

# Crunch time for slam-door stock

## NEWS ANALYSIS 3: OLD SCRAP

*At long last, it's goodbye to the first of the Mark Ones. Although they are more than 40 years old and may have hopeless crash-worthiness, many will lament their departure. Paul Clifton sees the scrap and pays his last respects*

**NOW HERE'S A MAN WITH REAL JOB SATISFACTION**, sitting in the cab of an enormous crane, dangling a powerful hydraulic grab handle.

He brings it crashing down through the roof of an old South Central slam-door carriage. When the grabber emerges, a huge section of roof peels off with the screaming complaint of ripping metal.

A door is plucked off its hinges and pulled free. Next, the crane wrestles with the whole side of the carriage, bending it over as easily as a child twists the ring pull on a can of fizzy drink. It bursts away in one piece.

We're witnessing the destruction of Mark One rolling stock, made redundant by the recent arrival of sufficient numbers of new Electrostars.

The demolition looks ridiculously easy. It is blindingly obvious just how flimsy these old trains are. The base is strong and rigid but the bodywork might as well be made of papier maché for all the resistance it offers.

These trains were condemned as unsafe in the Hidden Report into the Clapham rail disaster, in which 35 people died when one slam door train collided with another. The crash was in 1988, but nearly all the trains are still running. The road-going equivalent would be to see today's M3 motorway full of Ford Anglias and Bedford vans, with a few new-fangled Vauxhall Victors here and there. The Austin Allegro would not even be on the drawing board.

South Central reckons it's the first of the south coast operators to get rid of them – 20 carriages down, nearly 600 to go on this franchise alone. There are two reasons for being first – it is forging ahead with rolling stock replacement, and it has a more acute shortage of storage space than either South Eastern or South West Trains. It simply doesn't have room to park all its trains, and the old ones must go almost as fast as the new ones arrive.

So it's sending them to Immingham. Go to Doncaster, turn right, and carry on for what seems like a week across North Lincolnshire – the landscape on the south bank of the Humber is featureless at the best of times, but in midwinter fog it seems a fitting place to find a railway graveyard.

The trains are dragged to Immingham Railfreight Terminals. Some come by rail; others suffer the final indignity of arriving on the back of a lorry. First, all the fittings are stripped out. Each carriage is taken through an



airtight shed in which asbestos is carefully removed. Then it's ready for the man with the big bolt pierced through his eyebrow, a big grin on his face and an even bigger grappling handle at his command.

He single-handedly demolishes the entire superstructure in 20 minutes flat.

'From a 35 ton carriage we recover about 32 tons of metal, which is melted down for re-use by industry,' explains Tim Gooseman, the company's business development manager. 'We only have about three tons of waste.'

So how much is one of these carriages worth? His father Alistair – the company's managing director – is reluctant to speculate. But around £2,000 seems a reasonable guess. In other words, virtually worthless.

The rolling stock leasing company Porterbrook says all the old trains will be scrapped – there is no market anywhere in the world for worn out third-rail stock of this



**‘I think in the future we’ll come to look at these trains the way preserved railways look at steam trains now.’ Jim Pinder, manager of South Central’s Brighton depot**

antiquity. Only 20 carriages have been scrapped at Immingham so far. Together with a rival site at the equally unromantic Shoeburyness in Essex, it can look forward to tearing up another 1,800 carriages over the next couple of years.

The image of the old trains being ripped apart is one that will be welcomed by most commuters, enticed by the prospect of new air conditioned comfort. A Ford Focus instead of the old Anglia.

But not everyone is happy. As the pictures were shown on television, the BBC received a few dozen calls from irate passengers who insisted it was wrong to destroy them. Quite what they would do with them instead, they didn’t say.

‘I think in the future we’ll come to look at these trains the way preserved railways look at steam trains now,’ said Jim Pinder, manager of South Central’s Brighton depot, which has been home to Mark One stock for 40 years. ‘There’s a lot of affection for these. And they are amazingly reliable – they hardly ever break down.’

He’s in the middle of adapting the depot to handle the new Electrostars. ‘It’s about as big a change to our world as you can possibly imagine. The whole way we work – everything we do, every tool we use, every process we follow, is being changed. Yes, the new trains are far better, but that doesn’t make them easier.’

At the moment, the new trains are stabled alongside the old. With another one arriving every few days, that situation can’t continue for much longer.

Further west, the South West Trains stock won’t be heading to the breaker’s yard for a few months yet.

‘It’ll be some time next year, we hope,’ explained Andrew Haines, the Managing Director. ‘But we want to hang on to them for a while. We need to make sure that Network Rail has installed sufficient power in the tracks for all our new trains to run, before we start to get rid of the old ones. You could call it an insurance policy.’

In fact, by the middle of January, only 17 Desiro sets will be in passenger service. Through the spring, deliveries from Germany will reach their peak and new ones will turn up every few days.

The crushing of the old trains is a key image for the railway. It is tangible evidence of the biggest change to the experience of commuters for a generation. This is a wholly positive story, and the industry hasn’t had many of those lately.

In the re-invention of the South’s railway service (and we’re talking about almost one in two of Britain’s train passengers here) we have already seen the arrival of the first new train. That was the initial landmark. The second should have been improved performance figures, but commuters have probably given up hope of that one. Next, we have these pictures showing the beginning of the end for slam door trains. And the final key image must surely be the last slam door train to leave service.

When will that be? The SRA reckons it should happen during 2005.

But the bloke in the cab of the crane looming out of the featureless Immingham mist will have work well beyond that. He’s crunching up half a dozen carriages a week. With more than 1,750 still to go, he’s going to have his hands full.