

Perhaps Sunday is not such a Day of Rest

David Campbell



Southern Shorthaul Railroad was rather busy across the Victorian broad-gauge network on Sunday 12 February. Recent locomotive acquisitions have allowed its Victorian operations to be significantly increased, particularly with locos P11, 14, 16, 17 and 18 (surplus ex-V/Line), and B76 and 80 (ex-Rail First Asset Management) joining the fleet.

The little P class locos (around just 1000hp) have proven invaluable, operating plant trains in the Metro area, with many of those tracks unsuitable for larger and heavier locos. They are also seen supporting the grain trains, with two of the P (or their T class cousins) used to replace an unavailable larger loco (B or S class), or as extra power on the more heavily graded tracks. P11 is confined to SSR's Bendigo North Workshops as the shunt loco, while the remainder are frequently seen on main line workings. P14 and P16 have been re-painted into SSR's corporate yellow/black livery, and P18 is currently being re-painted, while P17 remains in V/line red/yellow "cheeseburger" colours. The P class locos were originally the well regarded "flat top" T class locos, dating back to the mid-1950's, and rebuilt into their current configuration in the early 1980's.

The two B class (at 1500hp) have given SSR greater certainty with the operation of their trains. B76 and B80 are still in the former CFCLA colours of silver/blue/yellow, with "SSR" decals added. These recently acquired locos (when combined with more wagons) have allowed SSR to provide additional grain services.

SSR had for some time been running up to 31 wagons on their grain services, primarily serving the Kensington flour mill, although opportunities to export through Appleton Dock formed a handy traffic flow. Fleet numbers initially restricted SSR's operations to just the one grain train; typically, the Kensington mill received around 20 wagons, allowing SSR to opportunistically load up to another 10 wagons, often from smaller sites. Another ten grain hoppers were re-gauged to Victoria's broad gauge (1600mm) recently, and their grain train was then altered to operate as two distinct trains (known as the "black"

and "white" rakes), each comprising up to 21 wagons, usually with one rake servicing the Kensington mill, while the other rake operates into Appleton Dock. The newly arrived wagons are class BGKF, the former NSWGR coal wagons used on the later Leigh Creek coal trains and re-built for grain service by SSR in Lithgow.

SSR's two grain trains have been operating to Manangatang, Sea Lake, Nullawil, Wycheproof, Charlton, Woorinen, Piangil, Mitiamo, Elmore, Deniliquin, and Tocumwal, dealing with what has been a good grain harvest. The use of these shorter rakes allows SSR to bid for smaller contracts to transport grain, and has resulted in them regularly serving smaller sites such as Elmore and Mitiamo which in recent times had dealt with fewer trains. Pacific National had standardised their grains trains into rakes of forty wagons, which clearly provides good business for them, leaving SSR the opportunity to bid for and frequently obtain that smaller volume work.

Perhaps not unexpectedly, the older locos have had some reliability issues, with S302 withdrawn late last year due to electrical issues, and B75 recently only operating intermittently. Most trains are ideally hauled by their remaining B class (76 and 80) and S class (312 and 317), with any further loco requirements being covered by their P class, as above, or T class locos (363, 381, 385 and 386).

The former Victorian Railways Bendigo North Workshops, located adjacent to the junction between the Echuca and Swan Hill lines, is now used by SSR and is invariably busy these days. SSR (and their associated business, Bendigo Rail Workshops) performs various heavy repairs and refurbishments to V/line's *Sprinter* and *VLocity* trains, as well as N class locos. Pacific National locos also may be seen here, usually BL, G and XR classes. Visible from passing Echuca line trains are various locos in store or repair, including S302 (stored with electrical issues) and B65, in Auscision paint scheme, and believed to be undergoing re-conditioning works; its return to service would be very useful for SSR's operations. P11 is the usual workshop shunt loco. Former suburban Comeng electric trains

Left (page 44): SSR remained busy during the week commencing Sunday 13 February. B80 is seen here at Elmore a couple of days later, on Tuesday 14 February, loading its rake prior to returning to Kensington that night. Barely visible, B76 and P14 were assisting. 8075 Down Echuca service has just arrived on the main line, with several passengers leaving this busy service. The "SSR" transfers recently applied to the B class units in place of "CFCLA" are visible. Bill Arkell **Below:** Always a magnificent sight when running back-to-back, S317 and S312 are seen near Talbot heading towards Manangatang on Sunday afternoon, 12 February. This particular rake is referred to as the "white" rake, as suggested by the colour of the covers on the grain wagons. This train later discharged at Appleton Dock. Bill Arkell



may also be seen here being scrapped, as well as a collection of disused vehicles.

Four separate trains were being operated by SSR on Sunday 12 February, each with quite some interest for railway enthusiasts. B76 and 80 (celebrating their 70th birthday this year) were heading a rake of 17 wagons back to Kensington, having loaded at Charlton during the morning before departing for Melbourne around 11:30am.

S312 and S317 discharged their loaded train at Appleton Dock during Sunday morning, before departing Melbourne around 2:30pm, heading off on the long haul to Manangatang with another 21 wagons. This particular train ran via Bacchus Marsh, giving the many enthusiasts "in the know" the rare sight of a Down goods train climbing the famous Ingliston Bank (between Bacchus Marsh and Ballan) in daylight, re-kindling memories of the days before gauge standardisation when this was the main route to Adelaide.

P14 and P17 had spent their weekend running a plant train in push-pull mode around the Richmond – South Yarra area in the

inner Melbourne suburban area. These long and heavy trains usually operate during Absolute Occupations, handling tasks such as rail delivery and pick up, ballast discharge, and collection of spoil. Up to nine locos may be used on these trains, with track restrictions usually necessitating use of smaller units. Heritage locomotives are often seen supplementing these trains, with other main-line operators unable to source sufficient of these lighter locos to compete with SSR's T381, and heritage locos T395 and S313, the latter enjoying an opportunity to have some recent works checked.

Rounding off a busy day, P16 and T386 were operating the EV120 track evaluation vehicle in push-pull mode on the Bendigo corridor, inspecting the passenger lines to Swan Hill and Echuca. This movement ran from Melbourne to Swan Hill on Saturday 11 February, spending the night there before running back to Bendigo and then on to Echuca on the Sunday, finally returning to Melbourne on Monday 13 February.





Above: Nearing its destination, the B class led train is seen later in the afternoon of Sunday 12 February crossing the Moorabool viaduct near Batesford, on the steady descent from Warrenheip to Geelong. Scott Gould

Below: P16 and T386 are seen stabled in Swan Hill early on Sunday 12 February. These locos operated in push-pull mode, powering the EV120 Track Evaluation Vehicle on its routine inspection of the Swan Hill and Echuca lines, departing early that afternoon. David Campbell





The two S's could be heard long before they swung into view below the trig point on the gruelling 1 in 48 climb to Bank Box loop after being put away at Rowsley loop, near Bacchus Marsh, for an hour. Scott Gould