

"Merchant Navy" class  
Pacific No. 35022,  
"Holland America  
Line", ready to restart  
from Salisbury on the  
"Atlantic Coast Ex-  
press" on September 4



Photo: D. W. Winkworth

## LAST WEEK-END of the "Atlantic Coast Express"

D. W. WINKWORTH

**A**N unusual air of expectancy brooded over Waterloo Station mid-morning on Friday, September 4, more in accord with an inaugural run of a fast train than the final trip of the 38-year-old "Atlantic Coast Express". Strictly it was not the final run, as on the following day there would be two parts of the train departing westwards—yet for the band of Southern recorders, of which many well-known names were present, it was the last run on the fast 60 m.p.h.-plus schedule. The decision as to whether to accompany the last down or up train had been resolved for many by the advent of diesel-hydraulic traction on the up train on August 17.

It fell to these particular enthusiasts to start the farewell to the West of England services which were to be radically altered on the Monday following and yet, somehow, one could hardly realise it was a farewell. The platform gates were opened three-quarters of an hour before departure time to admit some of the already waiting travellers, and when the empty stock was drawn in the roof-boards on the coaches positively gleamed in the sunlight filtering through the roof of the station. A count showed that 13 coaches were to be the load—one over the maximum laid down.

Knots of enthusiasts who had gathered on the platform got entangled in finding corner facing seats on the down side, and then gradually gravitated to the end of the platform to see as "spick-and-span" a "Merchant Navy" class engine as the train had ever had back on. No. 35022, *Holland*

*America Line*, was complete with headboard for Driver Sibley of Salisbury, who, report had it, was driving well this week, to take over. Wisely he gave a cautionary word to the wildly optimistic regarding the possibility of the load "holding her back".

Promptly at 11 o'clock the tank engine buffered up at the rear and 35022 moved away and was soon accelerating in determined style towards Vauxhall, only to brake, on this day of all days, for a signal check. Surely enough the red aspect was unblinking and 35022 came to a halt by Nine Elms goods yard. It was soon evident from the sight of a man with his flags that this was a signal failure and that it was in order to proceed. So with steam blowing off violently from the angled safety valves, the engine was restarted and the determined running recommenced; Clapham Junction was passed in 10 min. 26 sec.

By Surbiton (where a lady photographer was at work) speed had risen to 70 m.p.h. and by Woking time was being steadily regained. The summit at milepost 31 was passed in 34 min. 35 sec. at 70 m.p.h. and speed dropped only as Basingstoke was approached. Here another named train was making its way through—the "Pines Express"—over a route very different from its first days, and who would have thought even three years ago that the "Pines" would outlive the "ACE"?

Scheduled passing time for Worting Junction was 50 min. and Driver Sibley had managed to pass within ten seconds of that and so anything

regained now would go towards an early arrival. Keeping within the speed limit and with a restrained run down Porton bank, the spire of Salisbury Cathedral soon came into view and then the train ran through the short tunnel and arrived, in 78 min. 7 sec. from the start, some 2 min. early. This represented a net time of 74½ min. without any excess of speed *en route*. Well done! Customary water and coaling activities occupied the engine-men during the halt while the photographers present endeavoured to obtain some record of the proceedings.

### Crew change at Salisbury

Exmouth Junction shed's F. Turner, a driver with a reputation for good running, now took over and a punctual public timetable departure was made, one minute early on working time. With the new crew running was still on the same high plane, Semley being passed in 20 min. 38 sec. at 60 m.p.h., followed by 89 m.p.h. at Gillingham, a dash up to milepost 107½ (74 m.p.h.) and then into the dip of Blackmoor Vale with 64 m.p.h. at the summit, marked by milepost 113½ (30 min. 8 sec.): thus, by Yeovil Junction, a couple of minutes gain on the scheduled passing time of 39 min. had been recorded. Similar fast running persisted to Crewkerne.

It was evident that a somewhat early arrival at Sidmouth Junction was going to be made if this progress was maintained and so it did not come as a complete surprise to some observers that an easing was made after Hewish. The 60 m.p.h. running continued, with steam blowing off, almost to Axminster, and it was obvious that 35028's epic of September 23, 1961, when Honiton Tunnel was entered at 59 m.p.h., was in no danger of eclipse or even of being equalled. And so it proved; for although the schedule of 60 min. to Axminster was bettered by 2½ min. (this intermediate timing was somewhat unrealistic as it allowed but 13 min. to the finish including the Honiton climb) a certain amount of way was lost and the 470-ton load scaled the incline not in the high "forties" but in the "thirties" and with more restrained running to the stop at Sidmouth Junction a quarter of a minute was dropped on schedule although public arrival was still early. Running time on to Exeter Central was 15½ min., excluding time spent in setting back on restarting, and a late arrival there of a minute was something of an anti-climax after the departure from London.

This was the parting of the ways for many of the enthusiasts: one or two faithful souls were travelling on to the end, either to Ilfracombe or in the second portion—headed by 34015, *Exmouth*—to Padstow. Others drifted away in small groups to refresh themselves and talk over personal experiences of the train down the years and not a few returned to sample the 4.30 p.m. departure to Salisbury and Waterloo.

No. 35026, *Lampart & Holt Line*, and Driver Parkhouse (Exmouth Junction) were delayed in leaving with this train for more than 20 minutes as a diesel-hauled portion of the train arrived late.

After an initially slow start and a gentle run past the locomotive sheds—where an "N" class 2-6-0 and some Pacifics were visible but, alas, now no "M7" tank—running picked up and time was steadily regained to bring the train into Yeovil Junction some five minutes less than schedule at a mile-a-minute rate for the 48.9 miles, and so provide yet another workmanlike performance record over a far from easy road.

On the Saturday, photographers, and youthful (and some not-so-youthful) "spotters" were out in force and by the commencement of the midday procession of trains through Templecombe there appeared to be more enthusiasts than passengers on the platforms! As a harbinger of the new order, No. D831 appeared on the 9.30 a.m. *ex-Exmouth* train to be shortly followed by the 10.28 a.m. from Exeter Central, which was double-headed, as on some previous Saturdays, by two unmodified light Pacifics. Tape recording machines were noted well to the fore in the leading coach of the train and it is to be hoped their owners were well rewarded with appropriate sounds from 34106, *Lydford*, and 34079, *141 Squadron*.

The comings and goings of the Somerset & Dorset section trains punctuated the main-line proceedings. The first portion of the down "Atlantic Coast Express", which had left Waterloo at 10.35 a.m., came by with modified 34089 in charge, to be followed shortly by the main 11 a.m. train again in charge of 35022 and made up to 13 coaches, but without head or roofboards, making a supremely confident climb up to milepost 113½.

Next it was the turn of the up train, the first portion of which, from Ilfracombe, leaving Exeter Central at 12.30 p.m., was entrusted to No. 35009, *Shaw Savill*, hotly pursued by the Torrington portion headed by 34093, *Saunton*, another modified engine. Last of all, by which time the sun had veiled itself, came the 11 a.m. from Padstow, the last up "Atlantic Coast Express" and the only one carrying roofboards for the last day, drawn by 73085, *Melisande*. This indeed was a pleasant link with the past and inevitably it drew one's recollection back to the pre-Pacific era when those doughty 4-6-0s—the "King Arthurs"—handled the traffic so stoutly over this fascinatingly switchback and scenic route. It seemed a fitting finale that one of those old names should be coupled with the last "ACE" working.

Even on Sunday, the last day of the summer service, the devotees had not deserted their love. The last non-stop train from Salisbury to Waterloo had a good complement of recorders and although modified 34013, *Okehampton*, had managed to regain 1½ min. between Templecombe and Salisbury with the 460-ton train, two permanent way restrictions and a signal check together with a late start conspired to make the prospect of a punctual arrival at Waterloo impossible, although a net time of 84½ min., coupled with an enlivening dash through Woking in the high "eighties" was, in the circumstances, no disgrace. Appropriately, arrival at Waterloo was in the rapidly deepening dusk, which somehow seemed to epitomise the proceedings of this last week-end.