Restoration of LMS 'Black Five' No. 5025 gets Heritage Lottery support

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It was a major attraction up to 1994 when it had to be taken out of service for major repair and restoration work. The WEC Watkinson Trust has been working hard to raise the necessary £354,000 required to initiate the locomotive's four year restoration programme. Much of that sum has been raised from various supporting sources but now that the HLF has confirmed £50,000 of support, the programme of restoration to operating condition can begin. Major items of work relate to the boiler, wheels, bearings and tender water tank. While specialist contractors will be needed, much of the repair and reconstruction work will be carried out by the engineers and volunteers in the Strathspey Railway's locomotive shed and workshops in Aviemore. The locomotive should be back in service by 2015.

LMS 'Black Five' 4-6-0 No 5025 was purchased by Scottish railway heritage pioneer, Ted Watkinson, in the late 1960s for the proposed preserved railway between Aviemore and Grantown-on-Spey which was to become known as the Strathspey Railway. For a railway in the Highlands, the obvious locomotive was a Stanier-designed 'Black Five'. Many of these operated out of Inveness Shed in LMS and British Railways days from 1934 to 1960. They were affectionately known as 'Hikers' by Highland railwaymen in recognition of their capability on steeper gradients.

The locomotive eventually selected was British Railways No 45025 (BR added the '4' to its original LMS number) which had been built by the Vulcan Foundry, Newton le Willows, in 1934. It worked on the Highland Main Line during its first year in service and is the oldest surviving example of its class. Ted felt that another preserved railway should have use of the engine until the Strathspey Railway was ready to receive it, so it ran on the Keighley and Worth Valley Railway from June 1969 until 1974. No 5025 then came north for an overhaul at Andrew Barclay's works in Kilmarnock in May 1975. Running between Aviemore and Boat of Garten started on 27th August 1975.

After its arrival in Strathspey, No 5025 was a high profile performer till 1994, not only on the Strathspey line, but also on British Rail mainlines on 'special' trains. Once again, thousands of people will enjoy seeing it, photographing it and riding on trains pulled by it.

Should the 'Rails to Grantown' project succeed, this locomotive would be a fine sight crossing the open Strathspey fields en-route to a re-established Grantown West station.

Colin McLean, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund in Scotland, says: "What a marvellous sight it will be to see this popular locomotive restored to the glory of its heyday. The LMS Black Five No 5025 will give us another exciting door into learning about the history of the Highland Railway through the team at Strathspey. The Heritage Lottery Fund is delighted to support this restoration project as it will bring years of enjoyment and learning to young and old alike."

Neil Sinclair, WEC Watkinson Trust Chairman, says: "The WEC Watkinson Trust is delighted that the Heritage Lottery Fund has made the award which will enable the locomotive to steam again on the Strathspey Railway in 2015. No 5025 is an important link with the railway history of the Highlands, as it was one of the very first 'Black Fives' to operate in the region in 1934. These locomotives came to dominate the working of trains in the North of Scotland up to the end of steam in the early 1960s."

Colin Vaughan, Aviemore Locomotive Shed Engineer & Foreman says: “Having already fully restored two important steam locomotives, we are very much looking forward to getting to work on this engine. It is particularly satisfying to help others learn the skills necessary to maintain locomotives like this well into the future.”

Notes for editors

The WEC Watkinson Trust was set up as a charitable trust registered in Scotland in 1999 in line with the wishes of Scottish railway preservation pioneer, Mr Ted Watkinson.

Its prime mission is to provide the public with an opportunity to learn about the railways of the Highlands through preservation and operation of this LMS Steam locomotive, No 5025, along with its LMS and Highland carriages. The locomotive and carriages are to be operated and maintained on the Strathspey Railway.

Ted Watkinson was born in Yorkshire in 1910 where his father was a director of the family firm of wool merchants in Halifax. The family also owned property in Leeds and had coal mining interests in Wales. In August 1926 Ted journeyed by train to Nairn for a family holiday. It was the beginning of a lifelong interest in the Highland Railway and eventually his vital support for the setting up and operation of the Strathspey Railway. Ted died in Boat of Garten in 1981 after one of his many days on the Strathspey line.

The Strathspey Railway Company is Limited by shares and formed as a not-for-profit company. It operates heritage railway services on nearly 10 miles of the former Highland and BR line from Aviemore to Broomhill, near Dulnain Bridge and is one of the area’s top visitor attractions. Its first regular passenger services to Boat of Garten were in 1978. Trains, track, stations, signalling and engineering are staffed by a combination of many volunteers supplemented by a small number of permanent and seasonal employees.
Visitors enjoy a nostalgic train ride in restored carriages usually hauled by one of the railway's steam locomotives. There are fine views of the Cairngorms and the River Spey as well the chance to see much of the diverse wildlife, in varying habitats, along the line. Many passengers also enjoy dining in the train’s buffet car.

The Strathspey Railway Charitable Trust is a separate Company, limited by guarantee, from the Strathspey Railway Company. The Trust was registered with the Scottish Charity Regulator in May 2009 to raise funds for railway heritage activities on the Strathspey Railway and, in particular, to act as the promoter, fund-raiser and constructor of the line extension to Grantown. The charitable company is now undertaking, subject to further consents and adequate finance, restoration of railway services to Grantown-on-Spey by extending the track a further three miles. The scheme has cross-party political backing at community, regional and national level. Nearly one mile of new track is already in place and a bridge has been donated by Network Rail, and delivered to Boat of Garten, for the crossing of the River Dulnain.

Further information

Strathspey Railway Company, on tel: 01479 810725