



SteamRanger's Heritage - an insight into our past

BACKGROUND

Report on the final run of Pacific loco 624 to Robertstown
before being donated to the ARHS Mile End Museum

624 is a sister locomotive to loco 621 "The Duke of Edinburgh"
which has been reconditioned by volunteers and is now used as an
operational locomotive on SteamRanger Heritage Railway's Victor Harbor line.

FINALE - No. 624

Contributed by Mr J.B. Pierson
ARHS SA Division Recorder August 1966

With a most impressive run to Robertstown in late July 1966, S.AR. light Pacific No.624 gave fair notice of its capabilities to turn in a fine and fitting performance for its last run - "Night run to Nuriootpa". It was not surprising therefore, that an air of expectancy surrounded the 90 odd enthusiasts waiting on Platform 12 of the Adelaide Railway Station on the evening of Friday, 12th August, 1966.

At 6.20 pm., driver Alan Neale was at the throttle of 624, which, with air pump throbbing, sat looking magnificent in the dull evening light, at the head of its consist of 1 centenary, 4 AE's, and one end loading baggage (total 245 tons). One could not help but feel a thrill of impending excitement as the stage was now set for 624 to perform its final act - and no greater performance has she ever given, of this I feel sure.

At 6.23 pm, with safety valves blowing off, the 'road' was given and Engineman Neale eased his charge out of Adelaide Station and quickly accelerated No. 624 through the park lands and northern suburbs, where many a head turned and showed its approval of Steam on the high iron. The tempo steadily increased as we clipped along, and with effortless ease, we reached Gawler two minutes ahead of schedule. Then onward out of Gawler she marched, losing her feet occasionally, but with skillful handling quickly regained her stride and marched on relentlessly with her quickening staccato bark shattering the quiet country air.

To our recording team and in fact all those who witnessed the performance, 624 presented a grand scene at the head end of its charge; storming up the grades in fine style with headlight piercing the dark, and the almost continuous flickering glow from her firebox giving its plumage a golden lustre; indicating that well her fireman knew the meaning of 'little and often'."

The run home started off and continued in the same magnificent fashion, and we arrived early back at Gawler. Out of Gawler, 624 proceeded to show us just what a locomotive about to be written off is capable of doing. As she raced homewards and cut her schedule to shreds we discarded our timetables and pulled out our stop watches. A few quick computations, and we smiled with satisfaction and had our conviction - that 624 will be remembered long after her successors are scrapped - conclusively confirmed. After this 'never to be forgotten' run we slowed for restrictions through the suburbs but still managed to arrive in Adelaide approximately 2 minutes ahead of the scheduled arrival time of 11.05 p.m.

Walking from the train along the platform, it was hard to reconcile ourselves to the facts. After a superb performance of power and speed, 624 had completed her last run and was about to have her fire drawn for the last time. Fortunately however, the last chapter is yet to be written, for it appears that this locomotive, No. 624, is to have the honour of representing her class at the A. R. H. S. Museum, Mile End, S. A. For a more fitting representative, I feel, one could not wish.



624 on the Willunga line before retention at NRM (Photo: Roger Currie)