

Westward by Pullman

Run of the Devon Belle

ALTHOUGH the *Devon Belle* has not figured among British express train services for very long—it began to run in 1947—it can at least claim to be one of Britain's famous trains. Like its elder relative, the *Bournemouth Belle*, it is an all-Pullman train, which is still something of a distinction, and it was the first Pullman service to the West Country since the withdrawal of the *Torquay Pullman* on the G.W.R. as long ago as 1930. In addition, it conveys what is still unusual in British main line practice, a rear-end observation car. This rides at the tail of the train on the up journey as well as the down, for the car itself is turned on a turntable at the end of the run, quite a distinction for a coaching vehicle. A further novelty is the public address system, one of the first to be installed as a

on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays and up journeys on Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays.

As its name suggests, this particular *Belle* of the Southern Region links London and the West Country. Originally the down train consisted of two sections that ran together as far as Exeter. There it was divided, one section going on to Plymouth over the Dartmoor route while the other, bound for Ilfracombe, left the Plymouth line at Coleford Junction. Similar arrangements, but in reverse, applied in the up direction, the two sections of the train being joined at Exeter. Since 1950 the chief destination has been Ilfracombe.

The *Devon Belle* runs from Waterloo, the station where so many holidays start, and is soon on its way past busy Clapham

Junction, then out through Wimbledon, Surbiton, and the outer suburban area to Weybridge, where is Brooklands, once the home of British motor racing. At Woking the Portsmouth line goes off and, to add still further to the number of places on the route beginning with the letter "W," there is Winchfield. It is through Winchfield Station that the train is seen running on our cover, which is from a photograph by Mr. M. W. Earley. Further on comes Worting Junction,

where the Southampton and Bournemouth route diverges, after which there is a fast running stretch to Andover, more climbing and a long descent to Salisbury.

The *Devon Belle* is the only train that passes Salisbury without stopping. At Wilton—still another "W"—a halt is made, but only to change engines. The



A banking engine approaches the rear of the up *Devon Belle* at Exeter St. Davids to assist the train up to Exeter Central. The guard has removed the tail lamp from the observation car, through the windows of which the photograph was obtained.

regular feature on a British train, which enables the Pullman conductor to pass information to the whole train at once.

The *Devon Belle* is a summertime train, which at first ran at weekends only. Various adjustments have been made from time to time in its running arrangements, the most recent calling for down journeys

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Salisbury to Exeter road is a hard one, consisting mostly of a series of switch-back grades with plenty of 1 in 100. A long stretch of 1 in 80 for almost six miles constitutes the well-known Honiton bank, and this ends with a tunnel of the same name. But the climbing is not yet ended, for there are further humps to be negotiated before Queen Street Station at Exeter is reached, while a stop is made, too, at Sidmouth Junction.

To reach Exeter St. Davids, where incidentally the westbound trains of the Western Region run in the opposite direction to those westbound of the Southern Region, a steep downward slope of 1 in 37 is negotiated. Needless to say, here the assistance of a banking engine is necessary on the up journey.

After leaving the Plymouth route at Coleford Junction the train soon enters a long stretch where single-line working is the rule. This extends for some 19 miles, but there are of course passing loops at each station. At Umberleigh this comes to an end, but further on from Barnstaple Junction to Barnstaple Town there is another single-line section over the curving viaduct across the wide tidal River Taw. Soon there comes a terrific ascent that finishes with the three miles at 1 in 40 from Heddon Mill up to Morteohoe. This is

followed by an equally fearsome descent to Ilfracombe, ending with two miles at 1 in 36. Naturally, banking engines are required in each direction over this section.

At busy periods the train is very popular and as a result the original 10-car formation is swollen on occasions to a total of 14 cars, well turned out in their brown and

cream Pullman livery. This is a big train, weighing anything up to 575 tons full, but even this does not daunt the Merchant Navy Pacifics of the

Southern, for they were designed to be able to handle 550-600 ton trains at 70 m.p.h. Whatever criticism may be offered of these engines—and they have aroused a lot of controversy—they can do the job, and they can certainly run. Two of these heavier Pacifics divide the London-Exeter

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Above, a Drummond 4-4-0 brings into Waterloo the empty stock for the Devon Belle with the observation car leading. Below, travellers study the route between Barnstaple and Yeoford through the rear windows of the train. The photographs to this article are by S. C. Townroe.





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