

# ISLE OF MAN MANX TRANSPORT FESTIVAL 2024

(30th July to 4th August 2024)

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Between Tuesday 30th July to Sunday 4th August 2024, the Isle of Man had its annual Summer Transport Extravaganza; 5 days of special, enthusiast themed events taking place on all the island's rail and tram systems. From charter trips on the steam railway to private hires on the Manx Electric, and from unusual cars on the horse trams to engineering units giving rides on the Snaefell Mountain Railway, there was plenty of action to be had by all visitors to the island.

For a few days prior to the event, the Isle of Man 50 Group were once again having their 'hire' days too. Every year, prior to the start of the festival, the group spend a day with their privately hired train, tram or bus, going to various places on the island with many photo stops included. The 2024 program had a one-day bus hire on Saturday 27th July to a few random places, including the 'Sound' cafe in the South (overlooking the Calf of Man), Jurby and Peel. Sunday 28th July had a private hire day on the electric railway, followed by another on the steam railway the next day (29th July 2024).

Here is my written account, of how the 2024 festival unfolded.

**Sunday 28th July**

I joined in on the action here, having arrived on the island from Liverpool (onboard the fastcraft Manannan) the day before.

Tunnel Car 9 and trailer 36 (as trailer 19) were the vehicles on hire for the day. Starting out from a very misty Douglas, the first leg of the tour headed to Dhoon Quarry via Laxey, with photo stops at various places including Howstrake, Scarffe's Crossing, Preston Crossing and at Dhoon Quarry itself. After returning to Laxey for a lunch stop, Car 9 (looking very peculiar without her trademark bodyside lights) carried on the trip with photo stops at Cornaa, Murray's Road etc, before a short break at Ramsey.

Windy Ridge, Lewaigue, Crowville, Brown's Crossing and Ballaragh were the locations for photo opportunities on the return run, with Car 9 and trailer 36/19 arriving back just after 17:00. I however, switched sets at Laxey, with Car 16 and trailer 60 heading back to Douglas.

Other vehicles out in service on this day included Car 2/trailer 49, Car 7/trailer 51, and Car 1/trailer 54.

### **Monday 29th July**

Monday saw the turn of the steam railway to run a private hire. Manx Northern Dubs tank No.4 (IOMR No.15) Caledonia was in charge of this special run to Port Erin, featuring a selection of MNR stock. This included Saloon Car F.31, Van G.1, 'Cleminson' Coach No.6, and No.17 (the Foxdale coach). This consist was, apparently, the longest ever assembled for a charter.

Caledonia made her way along the route to Port Erin, with stops at Keristal, Port Soderick, Meary Veg, Ballasalla, just outside Castletown, Ballabeg, Colby and Port St Mary. These were timed very carefully, so as not to cause any disruption with the railway's normal services (timetable R being in operation on this day).

One highlight of the run, was all three services crossing at Ballasalla. When the last time this sort of thing happened, is anybody's guess...

IOMR Beyer Peacock tanks No.4 Loch (Douglas based) and No.11 Maitland (Port Erin based) were in charge of the regular service trains.

### **Tuesday 30th July**

The festival week got under way on this day, starting with a morning parallel run from Douglas Derby Castle, with Tunnel Cars 5 and 7 doing the honours. No.7 carried on towards Laxey, while No.5 returned to Derby Castle, prior to the start of the day's service.

On the steam railway that morning, Beyer Peacock No.4 Loch was working the usual 09:50 service to Port Erin, adorned with two headboards created by the excellent David Archer; 'THE PORT ERIN LINE SINCE 1874', and 'ISLE OF MAN STEAM RAILWAY 150'.

On the horse tramway, Car 45 joined Car 36 with the day's duties.

Back on the MER, Ratchet Car 14 was the vehicle of choice for the 'Crossbench Crossover' tour; a special trip organised to take in as many of the line's crossover points as possible. These included:

- 1) DC 'Groudle Siding'
- 2) DC No.2 Crossover
- 3) Onchan Head
- 4) Ballameanagh
- 5) Fairy Cottage
- 6) Laxey Car Shed New (including a surprise run into the shed itself)
- 7) Dumbell's Row (Laxey)
- 8) Ballagory
- 9) Ballaskeig
- 10) Queen's Valley
- 11) Ramsey: ex-Car Shed Siding
- 12) Ramsey Station Siding 1
- 13) Ramsey Station Siding 2

I took a ride on this trip, until bailing on the return run, in order to catch a bus back to Douglas for my next engagement.

It was back to the steam railway for the last activity of the day. Loch departed Douglas with an almost non-stop run to Port Erin (leaving 15 minutes behind its scheduled departure time of 17:30, and making a brief stop at Colby), where an evening photography session was being held. This featured No.11 Maitland and No.5 Mona (the latter drawn out of the railway museum for the occasion) joining No.4 Loch, as well as the added bonus of a John Fowler steam roller on the platform. The event featured all three locos posed in various positions in the station area, and included Mona on the passenger stock for good measure!

### **Wednesday 31st July**

Day 2 of the festival kicked off with another morning Derby Castle to Groudle parallel run. This was meant to feature Winter Saloon Cars 20 and 19, but the latter was out of action (pending overhaul), so was swapped for 21; itself looking much better in standard MER colours.

On the horse tramway, the covered saloon cars came out to play, with G.F Milnes built 27 and 29 being used on the day's services.

Derby Castle was playing host to the first of two days of workshop and car shed tours, with MER volunteers giving visitors a guided tour and talk at various times throughout the day. I went along to the morning session, to observe many vehicles being maintained/stored, including Cars 18 and 29, 32 being moved around, and Cars 2, 7, 14 and 16 being posed for photographs outside the shed.

Next, it was onto the Groudle Glen Railway, having its extended Summer

Wednesday opening for the festival period. 2019-built Bagnall Brown Bear was in charge of the two-carriage service. However, Sea Lion was seen on shed at Lhen Coan, being prepared for the evening services. Otter, Busby, Dolphin, Walrus and Polar Bear (the battery version), were also noted.

Laxey was the last stop for the day's activities. Cars 1 and 2 operated parallel runs to Dhoon Quarry and back, Mail Van 4 was on display in the siding by the Mines Tavern (having come up from Douglas behind Car 1), the old goods shed was open for visitors to look inside (freight van 3 and a pair of bogies on display), and Cars 7 (with trailer 19) and 21 (with trailer 59) working between Laxey and Douglas.

### **Thursday 1st August**

The 3rd day saw Cars 16 and 32 on the morning parallel run to Groudle, before they both went into service for the day (and a good thing too, since it was boiling hot!). Works Car 34 gave 'Motorman' taster sessions between Laxey and Lewaigue, while Car 21/freight trailer 26 were noted on shuttles between Laxey and Dhoon Quarry, with a photo stop at Bulgham on the return.

On the horse tramway, open toastrack cars 21 and 42 came out to play. Again, good thing too with the afternoon getting very hot indeed!

On the steam railway, aside from the IOM Steam Railway Supporters Association's annual meeting, all three of the railway's Beyer Peacock tanks

were out in traffic. Maitland maintained the 'Southern' end of the service, while Loch and Kissack double headed or banked some trains heading out of Douglas. Having been on the MER that morning, I travelled to Ballasalla and back to Port Soderick, for a lineside session at Keritstal.

That evening, Loch and Kissack worked the 'diner' train to Castletown, running in commemoration of Henry B. Loch.

All three locos were adorned with various headboards on the day, created especially for the festival period. Including 'Earl of Derby', 'Duke of Sutherland' 'Isle of Man Steam Railway 150', and 'The Port Erin Line Since 1874'.

### **Friday 2nd August**

The 4th Day of the festival, saw a lot of activity on both railways. On the Steam Railway, there was Ailsa working shuttles at Douglas station, and the Blue Simplex at Castletown. It was at the latter place that the 150th anniversary of the station was being commemorated, with celebrations commencing in the afternoon, and concluding with the unveiling of the blue plaque. That evening, saw an 'Isle of Cider' special diner train operate to Port Erin.

During the day, Douglas Works and Signal Box were giving guided tours, conducted by volunteers of the railway. I joined such a tour in the morning, and saw the following items among many around the shed:

- 1) Caledonia in the works shed.
- 2) A new boiler intended for No.12 Hutchinson.
- 3) The frames of No.12 Hutchinson.
- 4) Royal Saloon F.36 being given some needed TLC.
- 5) No.8 Fenella, all sheeted up.
- 6) The frames and boiler of No.9 Douglas.

Outside, No.4 Loch was being prepared to work the 11:30 back to Port Erin; this service having arrived behind No.11 Maitland.

On the Electric Railway, guided tours of Laxey Car Sheds were the order of the day, again conducted by volunteers of the railway. Wickham Car 22 gave shuttle rides over Laxey Viaduct, and Works Car 34 with trailer 51, operated shuttles between Laxey and Dhoon Quarry.

The Snaefell Mountain Railway had NATS 4 (one of the railway's engineering vehicles, substituting for NATS 3), on its sell-out workings to and from a windy, and cloud covered Snaefell Summit.

### **Saturday 3rd August**

The penultimate day of the 2024 festival, and one that saw tours of the car sheds at Douglas Derby Castle, a 'Victorian' day on the Groudle Glen, the



Great Laxey Mines Railway in operation (albeit, under limited circumstances due to a collapsed culvert), His Excellency the Leutenant Governor of the Isle of Man (Sir John Lormier, accompanied by Lady Lormier) travelling to Port Erin for a special engagement to mark the 150th anniversary of the Port Erin line, and Caledonia on an evening charter, with a selection of Manx Northern passenger stock.

I started the day at Douglas, to see His Excellency take a footplate ride aboard No.4 Loch, before moving onto Laxey to visit Lady Isabella (the Laxey Wheel), and the Great Laxey Mines Railway (Ant working the service, while Bee was undergoing light maintenance). Next, it was onto the Groudle Glen Railway for a few hours, with Sea Lion hauling the 'Victorian' set, and tours of the shed and workshops taking place.

Then, after a few hours, it was back to the steam railway for the evening run with Caledonia. Hauling Saloon Coach F.31, the 'Cleminson' Coach (No.6), and the 'Foxdale' Coach (No.17). Passengers on the outward run took it in turns to ride in the 'Cleminson', to reduce the risk of the axles running hot. The charter left Douglas at 18:50, with photo stops/run pasts at Port Soderick, Ballasalla, a field inbetween Castletown and Ballabeg, and Colby. The train arrived at Port Erin just after 21:00, leaving around 45 minutes later after a quick turnaround. I however, decided to bail here, and get the bus back to Douglas, with another day's chasing at an end.

### **Sunday 4th August**

The 5th and final day of the 2024 Festival saw an intense timetable on the

MER, with nearly every active car in service. In spite of the onset of rain in the afternoon, there was a great deal of activity, including a special carnival event at Ramsey station (marking the 125th anniversary of the line's opening to Ramsey). Nearby, Ramsey Pier was open to the public, with the 3ft Gauge Planet/Hibbered diesel loco and single coach (both on loan from Jurby Transport Museum) making their first runs along the partially rebuilt pier for the first time since the 1980's. The event was supplemented with an open air concert, by a local ukulele ensemble.

The steam railway had one of its locos adorned with a special headboard, commemorating one of the railway's regular footplate crews of the past. Loch was recorded on the 09:50 departure from Douglas, wearing the 'Driver Percy Cain' headboard.

The Groudle Glen Railway had its 'gala' day, with every operational locomotive in service. Sea Lion, Brown Bear and Otter, supplemented by the battery-powered Polar Bear and diesel locos Walrus, Dolphin and Maltby, all took it in turns to work a two-train service between Lhen Coan and Sea Lion Rocks.

## **Conclusion**

Another great year for the Summer Transport Festival, and one that saw heavy passenger numbers spread throughout the island's rail and tram systems. While recent times may have been challenging from many perspectives, it is hoped that with enough support and encouragement, this sort of event can keep on going for a long time to come.

With thanks to everyone involved with the organisation and execution of the events, including the staff and volunteers of the steam and electric railways. Many thanks also to Isle of Man Transport, and the Isle of Man 50 Group.