***A4 Pacific, 'Sir Nigel Gresley'***

Generally acclaimed to be Sir Nigel Gresley's masterpieces, the streamlined three-cylinder A4 Pacifics rank high among internationally renowned steam locomotives. Their celebrity was attributed in no small measure to No.4468 'Mallard' which holds in perpetuity the world speed record for steam of 126 mph, set on 3 July 1938. The No. 60007 'Sir Nigel Gresley of this model set the post WWII speed record at 112 mph on 23 May 1959.

The familiar wedge-shaped nose was evolved via wind tunnel tests, the initial inspiration having been provided by Gresley's study of the sloped leading and trailing ends of French Bugatti railcars. The power saved on the A4 design through streamlining proved impressively significant in comparison with orthodox A3 Pacifics, with which the A4 had many mechanical specifications in common.

The first four engines were built in 1935 to work the 'Silver Jubilee' inaugurated for King George V's Jubilee year; a set of specially-designed articulated coaches were assembled for this, Britain's first fully streamlined train. The unveiling of the revolutionary A4s caused a tremendous sensation amongst railway enthusiasts and general public alike. They were all the more impressive in being painted silver and sporting names in which 'Silver' was the common prefix. The ultra-fast 'Silver Jubilee' service ran non-stop between London and Newcastle-upon-Tyne; crew changes en route were made possible by the ingenious corridor tenders. 31 further A4 4-6-2s, of which No.4498 was aptly christened 'Sir Nigel Gresley', took to the rails between 1937 and 1938. All proved sufficiently powerful to haul a 650-ton train at over 60 m.p.h. without assistance, a tough assignment at that time.

Several of the later-built A4s were deployed to work another and even more ambitious high-speed train, the non­stop London-Edinburgh 'Coronation' commencing in 1937 to mark King George VI's accession to the throne. Fitted with distinctive transatlantic style chime whistles, these grandiloquent locomotives were however not limited to working these two premium services alone: they worked fast expresses throughout the L.N.E.R. empire with equal success, thereby contributing heavily in marking the 1930s as the halcyon period of railway speed and regularity.

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Before World War II full valances had sheathed the Walschaert's valve motion of the A4s, but following Gresley's death in 1941 these were permanently removed in order to improve accessibility. The A4s built in 1938 were fitted with a Kylchap double blast-pipe and chimney. It was with these aids to performance that 'Mallard' took the speed record. The whole class followed suit, but no less than twenty years later, in 1957-58.

Apart from removal of side valances the A4s retained their unique appearance from beginning to end. All except one survived in good order until withdrawal took place between 1963-66; of the 35 engines in the class, six have been rescued from dismemberment. 'Mallard', in the Garter blue livery originally introduced for the Coronation service and eventually applied to each A4 holds rightful pride of place in the National Railway Museum at York.

'Sir Nigel Gresley' ran approximately 1.5 million miles in revenue service before withdrawal in 1966 when she was purchased by the 'The A4 Locomotive Preservation Society' which later became an educational charity known as 'The Sir Nigel Gresley Locomotive Trust'. Since then she has been a popular performer on the mainline and on heritage railways throughout the UK.

*(based on Ian Beattie, L.N.E.R. locomotives to scale, 1981)*

*This is the only LNER ‘Pacific’ owned by a charity controlled by its members. For information on how to join the Trust or how to support the locomotive, please visit the Trust's website:* ***www.sirnigelgresley.org.uk***

Search Google Images and Wikipedia for A4 Pacific, or Sir Nigel Gresley locomotive, or Mallard locomotive (do not forget the 'locomotive' here or you will end up with a whole lot of ducks).

colophon:

designer: Cor van Haasteren

cover photograph courtesy of Phil Brown

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