

1). INTRODUCTION :

Reefsteamers usually runs trains on a public holiday and this year's National Youth Day was no exception. This 'holiday train' ran on Thursday, 16th June, for SANRASM. The midweek runs have a way of upsetting your bio-rhythms as well as the once-a-week rhythm of the great locomotive shed itself. You do, however, get to see some people who are otherwise a bit scarce because of unavailability for the weekend runs.

The Wednesday night prior to the trip was quite a social one for me, enlivened by some people whose company I actually enjoy. I'm used to and like solitude. Loco minding at Reefsteamers, compared to FoAR, for instance, is a solitary experience which suits me down to my heat resistant soles. But it was a welcome change to have someone to talk to and to share sossies n' worsies over an open fire. In addition, there was a lunar eclipse to watch and we hopefully set up our cameras like a SETI telescope array alongside the ash pits within the reception track.

Madame Janine No.3046 was given to me with an almost dead fire and she took some raking and blowing before I got it going again with the new batch of hard, high ignition-point coal. But once the fire was re-established, she went through the whole night on one ladies' portion and the flat fire bed glowing unattended for hours with the high-carbon coal. Boiler pressure went from 750 to just under red line (1375KPA) in the dead-hours of the morning with a very relaxed fire. I was quite impressed with the moody old duster for a change! ☺



P01 – Temporarily swapping a pair of oil lines to assign a working port (center) to the left cylinder, and an erratic port to the less critical application of the mechanical stoker. A longer small-bore copper oil feed pipe had to be fitted to reach the crossed-over stoker port's outlet.



P02 – Andrew does a test blow-down of the now-stoker sight glass. There is a blockage somewhere, which cannot be repaired in time on a live loco. As the pipe work no longer had a non-return valve, Andreas needed to switch the stoker steam off before safely working on the lubricator.



P03 – My two surprise young Padawans who just invited themselves into my loco cab for the night. They are still chirpy and enthusiastic here! They both 'hit the bonk' by 1:30 although Victor (right) was back on the deck by 4:30.



P04 – Moon-gazer. A very warmly bundled Diana Sanderson sets up her open-air observatory alongside the ash pits to track the dramatic full lunar eclipse. We had beautifully clear viewing conditions for the night.



P05 – Peek-a-boo! The temps were projected to be minus 2 deg. tonight, so the shed doors were closed for warmth. It turned out to be a pleasant cool night instead. I worked with a thermal undershirt and a tee – no jackets required.



P06 – Umgeni Steam Railway member Ryan Fincham, proud new owner of the PMES 'Ugly Duckling' and a good friend of Reefsteamers, came up for the long weekend to see us and enjoy some different steam locomotives.



P07 – A sharp truncated, full-width coal bank burns on the leading edge. The central and front firebed stayed aglow untouched for more than 5 hours with the hard high-carbon coal. This class 15F rail-grinder actually LIKES this stuff!



P08 – A wheel-side braai in the top shed with only the 15F's wheels really standing out. The braai's body is a cross-sectioned vacuum chamber! Chef Pat Ackerman also paid us a visit, having fetched Ryan at the airport.



P09 – Attitude! The younger of the two Padawans 'tunes me some grief' as I focus up. And he is the one dancing on top of the stoker conveyor housing, listening to mobile music underneath those elegant fluffy pink earmuffs!



P10 – Recently qualified fireman Andreas Matthee fills up the short-spouted oil feeder to start topping up the Detroit-type lubricator for the day's work. His face is still intact and burn-free, so he listened to the updated stoker instructions.



P11 – Piet Molentze greases up the LHS trunnion bearing by the light of a flare lamp. (Held by his friend William.) Note to Reefsteamers : The next driver who asks me for paraffin will get his arse kicked.



P12 – A classic pre-dawn ash-pit shot with a delicate smear of steam over the wheels. In the far background within the shed is the Class 12AR, ignominiously jacked up with the front bogie rolled out for assessment for repairs.



P13 – The flare lamp has either gone out or is missing and Piet is now topping up the bogie axle boxes by feel and instinct in semi-darkness. Luckily, the 15F's bogie wheels are spoked and allow for easy access to their axle boxes.



P14 – Fireman Bob-Tail Matthee steams out the stage with the mechanical stoker's exhaust as it just starts to pick up its crunchy load. Fire cleaning was very simple with only a relatively thin layer of soft, fluffy ash to scrape out.



P15 – Loading crates of cold drinks in the predawn light. It was a long rutted walk in the deeply shadowed aisles between the waiting vehicles. South Africans will drink fizzy drinks no matter what the ambient temperature is.



P16 – Miss Luna appears in this busy looking scene. Ironically, this end of the yard was quiet. Luna was so bright after her eclipse that the Wednesday night sky was a deep, dark royal blue instead of black. Beautiful...



P17 – The Venus-topped Staff and Baggage Van is now booked off for improvements. The relative positions of the two gen-sets are to be swapped over to maximize space usage and to improve the cooling for the larger generator.



P18 – The faithful old S&B van, flanked by a C&W marker, stands isolated as the newly commissioned works caboose takes its first revenue earning run. When this van is recommissioned, it will be assigned to sleeper train duty.



P19 – Engineering Mngr. Andrew King went along for the gen-set's first ride although it had already run for 9 hours while powering the coaches. Here, Andrew is marking the fuel level in the gauge glass to check fuel consumption.



P20 – Training the Train Manager. Dennis Edgar gets a run-down and (simple) start-up procedures presented by Alan Lawton. The gen-set has a strange, almost-spooling startup from cold, but fires up within less than 2 seconds.



P21 – The white lamp sez that the 12V starting battery is under charge. The red light indicates that the generator's stator is live. The load hasn't been switched in yet, so the lights are still dark and the 3 ammeters all read 'zero.'



P22 – Reefsteamers Chairman and recently certified Train Manager Dennis Edgar stands with some unconscious pride in the kitchen doorway. He has just been shown how to operate the 220V-to-24V inverter gear on the bulkhead.



P23 – The caboose's kitchen has been tidied up and remnants of previous tenants removed. We plan to replace the coal stove with a gas burner when funds permit – not so 'interesting,' but more practical on a moving vehicle.



P24 – Since our standard YQ was changed, we now run over half an hour earlier. It means that the loco moves off before sunrise. With winter's late sunrises, the pull offs are somewhat monolithic scenes but impressive regardless.



P25 – Crowded cab. The loco had enough steam to run to the coach yard without stoking – Andreas was points-man. Note the twins in the middle, very impressed by the pulsing fire. We ARE permitted to give cab rides in the yards.



P26 – A William's eye view – I'm actually hanging out the door. We are passing the forge's western shop and also the footings where sand bins and sheds used to be. The lines to the left are bypass lines to the western exits.



P27 – This is the bleak end of the complex with no attempt at comfort or beautification. The loco coupled after only one 'bounce' to drop the coupling pins. The fellows are connecting the water tanker's transfer line to the tender.



P28 – Today's 3rd man, 'Hott-Nutts' George makes an appearance. George has already made a name for himself by HAND-firing this monster whenever he can – his lanky frame enabling him to reach easily over the stoker housing.



P29 – Brass nuts for Hott-Nutts. Slowly but surely, the non-ferrous décor is slowly re-appearing on the locomotives. Attie's nose wheel is back up as well. But the plain black etching primer is permanent – no graphite paint!



P30 – Being Cape Gaugers, there naturally isn't much space between the frames. But it is always startling to see the open gaps and 'see-throughs' around the wheels and under the boilers. Here the bogie axle looks a bit exposed.



P31 – If it doesn't leak, it's not a steam engine : whether it's oil, hot or cold water, steam, vacuum, sand, amps or air. The fellows are wrestling with the tanker's water coupling. The rubber sealing rings are less resilient in the winter chill.



P32 – Meet me at the siding. This point, where the cables conveniently duck under the ground, has become the de-facto meeting point of crews, managers and staff as the Reefsteamers train enters the main line system.



P33 – Train Safety Officer Clifford Matthee crosses to take station and make checks at the points we will use. He's safe as he is walking counter-flow to normal traffic and the people behind him are incidentally guarding his back.



P34 – Reefsteamers are proud to do our part in keeping the rail head shiny. It is a pity that the railways treat us as a nuisance then, even though we are paying customers.



P35 – De Necker! What kind of half-baked shunting signal is that? Actually, James Thomson had just driven in alongside and they enjoy ragging each other. James is deaf, so there are usually lots of odd hand signals involved.



P36 – The rear-end tanker rolls in. Due to the increasingly frequent delays on our trips, we now regularly take a tanker at both ends to counter the risk of extra water usage. Someone had forgotten to remove the fire pump's cover.



P37 – Not seeing us behind the bend, Andreas is already starting the injector as he approaches us – you don't often see this angle! The overflow isn't blowing as bad as it looks – that steam is condensing heavily in the cool air.



P38 – Like an elephant trying to hide behind a daisy, 15F 'Janine' lays at bay behind cantenary masts. The signal cabin hasn't released their interlocks and the points haven't been changed yet. Note how rough those rails are getting!



P39 – We've been 'given the road' and she is 'orf.' This is always a tricky start – a slight upgrade with the load stretched around the curve. Piet slipped softly only once.



P40 – Andreas didn't lose too much fire in the single mild slip – that's just the loose stuff burning off and scouring the tubes. The characteristic wide overhang of an SAR engine often casts an inconvenient shadow over the wheels.



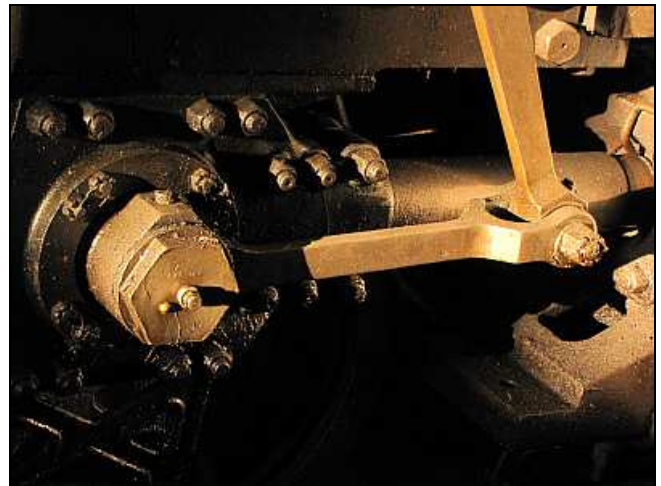
P41 – How smoke smudges appear on cantenaries and bridges. The winter night was mild n' dry so the railheads were dry too. Note the packed-in Coach Controllers' cars, always a block-in hazard for the overnight loco bashers.



P42 – The great length of this traction combination is apparent in this run-by. The 'Spoories' call these 'Torpedo Tanks' although the term originally came from the circular-section tank drum of the Vanderbilt type tender.



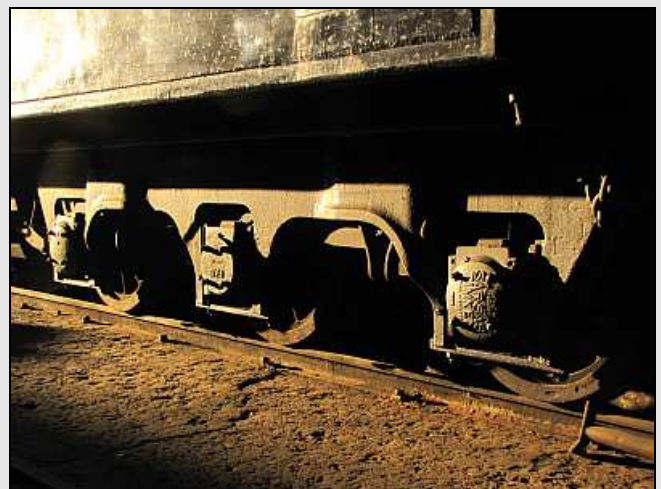
P43 – Recently shunted to the old boiler-washout area for security, Friend of the Rail's 25NC No.3404 'Elsabe' lifts her rusty face to the sun. On the buffer beam are stacked the spark arrestors (right) and the baffle plates (left).



P44 – 25NC Union Link. This provides the bias to open the piston valves just before the piston reaches the end of its stroke. It increases port-dwell and provides a much-needed cushioning effect for the heavy reciprocating parts



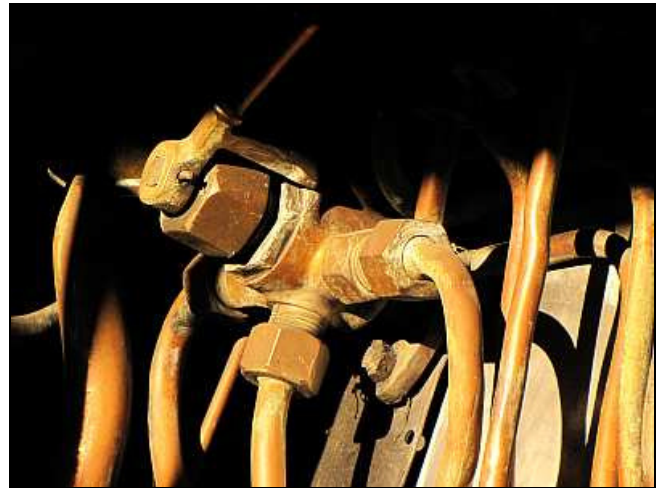
P45 – Where the steam meets the steel ... No.3472 'Elize's' massive rear cylinder cover, combination lever and union link are nicely highlighted.



P46 – The characteristic square-horned frames of an original Class 25NC's tender – often confused with the borrowed EW types used on our 15F's. Those types have very distinctive triangular side plates between the axles.



P47 – The terminal head for the pulsed speedometer. These are universal across the later SAR locomotives with the speedo sets being calibrated for the wheel diameters.



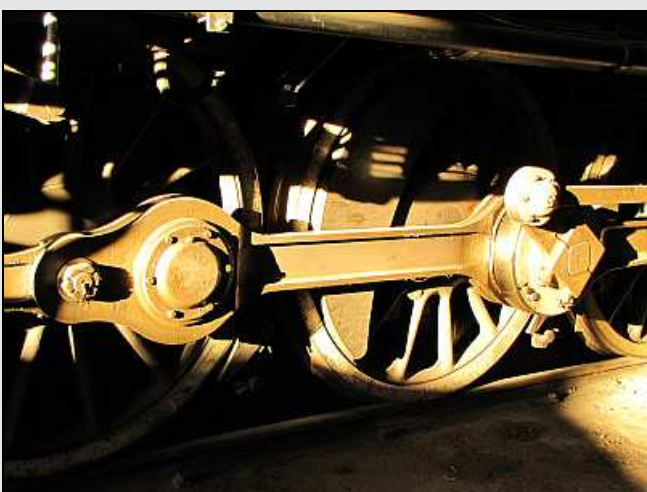
P48 – Within the dark morning-cold cab of the 25NC, some warm sunlight has made it past the protruding tender cubbies to highlight the grate shaker's change-over valve.



P49 – Zebra striped Class 24 and her tender, waiting for owner Greg McLennan's next ministration. The stripes are low-sun shadows from the heavy-gauge barred gates spanning the 8 tracks of the 15M Workshop yard.



P50 – With the morning sun in their sinuses, Class 15F 'Avril' and Class 12R 'Rosie' await the DZ of gold shunted at the end of the rainbow. With our current debt recovery program, there is little to expend on these extra projects.



P51 – The crisply machined center coupling rod on the Class 25NC, with the characteristic roller bearing housings. This rod actually 'trails' as, like most 4 driver axle SAR locos, the 25NC's con-rods drive the 2nd axle. (At right.) The GMAM, by contrast, has 'leading' center coupling rods.



P52 – Details of the roller bearinged return crank – including the usually-unnoticed thrust plate between the two housings. Contrary to popular belief, these bearings DO need greasing on occasion – but not for every run. We top up this housing with pumped white grease once a year.



P53 – Photoed the previous week – No.3046 ‘Janine’ now has stand-off number plates. The numbers were custom made and will not require polishing. The existing stickers were left intact. They are still firmly stuck but their slightly gold colour makes them harder to read at a distance.



P54 – The titular Janine poses within big Janine's drivers' seat while Papa Bear Andre, looks on. If any of my readers has an extra bag of cash they want to get rid of, the other THF locomotives have nameplates 'To Let' for easy going five year terms.



This Depot Report was compiled by Lee D. Gates on behalf of Reefsteamers
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