

## Restaurant Buffet No. 641

The RB has always been one of the most popular type of carriages. This extended from the LNER days, through the BR era, the latter being more commonly known as Restaurant Miniature buffet (RMB). In the preservation era, this is reflected in the fact that 55 BR-built RMBs survive, whilst there are 16 LNER-designed buffet cars extant. Their prominence in the BR era was confirmed when they were the centre-piece of a named train – the Cambridge Buffet Car Express – these often contained a LNER Gresley vehicle. It was the East Coast route which led the way in train catering when, in 1879, Pullman Car Prince of Wales with a fully equipped kitchen and with a coal fire for cooking was attached to a Leeds Express by the Great Northern Railway.

Following conversion of NER and GNR Opens to Buffet cars in 1932, an order was soon place for 'the real thing' and the first of Diagram 167 appeared in 1935. No. 641 was outshopped from York Works in 1937, being one of six allocated for use on the fast Liverpool Street-Cambridge services.

When built, No. 641 was an all-electric carriage which restricted its use to the LNER area. Nevertheless, Diagram 167 was a most versatile carriage, being used in a multitude of services, some of which had never seen regular catering vehicles previously.

In 1946, under the Thompson renumbering scheme, No. 641 became No. 9129.

In the late 1950s, it was felt that the Buffet cars needed a revamp and the order was placed for the conversion of 18 such carriages, 12 in 1958 and another six in 1959. No. 9129 was one of these, the work being undertaken at both Doncaster and York Works. Propane gas cooking was installed. Two windows were removed in the bar area when it was converted; the full width one and half width. In addition, the interior profile was altered – it is not known for what reason this was required – and gone was the rexine finish to the walls, to be replaced by ghastly plastic laminate. The tubular chromed chairs were also banished, to be replaced by wooden 'modern' ones. The clock had been well and truly turned back for the worse in the call for modernisation.



*An internal view of 9129/641 after it had arrived on the NYMR in September 1983. Note the modern chairs and dreadful laminate.*

*The completed interior – just as the carriage left Doncaster Works in 1937. Compare this view with that of how it arrived from Devon.*



Such was the suitability and versatility of these Restaurant Buffet cars that they ended up being the last LNER-designed carriages running in the BR era, No. 9135 being the last to be withdrawn in 1975.

No. 9129 managed to survive until July 14, 1973 at York Works, when official withdrawal took place. On being offered for sale from York Yard, the fortunate saviour was the Dart Valley Railway in Devon.

The Buffet was initially sent to Swindon Works where the exterior was put back to varnished teak, but still carrying its 9129 number. It wasn't proper teak panels, but teak laminate on plywood – not exactly idea for the rigours of nature! The years passed and by 1982, the carriage had become a static buffet at Paignton station on the then named Paignton & Dartmouth Steam Railway. In 1983, the carriage was put up for sale and two members of the LNERCA, David Cullingworth and Paul Denston, became the new owners. No. 9129 arrived on the NYMR in September 1983. It was not in the most healthy condition and so began a most thorough restoration from the frame upwards which has become the trademark of the LNER Coach Association. It soon reverted to its original number of 641.

Of particular note was the decision to change the internal profile back to that in which it was built and to 'unblock' the window, again to as-built condition. A set of genuine LNER tubular chromed chairs was obtained – from the Railway Institute, York – and reupholstered in the original blue 'Leatherette'. The kitchen had been re-equipped to modern hygiene standards.



*The graceful lines of RB 641 – the first fully restored Gresley carriage on the NYMR.*

The official launch of the magnificently restored Buffet Car was on September 4, 1994 when Yorkshire TV and pop mogul and enthusiast Pete Waterman were present.

To bring the story up to date, the Buffet Car has never been used to its full potential but a change in NYMR policy is to see Buffet Cars employed on each carriage set. In addition, No. 641 is the key vehicle being used in the highly successful Curry Trains and Pie & Peas specials. One final aspiration is to see the Stills boiler overhauled and installed beneath the counter for the prospect of real fresh-brewed coffee.

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**If you have enjoyed reading about this historical vehicle, you might like to find out more about the LNER Coach Association, formed in 1979 and affiliated to the NYMR. We welcome new members and provide a regularly updated website and a quarterly newsletter. For more information please call me – Murray Brown on 01733 578000 or email [murray@lnerca.org](mailto:murray@lnerca.org)**