

STEAM SPECIALS STILL ATTRACT THE CROWDS

A grand series of exciting steam hauled excursion trains returned to the North Wales coastal line this season, attracting bumper crowds en route and creating nostalgic memories for a host of railway enthusiasts. *Report by Don Hale.*

THE glinting rails on part of the former 'Irish Mail' route between Chester and Holyhead have hosted several visits from veteran locomotives this year, with some built



Above Jubilee Class locomotive No 5690, *Leander*, in her striking maroon livery, is pictured at Llandudno Junction in early September with an excursion from Crewe to Holyhead. Photograph by Stéphanie Durrant.

more than six decades earlier.

With bulging passenger lists, heads leaning of windows, grinning faces, and dozens of fans watching their progress at every possible vantage point en-route, the return of the popular steam engines seems to have been welcomed by both young and old.

One of the season's first visitors was Princess Coronation class 4-6-2 No 6233, *Duchess of Sutherland*, who appeared to great acclaim, resplendent in her famous LMS maroon livery, and now fully restored to pristine condition.

The 70-year old, William Stanier built locomotive, hauled a mixed assortment of traditional and Pullman style coaches from Crewe after

taking charge of a return excursion from Ashford in Kent to Holyhead.

Her visit however, marked a surprise downturn in the weather and supporters had to brave the drizzly conditions in order to capture her progress on camera. Llandudno Junction though was packed as the thirsty loco entertained the crowds in full steam, whilst taking on water via a complicated tubing system from an outside mains source.

The 'Duchess' later brought the picturesque town of Conwy to a halt as this magnificent beast stormed across the railway bridge towards the Irish ferry port, and disappeared under the ancient castle archway amidst a thick and swirling cloud of steam.

She returned later in the day, and again, later this year, with a similar 'Thomas Brassey' special.

Another interesting visitor to the area, who also attracted extraordinary crowds, was the powerful locomotive No 71000,

Below *The Duchess of Sutherland* attracts a host of admirers at Llandudno Junction, where the thirsty engine had to stop to take on water.



Duke of Gloucester, in perfect old green livery, hauling a St Albans-Holyhead special from Crewe.

An additional visitor included Jubilee Class No 5690; whilst A4 Class, 4-6-2 No 60009, *Union of South Africa*, was scheduled to attend, but was forced to make alternative arrangements due to last minute technical problems.

Some of these working engines, together with other limited representatives are still available to visit all year round at Crewe's railway exhibition centre. ■



No 71000, *Duke of Gloucester* emerged from a steam bath at the Junction to haul a special excursion from St Albans via Crewe.