

Modern Panniers



SMALL SUPPLIERS
PLUS

MRJ looks at the excitement surrounding the Lionheart Trains 64xx and 74xx Pannier Tanks.

Having set about replacing many elderly pannier tanks in 1929, with the introduction of the 57xx class, the Great Western Railway started to consider an updated version of its auto-fitted panniers. These were useful engines as they could handle four 70ft auto-trailers up a 1 in 60 gradient, being significantly more powerful than the four-coupled tanks of the 517 class which were only comfortable with two, or sometimes three coaches. The 2021 and 1076 classes were therefore to be modernised, and as an experiment, No. 2062 was re-wheeled with much larger 5ft 2in wheels and a new boiler, and after successful trials, this led to an improved 2021 class being designed by Collett. This became the 54xx class, and Swindon works started construction of the new engines in 1931.

A year later a further series of similar auto-fitted engines, but with smaller wheels, were introduced. Based upon the 54xx class, they were constructed in four lots between 1932 and 1937. These forty engines formed the 64xx class, and in essence were identical to the 54xx class other than their 4ft 7in wheels. With a large modern-looking cab, they appeared very different from the earlier auto-fitted panniers and were soon set to work in the hilly South Wales valleys and around Plymouth.

A near identical class of non auto-fitted engines were also introduced. These, the 74xx class, were stronger, had an increased boiler pressure and, apart from the appearance of the joint between the cab and bunker, were easily mistaken for the previous class. The first to be introduced were numbers 7400–7429 which

were first seen in 1936, but the last few were not built until 1950, bringing the total of unfitted engines to fifty.

The 64xx and 74xx classes are the prototypes selected for Lionheart Trains' first ready-to-run engine. This has caused quite a stir, and you only have to look at this picture of it to see why. We asked Martyn Welch what he thought of it, and apart from replacing the vacuum hoses with tubing stripped from electric cable, the photograph is of the model straight out of the box. He thought that the crankpin nuts could be smaller, and considered adding the corks to the coupling rods, but, apart from that, we are tempted to say it looks perfect!

Models of this quality are rare, but then Lionheart Trains is the idea of Richard Webster who started working in his father's business, Ratio, many years ago and is responsible for much of their quality rolling stock. He then went on to design and manufacture a small range of highly-detailed Great Western injection-moulded wagons under the name Websters, and these are still available from Peco. With a pedigree like this, it is not surprising that quality and a fidelity to the prototype are something we should expect from Lionheart Trains.

The models have a die-cast chassis and wheel centres, which are then fitted with steel tyres. The design of the chassis includes compensating beams and a motor with a skew wound armature driving a separate gearbox – performance is exceptional. The body is also mainly die-cast and its weight complements the slow running, and ensures enough traction to haul a heavy

train. The cab is a highly-detailed plastic moulding and the differences between the two classes are modelled. Likewise the die-cast tanks on the 64xx feature the weld lines of the prototype, and these are missing on the 74xx, just as they should be. Both versions have turned boiler fittings and buffers, following the philosophy of using the most appropriate manufacturing technique for each part.

The lower boiler is also plastic, which forms a cavity into which slides the PC boards of the DCC version of the model. If you haven't considered DCC, this little engine may well change your mind. It has a Zimo motor and sound chip, downloaded with a recording of 6435 at work on the Bodmin and Wenford Railway. The sound is, in our mind, just about the best of any we have heard – it's irresistible! A high bass speaker emits many sounds, and apart from the chuffing, there is the shovelling of coal, whistles and many more. This could so easily be twee, but it isn't, it's lovely! The chip also drives directional lights and a firebox flicker.

The model is available in a variety of liveries at £528, and can be factory fitted with DCC sound, for £696. This will sound a lot if you are used to Hornby prices, but it is actually very reasonable in the 7mm scale market place. Lionheart have gone on to make a Diagram N auto-trailer, steel mineral wagons and now 7-plank 1923 RCH wagons to the same standard. We hope that Richard Webster does well with his business, and we eagerly look forward to the next engine.