



## Canadian Pacific: A Record Holder

By Dave Wilson

Beyond the nicknames, card schools, banter, cans of tea and cheese and pickle sandwiches the mess-room at Nine Elms also bred a rivalry in the running of trains. Gordon Hooper, Gordon Porter and Eric Saunders were all Three link drivers in 1965 – and it is their names which crop up over and over. It is no coincidence that a link of just twelve crew should provide such a high percentage of the most memorable performances.

In late Spring of 1965 the beginning of the end of ‘Southern Steam’ begins with a run from Waterloo to Basingstoke. On 15<sup>th</sup> May 1965 I was rostered to work the 21-20 ex-Waterloo, the driver was not my regular mate Eric ‘sooty’ Saunders, but another of three link’s drivers Gordon ‘madman’ Hooper. Driver Hooper had earned his sobriquet not for any reasons of insanity but for his fast and fearless running and I was about to discover just how ‘fast and fearless’ that was. Revised schedules were being introduced from mid-June 1965 with the commencement of the Bournemouth line ‘electrification’ – the crews at Nine Elms knew that once that juice rail started it was all up for the steam hauled mainline express.

Our engine that night was one of preservation’s finest – MN class No.35005 *Canadian Pacific*, the load behind the tender was ten coaches. Being only the fireboy, I, of course, had no idea of what was about to happen and driver Hooper gave no direct indication that record setting was on the agenda. The 360-ton load was light for a ‘Packet’ and No.35005 was in fine fettle.

The route from Waterloo to Basingstoke has no major banks but, it is mostly rising gradients throughout its length. On the night, No.35005 ran from Waterloo to Basingstoke in 43 minutes 48 seconds, 41 minutes’ net, that’s 47.8 miles, start to stop, mostly against the grade and with the permanent speed restriction through Clapham Junction – not bad going. After leaving Basingstoke driver Hooper continued in the same cavalier style and No.35005 reached 105mph on the descent to Winchester. However, it was not the 105mph which was to become the yardstick but the 41-minute net time for the start to stop journey between Waterloo and Basingstoke.

The 21.20 ex-Waterloo was not a regular Three link turn, but the 17.30 departure was and like the 21.20 it was also first stop Basingstoke. The impending slowing of the timings and the inevitability of engineering works and their attendant speed restrictions once the ‘electrification’ began meant that any attempt to meet ‘Madman’ Hooper’s challenge ‘get to Basin’ in 40 minutes’ was going to have to happen ASAP.

Bulleid Pacific’s are very much a ‘like ‘em or loathe ‘em kind of engine – as someone who fired, and on occasions drove (unofficially) them, over much of the former LSWR I am definitely one of the former persuasion. Despite the abuse and neglect these engines were



subjected to as steam came to an end on Southern metals the performances speak volumes for their power and durability – performances in preservation have served only to confirm this reputation.