

Easter Monday at Kempton Park

By J. N. FAULKNER



Photo]

[J. N. Faulkner

Up train from Shepperton entering Upper Halliford Halt on the down line on Easter Monday, 1954

THE racing calendar provides Londoners with an important meeting on each of the Bank Holiday Mondays. All the three courses concerned, Kempton Park, Hurst Park, and Epsom, are on the suburban network of the Southern Region. Kempton Park Racecourse, at which the Easter meeting is held, is served by an adjacent station on the Shepperton branch, about a quarter of a mile east of Sunbury Station. The station, which is open on race days only, consists of two long platforms connected to the course by a covered way. The up platform is an island with a non-electrified terminal road alongside its outer face, but no other siding facilities exist at Kempton Park.

The Shepperton branch is normally one of the Southern Region's quieter suburban routes, with a regular weekday half-hourly service from Waterloo *via* Kingston, augmented during the rush hours by a few semi-fast trains *via* Richmond. Consequently, siding accommodation provides only for three eight-car trains at the Shepperton terminus, and as the crowds attracted to the Easter Monday meeting

require the running of trains at four-minute intervals before and after the races, this constitutes a severe handicap. The normal lengthy signal sections on the branch have to be shortened on race days by intermediate block posts at Fulwell Cutting, between Fulwell Junction and Hampton, and at Mark Hole, Hanworth and Kempton Park, between Hampton and Sunbury.

The race specials arriving from Waterloo are divided fairly equally between the Kingston and Richmond routes, which converge beyond the Strawberry Hill triangle at Fulwell Junction signalbox. After setting down the racegoers at Kempton Park, the earlier specials continue empty to Sunbury, where they cross over to the up line and return to Waterloo to pick up another load.

As the first race usually starts at 2 p.m., after about 12.30 it becomes too late for any more trains to be sent back to Waterloo to return in time for the racing, and it then is necessary to retain all further specials on the branch. At this stage the Signal Engineer establishes single-line working over the down line

between Sunbury and Shepperton, using electric train tablet instruments which are permanently installed in these signal-boxes. Then, when the next empty race special arrives at Sunbury, it crosses to the up road and proceeds down that line to a point about half-a-mile east of Shepperton, where it comes to a stand. Each succeeding empty train then follows the same course, closing right up to its predecessor, except where gaps have to be left at occupation crossings.

Meanwhile, the regular half-hourly service to and from Shepperton is worked over the single line alongside. Upper Halliford Halt, the only intermediate station on this section, has to deal with trains in both directions at its down platform. While racing is in progress during the afternoon, more empty trains are arriving from Strawberry Hill and Durnsford Road depots in readiness for the return traffic, and these take their turn with the passenger trains to travel over the heavily-occupied single line to Shepperton, where they berth either in the sidings, or go to fill the remaining space on the up line, west of the trains already stabled there. When all these have been stabled there are usually about sixteen trains on the up track, between Sunbury and Shepperton, in an almost unbroken line over a mile-and-a-half long.

After racing has finished, the empty

trains move forward in turn through Sunbury to pick up the homeward crowds at Kempton Park, and as far as possible the half-hourly Shepperton service is maintained during the return rush, still using the down track as a single line beyond Sunbury until the last of the berthed specials has been cleared (generally about 6 p.m.), when normal working is resumed.

Most of the trains used for the race traffic are the usual eight-car formation of two four-car suburban sets, with a few trains formed of two-car sets of both "NOL" and "BIL" types. The only steam participation in the Kempton Park traffic is the stand-by engine provided at Sunbury in case of emergency. It may be recalled, however, that pre-war Kempton Park meetings were served by steam-worked specials for first class passengers, which comprised "M7" class 0-4-4 tank engines hauling trains of vintage S.E.C.R. and L.B.S.C.R. compartment stock. These trains spent the afternoon at Sunbury, and they added to the complications of the return traffic by departing from the down platform at Kempton Park. Though the all-electric working of today is less picturesque, the handling of the Easter Monday traffic under the awkward conditions of the Shepperton branch would be much more difficult without the flexibility of this form of traction.