

TRAIN WORKING LEAMINGTON SPA/STRATFORD ON AVON 1940s

I would like to give a detailed description of a journey with a heavy freight train weighing in excess of one thousand tons made up of seventy loaded wagons between Leamington and Stratford on Avon. All the wagons are unfitted with a continuous brake and are loose coupled. I have chosen this particular journey as it is quite undulating and a route I frequently worked over in the 1940s and early 50s.

On leaving Leamington there is a falling gradient of 1 in 100, this takes the railway under the canal aqueduct, then immediately the track rises by 1 in 90 to climb over the R. Avon thus forming a dip beneath the canal. The next part of journey is Warwick to Hatton, a long incline of 1 in 100. From Hatton to Stratford it is generally falling with a steep decline of 1 in 75 on leaving Wilmcote.

Most long distance freight and mineral trains were worked by tender engines as they carried more coal and water. As this train working that I am about to describe was destined for South Wales, I will suppose the engine to be a 28xx class 2.8.0 tender engine.

When the train is ready to leave Leamington and the signals are in the off position the driver will create vacuum in the engine and tender brakes. When this is done the fireman will gently ease the tender hand brake and as it is falling gradient the engine will edge forward to take up the slack in all the couplings, this might be as much as a hundred feet. The guard at the rear of the train keeps his hand brake hard on until he reaches a point near the dip beneath the canal aqueduct, then releases it. When the driver on starting away knows he has a tight coupling throughout the train he applies a little steam to keep it that way. The fireman would be busy making up his fire. On reaching the canal aqueduct the driver would apply maximum power to climb the gradient of 1 in 90 to the bridge over the Avon and also to keep the couplings tight. This is to prevent a snatch from the rear portion of train that is still on a falling gradient. [Every few weeks a coupling or draw bar would be broken here]. When the train is completely through this dip firing could start again. [When an engine is being worked at its maximum it is not easy to fire, as the blast from the chimney would take the coal off the shovel]. On arriving at Warwick the driver would bring his train to a stand in advance of the station to await the assistance of the banking engine to Hatton. [The prime purpose of this engine is to assist heavy trains but it also has a secondary roll this being in the event of a coupling breaking to hold the train from running backwards. The bank engine would buffer up to the rear of the train, the guard would hand this driver details of his train and then remove the tail lamp from his van. The bank engine driver would then whistle the signal code, two crows and one. [A crow is one long, three short and one long whistle]. When the driver of the train hears this whistle he repeats it and both drivers start off together. On reaching Hatton the bank engine would stop at the signal box and if lines were clear the train would proceed towards Stratford on Avon. This is mostly a falling gradient but very steep after leaving Wilmcote where the train would be kept under close control. The remainder of journey to Gloucester is fairly straightforward.

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