

London to Paris via Dieppe

By C. R. L. COLES



Photo]

[C. R. L. Coles

Class "D" 4-6-2 locomotive No. 231.D.791 waiting to leave Gare St. Lazare, Paris, on an express for Rouen and Le Havre

OF the several routes between the English and French capitals, by no means the least interesting is that *via* Newhaven and Dieppe. Although the sea crossing is longer than by the "short sea route," the rail journeys on both sides of the English Channel are shorter, and the scenery, particularly in Normandy, is much more attractive than that of the industrial areas in the Pas de Calais. Moreover, the fares are cheaper, hence the popularity of the route during the holiday months.

To the railway enthusiast this route possesses another interest; for in this era of electrification and dieselisation, it is one of the few on which 40-year-old steam locomotives are regularly working most, if not all, of the long-distance trains.

It was on a Whitsun-Monday that I joined the 9.30 a.m. boat train at Victoria, made up of the usual rake of 11 coaches and two vans, and headed by electric

locomotive No. 20003, built in 1948. For one who has a soft spot for steam, this journey proved unexciting, and the best that could be said for it was that No. 20003 had no difficulty in effecting a punctual arrival at Newhaven Harbour, where the British Railways steamer *Londres* was waiting.

The *Londres*, a twin-screw vessel of 2,404 tons, with oil-fired steam turbines, is one of four ships of similar size engaged on this 3½-hr. run. The others are the B.R. steamer *Brighton* (2,875 tons), and the two S.N.C.F. steamers *Lisieux* (2,943 tons), and *Arromanches* (2,404 tons). Normally two ships, one British and one French, are sufficient to maintain the daily service in both directions, but during peak periods in the summer, when both day and night services are in operation, all four ships are in constant use.

The harbour entrances at both Newhaven and Dieppe are narrower than at other channel ports, and the steamers,

which are not equipped with bow rudders to facilitate navigation stern first, approach the jetties without reversing. Not until passengers and baggage have been landed do they turn round in readiness for the return trip.

From Dieppe to Paris, a distance of 126 miles, the usual route is by a secondary single line to Darneval Junction, in the outskirts of Rouen, where the main line from Le Havre is joined, and then following the valley of the Seine. There is also an alternative and more direct route *via* Serqueoux, which is $20\frac{1}{2}$ miles shorter, but more difficult. It was by

pleasant undulating country, studded with farms and woodland. Much of the permanent way is laid with chaired rails. The numerous adverse gradients, some of which are lengthy, are not conducive to high speeds.

At Serqueoux, the first town of any importance, we cross the Nord line from Abbeville to Rouen, with which a physical connection is made. This useful alternative route to and from Rouen was regularly used for a time during 1956, while one of the tunnels on the Seine Valley line was undergoing major repairs.



[Photo]

[R. C. Riley

Boat train from Newhaven passing Lewes with electric locomotive No. 20002

this latter route that the boat train by which I travelled was booked. A separate train was provided for passengers travelling to Rouen or beyond.

The tracks between Dieppe Maritime and Dieppe Ville run along the quayside, and between these points all traffic is "flagged." Trains terminating at, or starting from, the town station are accommodated in bay platforms, where an assortment of passenger vehicles, including diesel railcars, usually can be seen.

On the right, beyond Dieppe Ville Station, is the locomotive depot, where a number of former Etat 4-6-2s and American-built 2-8-2s of post-war construction are shedded. Then comes the junction, where the single line to Rouen diverges to our right, and we soon enter

Approaching the outskirts of Paris, we pass Colombes Station which serves the sports arena of Stade Colombes, the venue of the 1924 Olympic Games, and which, to followers of international Rugby football, is to France what Twickenham is to England.

The concluding stretch of the run to the Gare St. Lazare is over the Chemin de Fer de Paris à St. Germain, the first railway to be built in Paris. This line ran from the Place de l'Europe to St. Germain, a distance of 12 miles, and was opened in 1837. The first train from Paris, on which King Louis Philippe had intended to travel, ran on August 26 of that year, in connection with the Fête des Loges. However, the king was prevented by his advisers from so doing, because such mode of transport was then

regarded as dangerous. Instead, Queen Amélie, accompanied by her children, travelled on this inaugural train, and the Duc d'Orleans rode with the driver.

Designed by Litsh, the present Gare St. Lazare occupies a site adjacent to, and south of, the Place de l'Europe, and was completed in 1889. It has 27 platforms, and although not the largest terminal station in Paris (that distinction is held by the Gare de l'Est), it is generally regarded as being the busiest, and handles more than 1,200 trains a day.

It is divided roughly into two main parts, linked by a large and well-appointed circulating area flanking the Rue St. Lazare. The left side of the station, adjacent to the Rue de Rome, handles a large volume of short-distance traffic for residential areas west and south-west of the city. The right side of the station, which adjoins the Rue d'Amsterdam, deals with long-distance traffic to and from Brittany and Normandy.

Near the ends of the platforms a large overbridge carrying the Place de l'Europe spans the approach lines to the station. The railway is here in a walled cutting extending beyond the bridge carrying the Boulevard de Batignolles and the "Metro" line over the railway. Originally it was in a tunnel which constituted a serious bottleneck, until it was alleviated, to some extent, in 1909 by the provision of two additional tracks on the extreme left, partly in the open and partly in tunnel beneath the Rue de Rome. This tunnel still exists.

Despite this improvement, congestion still existed, and in 1912 it was decided to do away altogether with the triple Batignolles Tunnels, and provide a further pair of tracks. However, as a result of the first world war and other financial problems, it was not until 1924 that the work, involving the excavation of more than 200,000 cu. yd. of material and the reconstruction of three overbridges, was completed at a cost of over five-million francs.

On October 5, 1921, before this reconstruction had started, a serious accident occurred in one of the tunnels. An error in signalling resulted in a train which had just left the terminus colliding with the rear of a preceding train. The impact caused the bursting of gas mains, the fire from which contributed to the high number of casualties.

It was not until I arrived at Gare St. Lazare that I was able to record the identity of the Pacific which had worked the train from Dieppe. This was No. 231D573, one of a batch of rebuilt engines, constructed in Glasgow, and which first appeared in 1914. The prototype of these rebuilds was the Chapelon "E" type of the Paris-Orleans Railway which, with later engines of the same type, are now in service on the Nord Region. Altogether, under the direction of M. Dautry, at that time (1929) General Manager of the Etat system, 134 engines were reconstructed with enlarged steam pipes and Dabeg poppet valves for the low-pressure cylinders (the high-pressure piston valves remaining unaltered) and new Schmidt superheaters with 30 elements instead of 24. In their rebuilt form these engines are classified type "D."

The remaining engines also underwent various modifications, based on Chapelon principles. Of these, what are now classified type "G" were completely reconstructed with Dabeg valves to both high-pressure and low-pressure cylinders and Kylchap double exhaust pipes and double chimneys. Some of these engines also work into Gare St. Lazare.

I was particularly impressed by the high standard of cleanliness in which all these express locomotives were kept. As on other Regions, each driver and fireman have their own engine and are responsible for its day-to-day performance, maintenance and repair until it is due for general overhaul, when they can either spend this period in the shops or temporarily work on suburban trains until their regular engine is ready for traffic again. They thus take a great pride in their engines and it was a pleasure to observe the crew of the stand-by 4-6-2 at St. Lazare busily engaged in polishing the boiler lagging and brass work.

Suburban and short-distance traffic at Gare St. Lazare is both steam and electrically operated. The steam trains are worked by powerful three-cylinder 2-8-2 tank locomotives similar to those built for the Chemin de Fer de l'Est in 1930. These suburban trains are in units from seven to nine vehicles, some of the double-deck type. The majority of these trains operate on the pull-and-push principle, with the locomotives running

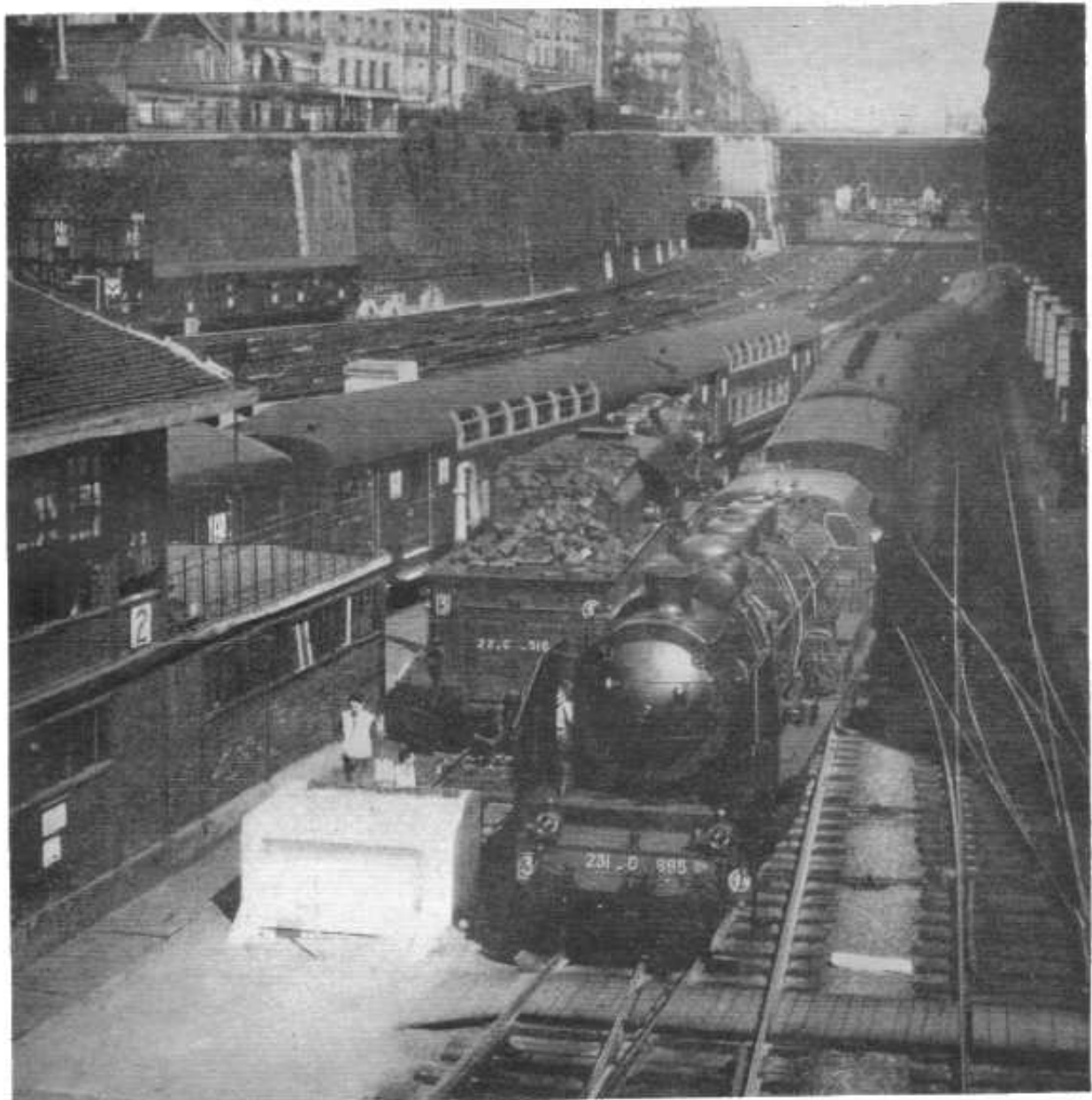
chimney first at the head of incoming trains.

The suburban electric trains are of the multiple-unit type, with third-rail conductors. The positive conductor rails, which for reasons of safety are shielded by wooden guards, are on the outside of the running rails. The general appearance of these trains is marred by large advertisements conspicuously displayed on the exterior panelling.

There is, as yet, but little evidence of the diesel locomotive at St. Lazare. In fact, such diesels as are to be seen there are engaged in carriage shunting and station pilot duties. Empty stock is never hauled into the station, it is

always pushed. Conversely, incoming expresses are invariably shunted out of the terminus by the train engines. It is only when vehicles need to be detached from an incoming train that a diesel locomotive can be seen attached to the opposite end.

Although there is none of the international atmosphere at Gare St. Lazare, and not a great variety of motive power, the station has a strong attraction for the railway enthusiast. It remains a steam stronghold as far as main-line services are concerned, but there appear to be plans to electrify at least this part of the Ouest Region within the next five years. It may well be that, as other



Photo]

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Express from Brittany entering Gare St. Lazare with 4-6-2 No. 231.D.695. A pull-and-push suburban train of double-deck coaches is leaving on the left, and in the background is the tunnel under the Rue de Rome

sections of the Nord and Est Regions are electrified, steam locomotives made redundant will find their way to the lines of the former Etat system. Already, a number of 4-8-2s from the Nord lines are working between Le Mans and Brest.

My last impression of Gare St. Lazare was of starting for home on the Dieppe boat train which, in the main summer season, leaves Paris at 10 a.m. and is booked to cover the 126 miles to Dieppe Maritime, *via* the Seine Valley line, in 146 min. inclusive of stops at Rouen and Dieppe Ville. Except at weekends, and during the peak holiday season (when it is necessary to run at least one separate train), the front portion of the train is reserved for boat passengers. These coaches are sealed off from the rear part, to allow customs and passport formalities to be carried out *en route*. On the occasion of my journey the train consisted of eight coaches and two vans, headed by 4-6-2 locomotive No. 231D675.

Of the two routes between Paris and Dieppe, the Seine Valley line is the more interesting and is also one of the oldest in France. It was constructed in 1843 by two British engineers, MacKenzie and Brassey. Another well-known railway pioneer, J. Buddicom, supplied the original locomotives for working the line and one of these engines, restored to its original condition, was exhibited at the 1951 Festival of Britain in London. The original works at Sotteville, near Rouen, built by Buddicom for repairing and servicing these locomotives, is still in existence and, under the name of Ateliers de Sotteville-Buddicom, carries out carriage and wagon repairs.

Leaving St. Lazare on the stroke of 10 a.m., No. 231D675 accelerated rapidly, and we were soon passing Batignolles depot, one of the largest on the Ouest Region, to which shed this engine belongs. Besides 4-6-2s of classes "D," "G" and "H," and 2-8-2 tank locomotives for suburban traffic, several American-built 2-8-2s are shedded there. These post-war locomotives are chiefly used for freight traffic, of which there is a considerable amount, to and from the principal Atlantic ports. Speed was soon in the "sixties," and, as we continued towards Asnières, where the railway crosses the Seine, so the basilica of the Sacré-Coeur surmounting the Hill of Montmartre (and a landmark for many

miles around) gradually receded into the distance.

Mantes, a residential town on the left bank of the Seine, is 36 miles from Paris, and is the junction for the steeply-graded Cherbourg line which diverges to the left. It is a town full of historical interest, and its cathedral of Notre Dame, dating from the twelfth century, is very similar in style to that of Paris. It was here that William the Conqueror sustained fatal injuries in 1087 by falling from his horse.

Continuing down the valley over long stretches of level track, with many sweeping curves, and through several short tunnels, we come to Sotteville, 83 miles from Paris, at the foot of the 26-mile climb through Rouen to Yvetot. On our left are the locomotive repair works and, in a few moments, the towers of Rouen Cathedral come into view. After stopping at the Right Bank Station, we plunged straight into St. Maur Tunnel, on an adverse gradient of 1 in 187, and continued climbing until, at Darneval Junction, we diverged to the right onto the single-line connection for Dieppe. At first, speed was relatively slow, but soon we were over the summit, and a very fast run down the other side brought us into Dieppe Maritime on time at 12.26 p.m.

No. 231D675 uncoupled, drew ahead, then backed down the parallel track to Dieppe shed for servicing in readiness for working the return boat train to Paris later in the day. We had covered the 126 miles from Paris at an average start to stop speed of 51.78 m.p.h. with what is, by French standards, a very moderate load behind the tender.