

SEPTEMBER 1986 NEWS-SHEET

TESTING, TESTING In the August news-sheet details were given of the August 9 test run to Portrush with newly re-commissioned Great Northern Compound 4-4-0 No.85 "Merlin". The trip took place as planned, and was well supported, with about 80 members and friends travelling on the special. In the event, however, it proved somewhat inconclusive as regards giving an indication as to 85's suitability for hauling the Steam Enterprise trips in September. The main problems with No.85 have been lingering doubts about her pulling power up gradients, concern over her excessive coal consumption (up to 50 pc more than No.4), and reports of rough riding.

CIÉ have given the engine the go-ahead to run to Dublin with the Steam Enterprise but at the time of writing things were still up in the air.

It was expected that No.85 might work light engine from Whitehead to Belfast Central sometime during the week of September 1, and then do a test trip with the RPSI train to Portadown and back. If that was successful, consideration would then be given to putting 85 on the Steam Enterprise on September 6, but otherwise the train would be worked by our 2-6-4T No.4. A decision as to which loco would work the September 20 Steam Enterprise was to be taken after the first train had been operated.

Members wishing to get up to date information are advised to ring the Whitehead Railway Project at Whitehead 78567 during business hours. The RPSI Operations Department will keep the Whitehead Railway Project posted so they should have all the latest news.

DOWN LINE No.4 worked round to Central Services Depot (the former Queen's Quay) on Bank Holiday Monday August 25 with the Bangor Belle special. NIR had suggested that No.4 should work the Belle rather than No.85 because of the poor visibility from the footplate when No.85 is working tender-first. Despite atrocious weather conditions (the tail end of Hurricane Charlie) the Bangor Belle was once again a popular event, with some 250 passengers on each of the trips.

FLYING HIGH Our 2-6-4T No.4 was in charge of the final Flyer on August 16 and brought a successful conclusion to an outstanding Flyer season. All three trains were booked out in advance and loaded to capacity. On each of the Castlerock extensions it was standing room only with an average of 400 passengers packing on board the excursion. The new turntable at Coleraine, which is now in operation, was used for all of the Flyers. Congratulations to all those involved in the running of the Portrush Flyer. Roll on season No.15!

SHUTTLE SERVICE The Dublin-Maynooth shuttle on August 23 also proved to be a success with all three trains being well filled. No.184 starred in a smashing front-page picture in the Irish Times on August 25 and the event was also featured on RTÉ.

PUBLICITY BOOST During the morning of August 25 Bord Fáilte hosted a mobile press conference as No.4 made her way from Belfast York Road to Belfast Central via Antrim and Lisburn. The objective was to publicise the Steam Enterprise season and very effective it was too! There was

coverage in all three Belfast newspapers and no less than three interviews on various Radio Ulster programmes as a result. The members of the press, who were accommodated in the directors' saloon, were treated to a buffet reception at the Whistle Stop bar upon arrival at Belfast Central. Our thanks to Bord Fáilte for arranging and sponsoring the event which was very worthwhile.

- DON'T DELAY If you haven't so far booked for the Steam Enterprise - don't delay. Bookings have been coming in steadily and the second train of the season is traditionally very heavily booked. Whatever engine we use it will be steam all the way and a chance to view what must be Ireland's most scenic main line!
- Tickets are on sale at Mullan's bookshop, Donegall Place, Belfast, Nelson's Medical Hall, Lisburn, Castles Travel, Lurgan and Portadown, and Keenan's Chemists, Newry.
- Members can also book by post.
- CITY LINK Details are enclosed of the Larne Lough Special on Sunday October 5. Plans were in hand at the time of writing to fit in a special stop at Belfast's newest station - the halt at Belfast City Hospital which is due to open on October 6. Don't miss this historic occasion.
- WINTER DRAWS ON Also enclosed in the circular are details of the Belfast area meetings planned for the coming winter season. The venue, as always, is St Jude's Church Hall, Sunnyside Street, Belfast, and the meetings, which start at 7.30 pm, are all on the second Tuesday of the month. A warm welcome awaits all members and friends, and we look forward to seeing large turn-outs, as usual.
- As you will see, if you live in Northern Ireland we have enclosed two posters about the meetings. Please have the second poster displayed in your local shop, office or school as a means of publicising the events.
- GOING, GOING Time is going fast if you haven't yet started to sell your tickets in the RPSI Grand Autumn Draw. Members should have received their books of tickets in the last circular and already many members have sold their batch. If you haven't, get moving now! The winning tickets are to be drawn by Mr Roy Beattie, the chief executive of NIR, at the Belfast area meeting on October 14. Mr Beattie will be addressing the Society about the latest developments on NIR so come early if you want a good seat.
- FIVE FOOT THREE The latest issue of the magazine is still with the printers but we hope to have it ready to send to you at the start of October. Editor Gavin Martin says it's well worth waiting for!
- SANTA TIME Full details of the Santa trains at Whitehead will be included in that circular at the start of October. But you could pencil the dates in your diary now - Sundays November 30, December 7, 14 and 21, and Saturday December 13 as well.
- STEAM TRAIN RIDES The Whitehead Steam Train Rides season drew to a close on Sunday August 24 after another successful year. No.3 "R.H. Smyth" was the regular loco and the crowds turned up during July and August, although things were a little quiet in June. Many thanks to all those who helped.
- FAME AT LAST! The RPSI has been doing well in the publicity stakes recently with a major article by editor Michael Harris in Railway World, all about the Clew Bay tour. Another excellent piece of coverage was

in the Railway Photography and Video magazine, where David Eatwell wrote a nice piece about the two-day tour.

DESIGNS ON SUCCESS The RPSI Council is currently exploring the possibilities of taking over the station building at Whitehead which has been lying empty since the introduction of colour light signalling earlier this year. We have had drawings done of the building and are examining its structural condition. Now we are asking a firm of estate agents to assess the commercial potential of the premises. Watch this space.

DATE FOR THE DIARY Don't miss UTV's "Traen 150" programme, produced by RPSI member Andy Crockart. The programmes, called "Sleepers Awake" and "The Impermanent Way" go out at 10.30 pm on Mondays October 13 and 20.

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