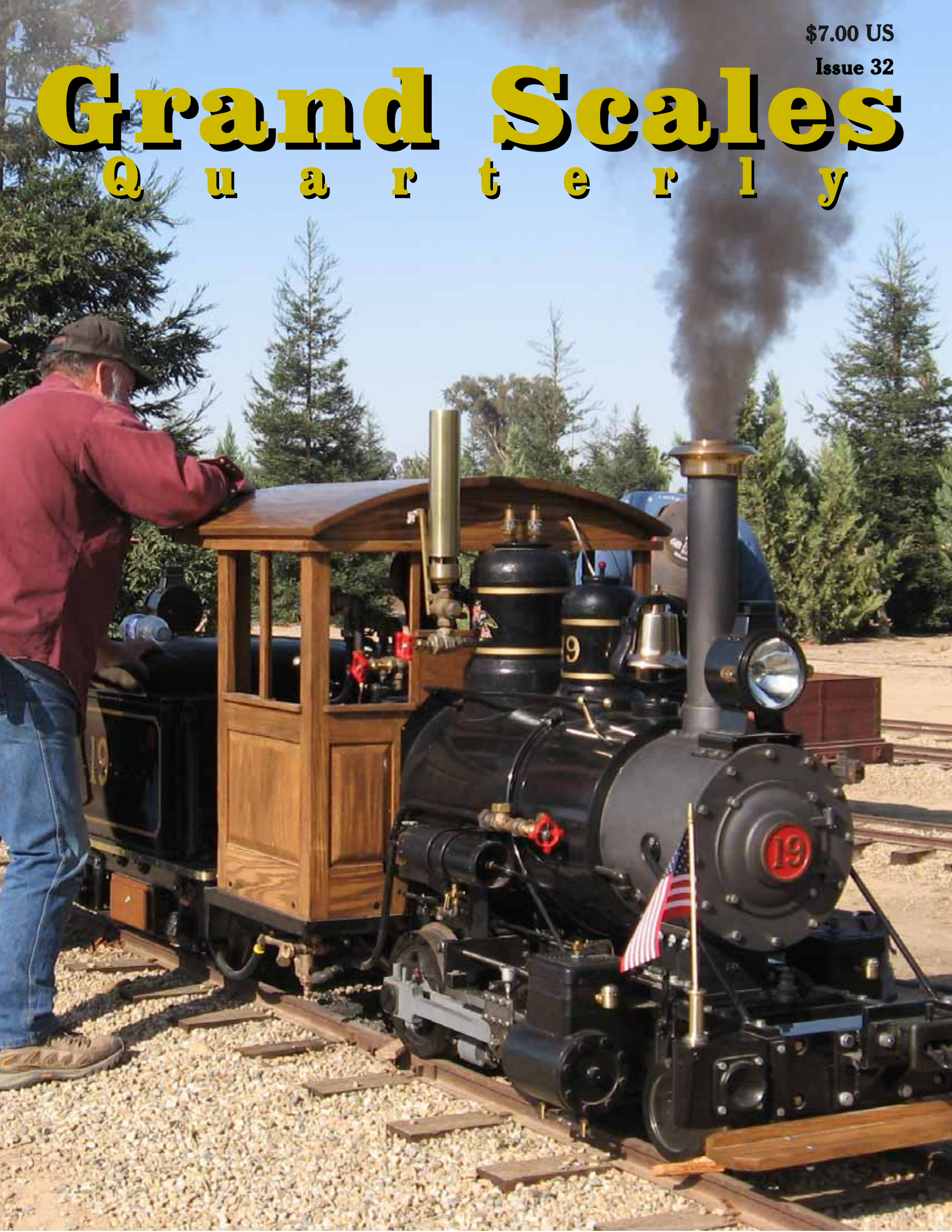


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Issue 32

Grand Scales

Q u a r t e r l y



A GOOD START TO THE DAY

By Colin Fleetney

The 15" gauge **Romney, Hythe & Dymchurch Railway**, early fall, in the mid 1950's. A seasonal driver, I had a matter of days left on the railway and would, with the ending of the high-summer timetable, return to my work as a sea-going engineer.

It had been a wild, noisy, wet night. A full, rain-filled, south-westerly was roaring up the English Channel from the Atlantic causing the old camping coach (a standard-gauge coach body of the 1890's, converted into several apartments for the use of the seasonal staff) to shudder and creak all night. Now, at 7:30am, I walked, with Driver Peter Catt across the shed yard, our heads bent against the powerful gusts that swept across the main line and shed yard.

Today I was rostered on turn 1. This turn would see me take the first train of the day, west, out to Dungeness. I would then do two complete trips round the railway plus one from Hythe back to

Romney. In all, before going back on shed, a total of some 69 miles.

Peter Catt was on turn 2, the longest turn in terms of mileage on the engine roster board. Peter, a full-time employee of the Line, had *Northern Chief*, the only superheated engine in those days. *Northern Chief*, like my engine, *Samson*, had one of the original, small tenders.

Peter would leave New Romney station, as I would at 8:30am, taking the first train of the day, east, to Hythe. He would then do three complete trips round the railway and clock up some 72 miles before handing his train over to the turn 4 engine, here at New Romney, out on the Down Main at the Outer Home signal, late in the afternoon. One of Peter's trains – Hythe to Hythe – would be the *Marshlander*, the prestige train of the day.

It was a relief to open the wicket-door and step into the shed. It was warm, smelt of all the good things; engine oil, hot cylinder oil and sweet coal



The author's good friend, George Barlow, oiling round his *Green Goddess* at Dungeness. Just out of sight by the bottom right-hand corner of this print, stood the windmill that pumped water to the tank.



Dungeness, with a heavy *Marshlander*. Apart from the van (which, with some four saloons, is out of sight) I note I have a 4-wheeled truck marshalled in the train. I would reckon that the truck and the four passenger vehicles between it and the engine were added to me at Romney. The points (switch) lever in the foreground opens the points situated under Sammy that gives access to the long siding used to store excursions and specials.

smoke tinged with steam.

The engines were all standing in the order that would allow them to leave, turn by turn. Our engines were, therefore, standing at the head end of two of the three roads. Behind *Samson*, one of the two 4-8-2 engines operated by the RH&DR, stood 4-6-2, *Green Goddess*. Driven by the Foreman Driver, George Barlow, who would follow me out to Dungeness on turn 3.

EARLY MORNING IN THE SHED

The firelighter, who had been working since 4 am, had, as was expected, found all the engines 'hot' and carrying around 20psi and with the water just showing in the top nuts. He had then emptied all the fireboxes and smokeboxes and tubed all the engines (*brushed the flues*) before getting fires under way. He was having his breakfast when we booked on.

After opening the ashpan damper and cracking open the blower, we had taken the covers (the night-clothes) off our engines, folded them and put them on our engine's section of

shelf at the back of the shed.

While the wind gusted and boomed above over the shed roof I fanned some small coal across the grate. She was, by then, carrying 80psi - 100psi short of working pressure. She would come round while I drew my two types of oil, cotton waste and so on, from the store, filled her countless oil boxes, inserted the woollen siphon wicks or repaired or made new ones as required. Out of sight, crouching down oiling his pony truck, Peter observed in colourful language that our engines would be filthy within a mile of leaving Romney. I looked at immaculate *Samson*, and agreed.

In weather like this driving an engine with a small tenders was no fun – you were, quite simply, out in the open air. None the less, Peter and I liked our tenders, they were attractive and elegant, ran easily and were steady on their bogies. However, from a practical point of view they were not so good. They carried only a relatively small amount of coal and water, fine for Peter with his superheated engine,

HAVING THE RIGHT OF WAY

The New Romney / Dungeness branch was protected by the standard 'Token' system used for all single-track working. Normally I would have been given the token in its leather pouch which was fixed to a steel, leather-covered ring, some eighteen inches in diameter. I would then have hung it on its hook in the cab and, on my return to the double track, where the next train to Dungeness would be waiting, I would have leaned out and hooked it over the arm of the driver of that train's engine. Not as the first train of the day, though.

As the first train I would proceed under the protection of a ticket. This was a legal document signed by the station master allowing me to take a train out to Dungeness but without the token. I would not, on arrival at Dungeness, be permitted to leave station limits until the arrival of the next train.

The engine of the next train would be carrying the token, plus a ticket permitting me to proceed from Dungeness to New Romney, without the token. Legally it was not enough that the driver of the next train would hand me my 'Dungeness / New Romney' ticket. I had to actually see the token hanging inside *his* cab.

not so fine for me, with mine running on saturated steam.

I had no need to turn *Samson*, she was already smokebox to the west, because I had brought in the last train of the day from Hythe at around 9:00 pm the day before. Peter ran on to the turntable and, to save him climbing down, I turned him smokebox east. The turntable at Romney was bought by Captain Howey, the owner of the RHDR, when the Lynton & Barnstaple Railway was scrapped in 1935. Even at that time, when few people cared about little, narrow-gauge railways, it was considered an act of extreme vandalism by the mighty Southern Railway to close and cut up the L&B. Anyway; the Romney still uses the old Barnstaple shed table.

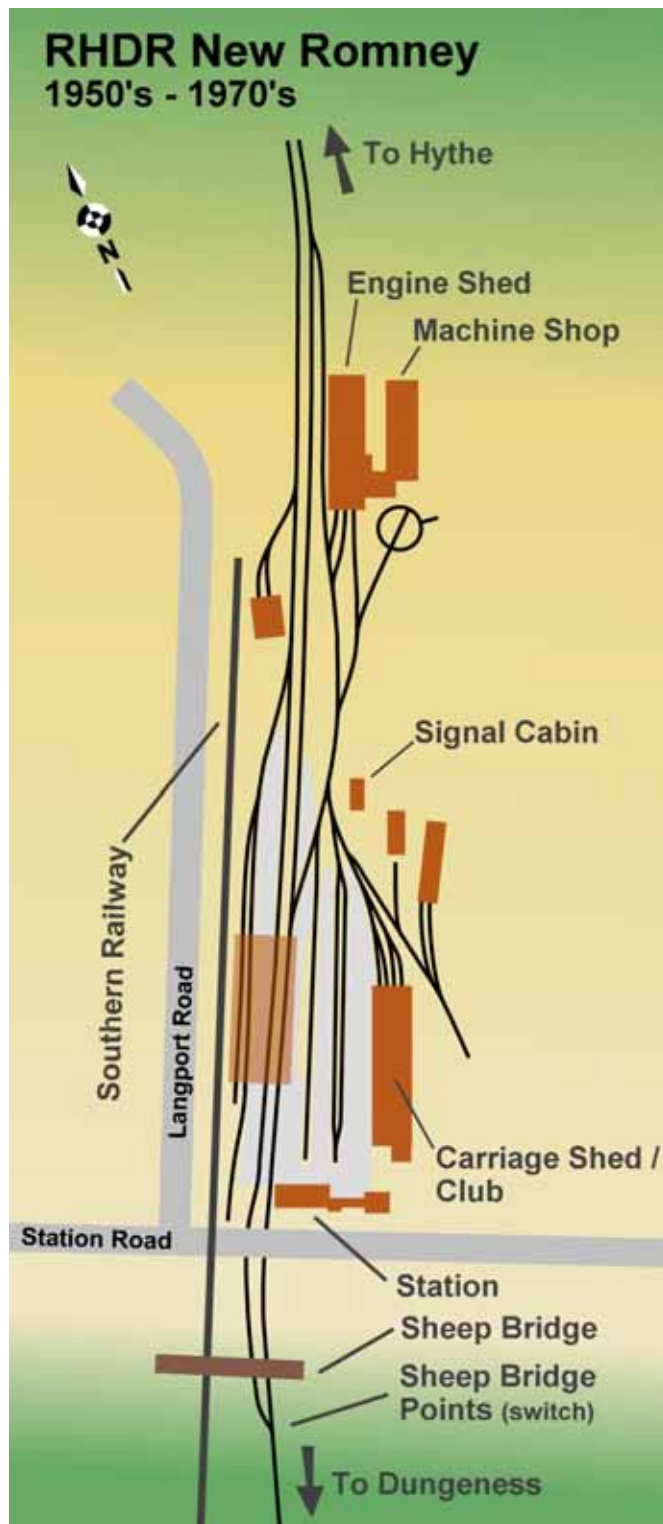
COUPLING UP

My train was standing under the train shed roof at the Down platform. It was, in fact the train that I had brought in last night. All I had to do was run, from the shed-yard, down, on to the main line. I would then cross Points No.8 to the Up road. Run, 'wrong road' west, through the station and the tunnel to the Sheep Bridge points and thus out, on to the single track. Then, while the shunter, who had ridden standing on the cab step, held the points over, I would reverse through them. The shunter would then ride back, through the tunnel, and couple my engine to its train.

My train consisted of eight saloons each seating eight people, plus three twenty-seater semi-opens and a big, sliding-door van which was the leading vehicle. I had hoped that I would be able to remove the semi-opens, but no. As it was Hythe market day, a day upon which many country people from across the Romney Marsh would take advantage of the Market-day Cheap Returns, the station master felt that I might require them, on my 'Up' journey. I felt that he was a trifle over-optimistic.

While I was topping up my tender (with a small tender, one never passed up an opportunity for water), the Station Master handed me my ticket which I hung in its clip inside the cab. Meanwhile Peter Catt had propelled his train, from No.1 siding, to the up platform.

Peter had perhaps twenty people, with their shopping bags and baskets. I had collected four – employees of Maddison's Holiday Camp.



The fast-moving, low clouds were slate grey and hinted at yet more rain, so I smeared more Brasso over the brightwork and then wiped the boiler and cab down, once again.

As the four intermediate stations on the Dungeness Branch were unstaffed all trains on the branch, with the exception of the Marshlander Limited, were required to carry a conductor. The

conductor not only sold tickets but helped with the loading and unloading of luggage, prams, boxes and so on, in and out of the van.

My guard, Sylvia Coombs, who lived New Romney, was seasonal employee like me, was in her final year at a teacher-training college. Sylvia stood festooned in her money bag and ticket rack, talking to me. As the tender tank filled to overflowing, she closed the water valve.

LEAVING NEW ROMNEY

Buffeted by the gust eddying around the buildings, we compared our watches and then checked them against the station clock up on its tower. As if on cue the station master came down, on to the platform, blew his whistle and gave both trains the 'Right Away' by raising his green flag high.

With both hands on the regulator I eased her open through the pilot valve and into the main valve. The steam-chest pressure gauge swung quickly over to 180psi and, as the steam-cocks spluttered then roared, blasting steam into the tunnel mouth, I snapped the regulator closed and instantly reopened it, giving her a steady 150psi.

The 4-8-2 started to roll without so much as

a hint of a slip. As the train started to move, Sylvia swung into the open door of the van. Halfway through the tunnel I closed the cocks. With the engine labouring we erupted out of the west end of the tunnel and, within fifty yards, under the wide, concrete Sheep Bridge. This bridge enabled stockmen to drive sheep and cattle over the RHDR and into the stock pens of the Southern Railway's terminus station which was situated some ten feet higher than the RHDR at this point.

Doing no more than 8mph the train passed through the Sheep Bridge points and I watched as the lever and counterbalance weight rose and fell, rose and fell, as each bogie unit opened the blades in turn.

Once the rear of the train had cleared the Sheep Bridge points and was on to the single track I gave her more steam. For something over a third of a mile the track, dead straight, would pass between, on the left a wire fence protecting meadowland and, on the right, a belt of mature trees plus blackberry bushes, elder and blackthorn. This belt of trees, about one hundred feet deep, cut the RHDR track off from first, the station yard and later, the single track, of the Southern Railway's standard-gauge New Romney branch.



The New Romney Branch / Southern Railway, approaching Church Lane crossing. Engine: one of the faithful Class H 0-4-4 tanks. She would be around 55 years old when the photo was taken.



Sammy and Me (the author) on an all-stations, general service train at Romney, for Hythe. I will have been uncoupled, run forward to the coal yard (about 60 ft. ahead of *Sammy*) coaled and reversed on to the train. On a normal day's service, of say, 60/70 miles, one would coal three or four times with a little tender.

The previous night's gale and heavy rain had caused the foliage, heavy with leaf, to sag over the track, making it invisible from the cab. I stood up, in order to look ahead over the cab roof, the rails now being hidden under the waterlogged foliage. *Samson* butted into the fronds of wet bracken, elder and thorn, water from the foliage boiled and bubbled on my beautifully clean smokebox, while my exhaust, driven by the gale, billowed through the trees.

Then, beyond the sagging bushes I saw, lying across the track, a fairly considerable branch. I opened the blower, closed the regulator and slammed the damper closed. I was, of course carrying a heavy fire causing the engine to instantly lift her safety valves with a roar. I climbed out and *Sylvia* joined me and we pushed through the undergrowth, our legs instantly becoming soaked. Together we dragged and finally tossed, the branch over the fence, into the meadow (the RHDR owned the meadow).

Then, with *Sylvia* in the cab with me, we started off again. (*Sylvia* always left Romney in the van and joined me, on the footplate, after we stopped at Greatstone.) After a few yards we had to disentan-

gle another branch and throw it into the meadow. Finally we had a third branch to remove. By now our timetable was blown to hell.

The belt of trees ended at Church Lane crossing upon which, every morning, an elderly man would always be standing with his dog. The dog, a big, old, over-weight yellow gundog, called *Sprinter*, was obviously a narrow-gauge railway enthusiast because he always sat within a fraction of an inch of the train. *Sprinter* seemed to know just exactly how far a Romney engine overhung the track and how far it would sway from side to side, for he never moved.

As the train approached Church Lane I sounded the whistle as per the regulations and (on this occasion we were only accelerating through, perhaps 10mph) leaned out to shout "Hi *Sprinter*". The dog, tongue hanging out, wasn't worried about the valve-gear whipping round inches from his nose and steam whispering from the injector. He smiled as only dogs can. His boss shouted, "You've had trouble", *Sylvia* and I, both standing, nodded in agreement. 