



Chairman's Report for the WLA AGM

5th November 2022

Good afternoon, everyone!

Well, first of all, I think it's fair to say that 2022 was a "vintage year" for the sights and sounds of Westerns on the Severn Valley Railway and that the WLA has more than played its part, with some quite amazing statistics, unprecedented in the 48 years of the WLA! Who would have thought, back in January 1974 that you could see and hear one of our Westerns for no less than 60 days in 2022, running for 3,372.5 miles – that's the equivalent of over six round trips from Paddington to Penzance or 105 round trips on the SVR! (NB if you include D1015, the mileage for Westerns on the SVR would be a staggering 6,258!).

Indeed, I'm pleased to say that our income from operating on the SVR this year, will be around £17k, the highest figure, we've ever achieved.

And if these figures aren't impressive enough, our locomotive achieved a 97.5% availability rate with only 1.5 days lost due to a vacuum leak and brake relay fault, which was quickly diagnosed and fixed by Robin Jones – (with a bit of help from D1013 Western Ranger!).

Without trying to use too many Warship names, the performance of D1062 in 2022 was truly Magnificent and the sound well, just Superb! And let's not forget all the Working Members, both past and present who helped to restore D1062 to its current state, since the work started on her major overhaul back in 1998. You know that the work by our "Western Heroes" was all worthwhile and appreciated by so many Western enthusiasts.

Obviously, you could be forgiven that our carbon-neutral footprint had been blown out of the window, but our Whizzo Woods has performed at a similar level. We calculated that we needed 155 trees to off-set the increased mileage in 2022. Taking into account that we needed 62 trees for last year, the current total is 212 trees since the scheme started in 2021, thereby offsetting our carbon footprint, and so at least we can be considered to be carbon neutral, despite all the extra mileage!

As you can imagine, there was quite a bit of running maintenance to keep on top of during the year and I'm sure you'll join me in thanking the small number of our Working Members who kept D1062 (running as D1040) in good order, not to mention its immaculate cabs and appearance throughout the year. You could probably argue that they were never like that in BR days – just ask Alan Berck-May who was a Second Man at Old Oak Common!

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The recent diesel gala was a great success for the WLA with the locomotive performing against its diagrams and supported by members of the WLA over four days. Particular thanks to those who manned the WLA sales stand which achieved around £3k in sales. A special mention to the overall success of our raffle ticket sales which generated a sales revenue of £8,375 this year, a net profit of £5,400 in part due to the generosity of Masterpiece Models who provided a wonderful O gauge model of Western Ranger at a heavily discounted rate!

Following the Diesel Gala, work has started on the overhaul of D1013's MD 655 engine which now has all 12 cylinder ex-BR cast iron heads removed, which will be replaced by refurbished "David" higher quality cast iron heads. Hopefully, the engine rebuild will be completed early next year. The other engine ear-marked for D1013 is the 538 engine which is currently in-store awaiting modifications.

As you are all aware, one of the highlights of the year, was something we'd never done before – renaming D1062 to D1040 Western Queen to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. As expected, this generated a substantial amount of publicity in the railway press, keeping Paul Finch busy with endless PR opportunities. A fitting tribute was made to the crew who tragically died on D1040 (on the 14th August, 59 years ago), when the locomotive carried a wreath organised by Mark Perry, and much appreciated by railway staff both on and off the SVR.

Just to mention for those who need peace of mind, D1040 will be back to D1062 before the next running season!

On the publicity side, the WLA managed to secure a cover spread and full-blown feature in the June issue of Railways Illustrated entitled "Western Wonder" and thanks to Paul and Darren for their help in achieving this remarkable achievement! And if that's not enough, another cover spread and full feature article is shortly to appear in Modern Locomotives Illustrated, paying tribute to D1013 Western Ranger no less, with "60 Glorious Years"! Thanks for Colin Marsden the editor for this one! What with these two articles plus all the PR, we've never seen our profile raised to such an extent in one year!

A little mention should be made about D1013 as it was only at the beginning of September that the locomotive was bought in from the outside at Kidderminster TMD with the tarpaulins removed. A considerable amount of hard work was undertaken to patch up the bodywork on one side (the other side was in remarkably good condition).

This included rubbing down of bodywork, applying filler, sanding down and painting various patches. The locomotive also received a fresh coat of paint for the yellow ends, making it very presentable when displayed at the Diesel Gala within Kidderminster TMD. In effect, the locomotive was transformed in a matter of days, which all helped to generate more interest for the WLA. A special thanks to Marty Kent who did a lot of the filling and sanding work – one of the filthiest jobs imaginable and not sure how his washing machine survived!

One or two members have questioned why D1013 is still being painted blue when the membership voted for maroon. To help clear up any misunderstanding the locomotive will be painted maroon when the person who is going to do all the hard work is available – which, I am told, will be at least in one or two years' time - make no mistake, there's a huge amount of preparation work to do for it to go in maroon, if we want the job done properly!

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What's been done is a quick makeover to make the loco look presentable whilst the remainder of the overhaul takes place, so at least it looks cared for whilst celebrating its 60th birthday and on display at the Diesel Gala. The WLA has a substantial budget available for D1013's repaint and the current work has been done in days rather than months, at no cost to the Association, so far as the blue and yellow touch-up is concerned.

The paintwork will also help protect the loco when stored out in the open, as our place under cover isn't guaranteed - we've just done the best that we can to make the loco look great again, within the time available.

In the meantime, D1062 will need to be checked over thoroughly before being put away for the winter and there are a number of items that need to be checked or dealt with such as two cylinder heads which are leaking out a small amount of coolant, replacement pre-heater, torque reaction arms/bogie work. The locomotive also needs a thorough clean, especially inside the engine room.

You could be forgiven if you thought our Working Members spent all the available time looking after our locomotives during the year but there were many other things to do as well. To start with, we had the massive task of moving our stores out of two 30 ft containers which were beside the steam shed at Bridgnorth MPD.

Although we were gifted two 40 ft containers at Kidderminster, these had to be made fit for purpose and I'm sure Coop won't mind singling him out for his huge amount of time and commitment to make these anywhere near suitable for storage. It took two trips with the BG coach to transfer the spares from Bridgnorth to Kidderminster and you can imagine the hard work off-loading everything to their new home.

Incidentally, we are just finishing off the electrical and lighting installation for the containers which is being partly financed by the SVR (G) Company following an application for assistance! In case you're not aware, the WLA has an agreement with the SVR to reduce its storage facilities at Bridgnorth as part of the SVR's Bridgnorth development plan. We still have a container full of bogie parts to transfer, plus our spare bogie, engine and other parts to move to Kidderminster, so in effect, we're halfway through this exercise at the moment.

On the admin side, we've been busy here too! So far this year, we've held four Board Meetings with one more due on the 24th November. The Management Committee have met three times during the year in February, August and October. One of the items which took up quite a bit of Jonathan and Ian's time is the item on the Agenda, where we have brought our Articles of Association up to date.

We have also seen the WLA with a brand new web site, which in itself was a massive task in creating something fit for purpose and where we have complete control. Basically, we now have our own domain name "westernlocomotives.com" (rather than .co.uk) and where you can now join the WLA using a credit card payment through Stripe if you wish and allowing you to join for a full 12 months from the time of payment and to auto renew if you wish. There's also the option to download a Standing Order form as an alternative, or you can download the traditional membership form.

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Of course, the sales items are on the new website, in addition to News and future Events, so please take a look if you've not been on the site!

Work behind the scenes continues with D1013's bogie appeal. The quotation from Nemesis Rail has been evaluated by Pete Sandham and identified areas where the scope of the overhaul needs to be clarified. A review of the Nemesis proposal in the form of a spreadsheet has been sent to Nemesis together with a request for a meeting in the latter part of November.

In addition, South Devon Railway Engineering Ltd will shortly be evaluating one of our spare wheelsets (now in their possession) in order to give a ball-park figure for a wheelset overhaul. The SDR hope to get back to us early November. We should then be able to proceed with the NHLF application once we understand the detail of the total costs involved.

I said at the beginning that it's been a Vintage Year for Westerns on the SVR, but it's been nothing less than a Whizzo year for the WLA! The achievements from such a small team of people has been astonishing, although I apologise for not mentioning everyone by name. But a big thank you to our team and to everyone who's supported the WLA in whatever way!

Just to recap for 2022:

- The first time we had ever renamed one of our locomotives
- Achieved the best WLA publicity & PR in a single year
- Record sales from the Sales Team
- The cosmetic transformation of D1013
- Developed a new "fit for purpose" web site
- Set up new storage facilities at Kidderminster
- Achieved the highest operating mileage in the history of the WLA with 97.5% availability
- The highest level of operating income ever achieved in one year
- A carbon neutral outcome

At the beginning, I said that it was a "vintage year" for Westerns on the SVR, I believe that thanks to everyone's support, that it really was more like a "vintage year" for the WLA.

Thank you!

Roger Smith
Chairman