

“Mike, you’ve got a 400 this morning”

Friday 7<sup>th</sup> October 2005

The 04:00 alarm clock went off and I reached out and pressed the snooze button. Three minutes later it went off again, I swung my legs out of bed and sat on the edge waiting for the rest of my body to wake up.

Downstairs my truly fantastic wife had breakfast ready for me.

“Did we check the lottery” I asked?

“Yes and you still need to go to work, sorry” came the reply.

It was a muggy sort of day when I set off for the short drive to Barnham.

I walked up the depot stairs and into the main office.

“Mike, you’ve got a 400 this morning” said John our duty production manager.

I lit up! I had been expecting just an ordinary long day with 377s.

I arrived at Littlehampton and made my way to the shed.

In number one road was a twelve coach train formed of 4 VEPs.

Happily I set the leading cab up and proceeded to walk around the outside of the train checking the various cocks, connections and other items.

All was fine **J**

I brought my charge out of the shed and stopped at the ground signal before platform one. Once a 377 had left I got the signal into the platform.

Changing ends a commuter asked “how many more days will we get the old trains?”

“I am not sure, I think November is the cut off date” I set up the leading cab and put up the ‘2’ head code.

This was to be the 06:33 1H51 Littlehampton to Victoria.

Headed by 3514 and followed by 3505 and 3530 twelve coaches of good old 1960’s engineering.

We set off a few seconds late, I looked up at the road bridge for any photographers but as it was still dark none were there.

I had sent a message to my wife asking her to alert the Yahoo EMU Slam Door Page group, and so thought I might see some early bird photographers later.

Annoyingly the signals between Littlehampton junction and Angmering were very slow to clear and we departed Angmering three minutes late.

These signallers have no respect for older trains I thought.

Leaving Goring I called the guard and said “come on mate let’s get back that time and arrive early” he agreed and we made a big effort at the next few stops.

We made 80 MPH between Hassocks and Haywards Heath and arrived there bang on time.

It’s a long old climb from Haywards Heath to Balcombe Tunnel and we were only doing 60 MPH as we passed over Ouse Valley Viaduct!

As we passed over I looked down at a herd of cows far below! I tooted the horn but got no reaction.

By Balcombe station we had managed 70.

Another few pheasants later we streamed out of the tunnel at nearly 80!

I decided that we would keep pressing ahead so rather than let the train coast over the junction I would keep it in weak field (highest power setting) to gain a few more seconds.

Dawn was upon us now but the dull autumn day was still with us.

Flashes came from our pick up shoes as we passed over the junction and the line flag flickered on my desk. (Line flag is an electro mechanical indicator giving status of third rail supply)

By Three Bridges yard we were at 80 MPH and could have done better but for yellow signals after the station.

I applied the brake a little and began the descent towards the bottleneck of Gatwick Airport station.

I could see the tail lights of a 377 in the platform so knew there was no point pushing it.

I was grateful when the signal before Gatwick cleared to one yellow, I let her run then. The station starter cleared and we were on the move again.

(The 06:33 does not stop at Gatwick)

A kind of daylight had arrived by now and for the first time this year I noticed the autumn colours of the trees along the line side, yellow, brown and red were all on show.

I looked back and saw that our passage was throwing up leaves already blown down.

Won't be long before we have that problem to contend with I thought.

It was getting a bit chilly now so I leaned over and switched on the heater on the second mans side, soon enough the familiar smell of a dusty 750v heater filled the cab!

Finally we were running on green signals, I remarked to myself how nice it was to hear the AWS (automatic warning system) clear bell! Much nicer than the strident scream from the 377s!

Another long climb is the Quarry line and we only made 75 MPH until we were well inside Quarry Tunnel where the line falls somewhat.

We streamed out of the tunnel at 80 MPH and by Star Lane substation we had achieved 90 MPH the maximum (allowed) speed for these units.

We pounded over Stoats Nest Junction and kept on at 90.

We flashed through Purley passing a class 59 shunting in the yard.

Just after Purley Oaks I moved the brake round and applied a full 50 lbs and the train slowed just right for the 60 MPH speed at South Croydon.

We arrived a minute early at East Croydon! A wall of passengers awaited us and somehow managed to board.

I looked back and saw that we were full and standing now!

We got away on time and built up to the maximum line speed of 70 from Selhurst.

I was annoyed to see yellow signals just after we had passed through Wansworth Common station, but happily they cleared and we arrived and departed Clapham Junction on time.

Now the final race was on, could we arrive early at Victoria and show them what the good old trains could do?

By Battersea Bridge I had my doubts and we were only clear as far as the home signal at Victoria, gingerly we edged towards VC530 and then it cleared.

We rumbled triumphantly into platform 14 a full two minutes early.

The massive crowd of commuters took the rare chance to open the doors before the train had stopped and began jumping out followed by the rest within a short time!

Only one stopped to say “great run driver”



*Here is a picture of 3514 at Victoria taken by Lee, thanks Lee*

My next job was to take these very capable old girls back to Lovers Walk at Brighton.

I set up the cab of 3530 and thought to myself, ‘I know I’ll put up a unique head code just in case anyone wants to take a snap along the way’

Now what to use, I did not want to cause problems and confusion so I elected to go for 00 Apt really as I was working this train DOO (driver only operated)

So we set off, the starter signal cleared and the RA (right away) sign illuminated (this means the platform duties have been completed and subject to signals you can start)

The signals were yellow and its only 15 MPH until the whole train is clear of the station and then only 20MPH for some good way.

As we passed the sheds at Victoria I glanced back to see if my train was following in good order.

It was but I noticed a door on the third coach back seemed to be 'on the catch' (not properly shut)

Might as well get this over with now I thought and stopped my train at VC549 just outside Battersea Park station on the down fast line.

I called the signaller and told her I needed to go back and secure the door.

I made my way back and was horrified to find the door was not 'on the catch' (slam doors have two latches the last one being a backup) but swinging open!

I could hear and see a 455 approaching on the up slow so I grabbed the door and tugged it shut. The driver of the 455 let out an indignant hoot on the horn.

Phew no harm done.

We had lost our place and so had to follow another train to Clapham Junction.

I approached Clapham at a crawl as the station starting signal was still at red and it's not a good idea to take a DOO slam door train into a platform as you are bound to get a few passengers jump on!

I saw that on the end of the up fast platform there were two photographers, one with movie and one with stills.

As the signal cleared I opened up and sounded a hello on the horns.

The 250hp traction motors growled contentedly as we built up speed again.

We had a booked lay over of five minutes at Gatwick platform six to allow a fast train through.

Here again a lone photographer recorded us.

Off we went now going at a good lick all the way to Haywards Heath where the signals were against us again.

Another train had clearly been routed ahead of us and was making its stops to Brighton.

I was not too bothered; I didn't really want this time to end anyway.

As we rumbled over Keymer Junction I spied a photographer on a road bridge.

I waved and tooted hello and he waved back.

I was later to find this had been Donald from The EMU Slam Door Page.

*Continued*

Here is the photo he took!



3530 leads 3505 and 3514 towards Keymer Junction on route for Brighton Lovers Walk

*Thanks Donald.*

We made good progress and arrived at Lovers Walk on time.

There I reluctantly handed the train over to the shunter driver who was going to take it to the North sidings.

After a short break at Brighton the rest of the day was spent with 3 car 377sL

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