



steamsounds Riding behind steam 6201

After leaving Swindon and becoming the London Midland & Scottish Railway's Chief Mechanical Engineer in 1932, William Stanier's first task was to provide the railway with a modern and more powerful locomotive fleet. His first design for an express passenger pacific locomotive was the Class 8P Princess Royal.

The first two locomotives emerged from Crewe Works in 1933 and it was the second, 6201 'Princess Elizabeth', that came to the notice of the general public when on 16th November 1936 that locomotive worked what was to become the longest and fastest non-stop run for a steam locomotive hauled passenger train.

6201 continued in service until, when withdrawn in 1962 it was purchased in the following year by the Princess Elizabeth Society. Initially based at Aschurch the locomotive later moved to Hereford at the Bulmers Railway Centre. From there, in 1976 6201 began once again to work on the main line and soon became a familiar sight on the Welsh Marches Route...

1. Over the years I have travelled behind 'Lizzie' many times on the Welsh Marches from Shrewsbury to Newport but the last time was on 13th June 1993.

1993 saw the 60th Anniversary of the loco's emergence from Crewe Works and also saw 6201 working its final train on the main line before coming out of service for an overhaul so what better route for that train than the Welsh Marches.

The train was called The Diamond Jubilee and quite fittingly, steam haulage commenced at Crewe. From there we ran to Chester, passing the loco's birthplace as we left Crewe. The train then ran steam hauled via Shrewsbury and Hereford then through Chepstow to Gloucester finishing with a run up the main line to Worcester.

One of the highlights of a southbound run on the Welsh Marches route was the climb to the summit at Llanvihangel and even with 12 coaches behind the tender this proved a relatively easy task for 6201 as you can hear in this recording which begins passing Pandy and ends at the top of the 1 in 100 climb at Llanvihangel.

2. The steepest gradient encountered during the run mentioned in the last track was the ascent of Gresford Bank between Chester and Wrexham and, on 21st August 1988 we had two opportunities to hear 6201 climbing this steep gradient when BR, in conjunction with Crewe & Nantwich Borough Council ran a steam hauled train on a circular route from Crewe via Chester and Shrewsbury before returning to Crewe direct and this was done twice in the day.

During the first circuit 6201 had trouble with a little slipping at the bottom of the bank and our driver quite sensibly didn't press the engine but no such problems were experienced on the second run. As you can hear in this recording, our driver was able to work the loco much harder on the 1 in 82 gradient.

The recording begins passing Rossett at the foot of the gradient and ends on easier gradients approaching Wrexham; the load was 12 coaches.

3. As well as being a regular performer on the Welsh Marches route, 6201 was also often to be seen on



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the Settle to Carlisle line and on 18th July 1992 worked a train south from Carlisle to Crewe.

The high spot on a southbound run was, of course the climb to the summit at Ais Gill and on this occasion with 11 coaches behind the tender and in the capable hands of driver Jack Eden 6201 produced an excellent performance. This recording is of the complete run from the departure from Appleby to the summit.

The start from Appleby is positive enough to produce a speed of just under the mile a minute maximum as we cross Ormside Viaduct before the first part of the climb begins.

The first section of 1 in 100 ends at Griseburn, passed just 8 minutes from the start and speed has fallen to 43 mph. The gradients begin to ease here, first to 1 in 166, then 1 in 200 and 1 in 220 with a final short level section after Crosby Garrett which is passed a little less than 11 minutes from the start. After passing through the short tunnel beyond, also on level track we cross Smardale Viaduct where the 1 in 100 gradient resumes; speed has risen to 54 mph. The 1 in 100 gradient continues with a slight easing through Kirkby Stephen; passed in $14\frac{3}{4}$ minutes at 46 mph, and through Birkett Tunnel. The section beyond the tunnel, before the gradient eases, is often the slowest part of the climb to Ais Gill and speed falls to 42 mph before the gradient changes. The easing of the gradient to 1 in 330 for almost a mile allows speed to rise to 49 mph before the final 1 in 100 gradient causes a loss of just 5 mph before the summit at Ais Gill is passed in $23\frac{3}{4}$ minutes from the start at Appleby. A really excellent performance with over 400 tons behind the tender.

4. On another southbound Cumbrian Mountain Express on 10th August 1991, after stopping for water and photographs 6201 is heard in this recording departing from Garsdale and making a fine sound accelerating its 12 coach train along the easy gradients to Rise Hill Tunnel.
5. Returning to the Cumbrian Mountain Express on the 18th July 1992; after the excellent performance on the climb to Ais Gill, the fun wasn't over. Equally good was the climb of Whalley Bank.

This recording begins as 6201 comes off Whalley Viaduct at the foot of the gradient at a little under 20 mph. Much of the climb is at 1 in 82 and once a little initial difficulty with lack of adhesion is over, 6201 produces some fine sounds and a gradual acceleration culminating in a maximum of 36 mph before the summit beyond Wilpshire is reached.

6. In 'real' steam days I am sure that 6201 would have been a regular sight working trains along the North Wales Coast and when steam returned to the route in 1989 it was most appropriate that 6201 worked the first train. This recording, however, is from a run in the following year.

During the return journey from Holyhead to Crewe on 13th October 1990 we stopped for water at Llandudno Junction and with that job done, 6201 is heard departing and sounds fine accelerating on easy gradients towards Colwyn Bay.

The North Wales Coast Route isn't noted for steep gradients but, beyond Colwyn Bay the line rises over the headland at Penmaen Rhôs, the final gradient to the tunnel being 1 in 100 and 6201 continues to be worked hard until the top of the gradient is reached just beyond the tunnel.

7. I've got hours of on-train recordings riding behind 6201 but always thought that my best one was from a railtour in 1987.

On 11th April 1987 6201, having been employed during the early part of the year on trains in the North West, worked a train from York to Shrewsbury on the way back to its home base at Hereford.



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We had Geoff Eldin, a York driver who we already knew well from the Scarborough Spa Express runs, and he was on the loco right through from York to Stalybridge. Speaking to him at York he didn't think he'd be breaking any records that day with a 13 coach train but promised to do his best for us.

After a good run to Leeds, soon after leaving we ran into difficulties. On the sharply curved, steep climb from Whitehall Jc. 6201, although rail conditions weren't particularly bad, began to slip and we eventually stalled with the locomotive just yards away from the top of the 1 in 53 gradient with easier gradients tantalisingly close!

In these circumstances we would not have been surprised to have to wait for some diesel assistance to get away from this spot but that was not Geoff's style so with some excellent enginmanship we were able to get away and continue our journey.

After that Geoff seemed even more determined to give us a good run and on the climb from Huddersfield to Standedge Tunnel he did just that.

This recording starts soon after passing through Huddersfield at reduced speed as the loco emerges from Paddock Tunnel.

The gradient here is 1 in 105 and we have a train weighing in at almost 500 tons but despite the load, the gradient and having passed through Huddersfield station at 15 mph speed rises on the climb and, for much of the ascent we are maintaining a little under 30 mph until we reach level track beyond Marsden and enter Standedge Tunnel where this recording ends.

What wonderful sounds and an excellent performance from 'Lizzie'!

