



SteamRanger's Heritage - an insight into our past

BACKGROUND

As increasing numbers of the new 830 and 930 class diesel electric locomotives were introduced to the South Australian Railways in the mid 1960s there was less work for the 700 series steam engines

By 1968 only two of the 700 series *Mikados* remained in service, 700 the first built and 718 the last.

Both locos were permanently withdrawn after an heroic excursion to Victor Harbor on 2nd June 1968 which was fraught with operational difficulties as described in this article written by the then ARHS Tours Manager, Dean Harvey.

However the climax of two Mikados double heading from Victor Harbor would never be forgotten!

"SAYONARA MIKADO" Adelaide to Victor Harbour Sunday, 2nd June, 1968.

Reported by Dean Harvey
"The Recorder" July 1966, pages 2 – 5

What has happened to 718? This was the question on everyone's mind as it approached departure time of 8.00 a.m. on Sunday, June 2nd. Ah! smoke above Morphett Street bridge and here she comes. There was nothing at all wrong with our loco as it turned out, just a shortage of water. The valves admitting water to the columns at Mile End had been closed by some unknown over-zealous gentleman and no one could locate their position to rectify the situation. Result, we had to leave Adelaide with half a tank of water and hope we did not encounter any difficulties before the first water stop at Blackwood. Rx No. 224, scheduled to work the Extra Relief Express, was in the same awkward position.

At 8.07 a.m. driver Tony Kopps eased 718 with its 280 ton train of 6 green and cream steel cars and GB4074 out of platform No. 1 on the start of an historic journey. Last of the Mikados to storm the mighty Lofties or so we thought at the time. Blackwood was reached in good style without incident and then fully replenished with water 718 continued her assault on the 1 in 45 grades. Just before Long Gully we stopped for the first photo stop which was a replica of the front cover of the book "700" but with engine 718 in lieu of 700. The good steaming qualities of 718 were apparent as it frequently blew off while working hard towards Mount Lofty which was passed at 9.42 a.m. some 21 minutes late.

A photo stop had been arranged to capture on film the departure from Mount Barker always a scenic location for photos. This was successfully carried out and just on the point of departure news came through that Rx 224 on the Extra Relief Express had failed at Belair.

This second train departed Adelaide at 8.40 a.m. bound for Strathalbyn where its carriages were to be added to the load of 718's train for the run to Victor Harbour. Fortunately the Society had paid an extra guarantee to have engine No. 700 on standby duty at Mile End but even so Train Control advised that a 2 hour delay was expected to the Extra Relief Express. It was therefore suggested that No. 718 continue to Victor Harbour after taking water at Strathalbyn without waiting for the Extra Relief Express as originally planned. It was further proposed that as No. 700 would need to proceed to Victor Harbour for turning, it haul its own cars and passengers there in the process.

The Strathalbyn water stop was longer than expected as the water flow from the column was restricted due to a partial blockage. It was not until 12.28 p.m. some 41 minutes late that we departed for our non stop run to Victor Harbour. Running was not inspiring on this portion of the journey and we ultimately arrived at Victor Harbour at 1.33 p.m. without further incident.

At Victor it was learnt that failure of the Rx had been due to sanding difficulties arising from a layer of damp sand in the sandbox. Severe slipping had commenced just after Clapham where very light rain drizzle was encountered making conditions very bad for rail adhesion. The train continued slowly with slip after slip until eventually at Pinera driver Jack Falkhead contacted Train Control and asked either for a fitter to rectify the faults with the sanding gear or the pilot engine. As No. 700 was supposed to be available at one minute's notice, Train Control elected to call it out but apparently Mile End was caught unawares as No. 700 was nowhere near ready for traffic.

Rx 224 struggled on to Belair with its train, cut off and returned light engine to Blackwood to change crews with No.700 as it took water. The report to Train Control at Pinera was made at 10.06 a.m. but it was 11.45 a.m. before No. 700 eventually arrived at Belair. The train departed Belair at 11.52 a.m. and proceeded in good style to Strathalbyn where driver Paul Kirkman took over for the run to Victor. As with 718 this latter portion of the journey was not up to expectations and arrival at the terminus was effected at 3.00 p.m.

Meanwhile things were happening at Victor Harbour and how! A local boy fiddled with the derail lever at the turntable and this action apparently resulted in the rear bogie of 718's tender becoming derailed as it was half on and half off the turntable. Normally it would not be possible for a child to operate this lever with the engine half on the turntable, however, it is understood that subsequent investigations at a later date revealed that the derail mechanism was in a faulty condition.

There it was with the tender in a crazy position looking for all the world as if the engine had broken its back. This disaster eventually rated broadcasts on the National News and Radio Australia, publicity we could well have done without as it does not help to maintain good relations with S.A.R. Things looked very grim indeed and, as engine No. 700 could not be turned because 718 was blocking the turntable, a 930 class diesel was despatched to rescue the stranded railfans from their predicament. What a blow for the last run of the Mikados -two of them at Victor and a diesel to take us home'.

The gang had been called out to assist the engine crew and Loco Inspector Mr. Tom Michaelanney attempted to rerail 718 but for a long time their valiant efforts seemed in vain. Then at 4.20 p.m. when most people conceded that the position was if anything deteriorating, skill and hard work paid off and 718 was on the high iron again. The 930 relief engine was stopped at Belair and redirected towards Mile End and the two engines at Victor were turned without further incident.

Interstate passengers who wished to connect with the Overland to Melbourne were advised to travel on the 5.05 p.m. regular Adelaide bound railcar. They sadly farewelled us as Car No. 44 and trailer slipped out of Victor Harbour station watched by an unusually large audience. Our friends on the railcar were more than usually sad at leaving us because by then a startling procedure for our departure from Victor Harbour had been announced.



Locos 700 and 718 wait with their cars at Victor Harbor ready to return to Adelaide 2nd June 1968
Photo by Dr John Wilson from ARHS publication
"The 700 Series Locomotives of the South Australian Railways" Second Edition 1979

(not included in original Recorder article)

Despite a 3 hour delay to our departure from Victor Harbour, rail fans had grins from ear to ear as double header Mikados steamed out of the town with water tank, brakevan, 9 steelcars, brakevan making a total of 491 tons at the drawbar. It was certainly a magnificent sight and sound as No. 700 lead No. 718 both working hard with tall twin towers of smoke towards Port Elliot.

Photo stops were off the programme because it was almost dark, however a stop was made at Chiton Rocks so that passengers could alight and witness the impressive spectacle of double header Mikados working hard past them with a background of rolling surf and twinkling lights from Granite Island and Victor Harbour. An awe inspiring sight indeed very fitting as a finale for the two most powerful non-articulated locomotives in this continent and one completely unexpected when we left Adelaide shortly after 8.00 a.m. that morning.

A non stop run was made to Strathalbyn and we halted before the level crossing at the Victor Harbour end of the yard to enable No.700 to enter the turntable access siding to take water. No. 718 then eased the train into the station and cut off to detach its 9000 gallon tank. The restricted water flow again held us up and by the time the engines were on the train arrival of the "down" Victor railcar was imminent and it was necessary for us to proceed and push back to the passing siding.

Departure from Strathalbyn was at 8.08 p.m. and then began perhaps the most memorable of all steam assaults on the Bugle Ranges. It is impossible to adequately put in words the dynamic impact and drama of Nos. 718 and 700 charging up the 1 in 45 grades and around the long curves of the Bugles. Suffice it to say that even though the night was very cold indeed, there was hardly a closed window during this magnificent ascent. A breathtaking run down to Mount Barker followed and both engines again took water. No troubles were experienced waterwise at Mount Barker and the operation cost us only 15 minutes which is not bad for two thirsty Mikados.

Driver Keith Fitzpatrick at the regulator of 718, the leading engine from Strathalbyn, was an expert on long whistles with a fading Doppler effect and recording enthusiasts no doubt obtained some unusual whistles on tape. At Mount Barker Junction the saga of the double headers ended and 718 ran ahead to permit engine No.700 and the leading GB to cut off and shunt to the passing siding. 718 recoupled to the train and then with 403 tons (13 tons over maximum goods load) we proceeded to Balhannah only to be admitted to the passing siding to cross the down South East passenger. It appeared that Train Control were now taking no chances as it was 20 minutes before Diesel-electric No. 901 roared past with the "Blue Lake".

Trouble! As if we hadn't had enough already. The new power actuated switch and signal system at Balhannah had gone berserk and the switches would not operate to permit us to enter the main line for Adelaide. By this time engine No. 700 and brakevan had caught up to us and was standing 100 yards behind our train. When all action to operate the switches proved futile it was decided to couple No. 700 to the brakevan of our train and push back to the main line at the Mount Barker Junction end of the yard.

Troubles again -a long up freight was by this time shunting at Mount Barker Junction and occupied the Block so preventing us from pushing out on to the main line. At last the Block was cleared and we pushed back on to the main only to find we could not proceed to Adelaide because of signal failure. The train was now situated approximately 4 mile on the Mount Barker Junction side of Balhannah station and the Station Master used his private car to whisk a Train Order to us permitting No. 718 and train complete with No. 700 and its GB to pass signal No. 1 at stop.

Safely in Balhannah yard on the main line our troubles were still not over as the signal at the Adelaide end of the yard was in similar trouble and would not operate. No. 700 and GB were detached and a Train Order was issued to pass Absolute Signal No. 11A at stop and at last after 1 hour 1 minute and 37 seconds we were on our way.

The big question was, could No. 718 haul the overweight train up the grades out of Ambleside or would we need a push up engine in the form of No. 700. The pessimists were dumbfounded and No. 718 showed the stuff Mikados are made of by not missing a beat on the long arduous climb to Bridgewater where a stop was made to change the loco crew. Although the grades between Aldgate and Mount Lofty are no greater than those near Yantaringa, the curves are sharper, the tall trees are closer and all in all this section always seems to be the biggest challenge and provide the best listening.

No. 718 blasted up to Lofty in an unforgettable manner that could not fail to stir the soul of any man, woman or child who had ever ridden behind a steam engine.

Arrival at Adelaide was at 12.34 a.m. on Monday, 3rd June and then it was
"SAYONARA MIKADO".