BR MK1 LOUNGE BAR CAR No. 4055

Lounge Bar Car No. 4055 has been converted from a standard Tourist Second Open (TSO) coach into one serving drinks on the Swanage Railway's "Wessex Belle" dining train.

4055 was originally constructed by British Railways (BR) Swindon Carriage & Wagon Works on underframes built at Ashford C&W Works ordered in Lot No. 30149 on 17th March 1954. The batch of 100 TSO's (numbered 3998 to 4097) were all completed by 23rd March 1957 so 4055 might have entered service around the middle of 1956.

The BR TSO carriage had a standard design (Diagram 93) which lasted for several years during which many hundreds were built. They were all fitted with 64 seats arranged in open saloons of 16 'bays' of 4 seats and steam heated radiators underneath them. Two toilets were fitted at one end either side of the coach end vestibule/corridor connection. The coach was carried on two vacuum braked BR 1 bogies.

TSOs were used widely across the BR network although 4055 was allocated initially to the Eastern Region. Carrying the number E 4055, it formed part of Inter City services based on that region. By June 1965, BR transferred E 4055 to Southern Region with the intention of it being converted to become part of the Bournemouth electrification fleet. However this did not transpire.

Prior to it's move south, E 4055 was overhauled in BR Horwich Workshops to remove vacuum brakes and install air braking. Steam heating equipment was removed to be replaced with electric cabling and radiators. Horwich dealt similarly with 30 other TSO's. However, (now S) 4055 retained it's BR 1 type bogies so was restricted to the original 90 mph maximum speed.

It has not been possible to define S 4055's exact duties whilst on the Southern but it is more than likely to have been used on the Oxted line as well as Tonbridge to Reading loco-hauled services. It may even have been in the rake of Newhaven boat trains although these ceased being loco-hauled on 4th October 1970. After these services were withdrawn, or given over to operation by multiple unit trains, S 4055 joined the pool of vehicles used on relief or special trains as well as occasional rail tour duties.

S 4055 was believed to have been withdrawn by November 1987 – a working life of around 31 years. After purchase by the Southern Steam Trust, in 1989, it was hauled to become stored in sidings at Andover. It stayed there for around three years until moved to Swanage in 1992.

Extensive refurbishment work was then undertaken on S 4055 over a long period. All interior fixtures and fittings were removed to leave an empty shell. After this, a long bar counter and shelving were constructed and installed. Behind the bar area several windows had been removed with resultant holes plated over to increase security.

Adjoining the bar a lockable wine and spirits store was created. The other half of the coach was provided with a large carpeted lounge area fitted with loose seating and tables. Here patrons could meet and enjoy a pre-meal drink.

Vacuum brakes and steam heating were re-instated, to make it compatible with the rest of the "Wessex Belle" dining train. Once it entered service it enabled aperitifs, as well as

drinks with meals, to be served to dining guests. Along with other vehicles in the "Wessex Belle" rake it was repainted, during 2011/12, into BR's early 1950s Carmine/Cream livery (known as "blood & custard" to many enthusiasts) which it still carries.

Dorset Police's rural crime team investigated an incident which happened at some point between the late hours of Friday 24th February and the early hours of Saturday 25th February 2023. Vandals smashed windows in the 'Wessex Belle' rake and attempted to set light to one of the dining train carriages.

During the attack several windows in S 4055 were broken and vandals managed to gain entry. Paraffin was poured and a rag set alight in an attempt to set the carriage on fire. If anyone has any information that could help Dorset Police in relation to this incident they are asked to report it by telephoning 101 and quoting the incident number 55230030725.

As a result of this damage, the Swanage Railway considered the relative merits of repairing S 4055 or disposing of it to another owner who had the time, money and resources to do so. In the event, a decision was taken to sell the vehicle.

More recently, the coach was taken to Arne Road siding, near Norden, from where it was removed on a road trailer on Monday 10th February 2026.

It has been purchased by the Somerset & Dorset Railway Heritage Trust at Midsomer Norton.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Swanage Railway Stock Books

Preserved Coaching Stock of British Railways – Part One BR Design Stock

by Peter Hall and Peter Fox (Platform 5 Publishing – 1994)

The Railway Heritage Register Carriage Survey Project:

http://www.cs.rhrp.org.uk/se/CarriageInfo.asp?Ref=1284

Information collated by Peter Sykes

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