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Back

Spotlight on Ron Price

Although I had grandparents living in Hatfield, I was born in Stoke Newington and at about the age of three my family moved to Chingford. One of my first recollections is of 1939 when I lived in Chingford and my father had an O Gauge layout in one bedroom and also an American Lionel standard gauge railway (I think it was approximately 2" gauge) in the garden. I can remember riding on a small truck with my feet on the loco. It used to pull me around the garden and I think it was 24 Volt A.C.

We were bombed out in 1940 and moved to Hatfield. In fact all three schools I attended, two in Chingford and one in Hatfield, were bombed and naturally it disrupted my education quite seriously. I remember at one time we only went to school one day a week in a big house.

In about 1946 my father joined the Hatfield Society of Model Engineers and in 1947 I started work. I got a job at the Sphere Works, which was an engineering firm in St. Albans. I was working in the machine shop on small milling machines and capstan lathes. I remember I used to go home smelling of cutting oil. I learnt a lot but never thought at the time it would be very useful in years to come. About this time my father acquired a 4" round bed Drummond lathe. Also the Hatfield Society had a model exhibition and running at the show was a 3½" Juliet built by Bert Saunders of the St. Albans Society. We were having a lot of trouble running the O Gauge layout and he said to me, "how about building a live steam loco?" Well that is how it all started for me!
We had the Model Engineer series on Juliet so Kennions was our next port of call. Drawings and all castings were purchased and work started. My father did all the fitting and I all the machining. Juliet was completed in 12 months and I remember building the boiler with 5 pint and 2 pint blowlamps. My mother never resented the fact that the 2 men in her life were always in the workshop. In fact she took an interest and encouraged us.

I gave up my job at the Sphere Works and got a job with de Havillands. This was 1948, I was a shop boy on the electrical section in the Erecting Shop working on aircraft such as Mosquito, Hornet, Dove and Vampire. After about a year in the Erecting Shop I joined the de Havilland Aeronautical Technical School as an apprentice, I wanted to be a toolmaker but at that time the section was full up. But as a second choice I chose sheet metal work. You had four days a week on the bench and one day in the classroom.

The Hatfield Society started running fetes and it was found that Juliet was not quite man enough for the job so we started thinking of another locomotive and it was decided to go for Princess Marina. In those days Dick Simmons supplied drawings and castings and the loco was built in 18 months. Marina is a very good locomotive and being very powerful ideal for fetes in those days.

After about a year I completed my course at the Tech School and was transferred to the sheet metal department. In those days it was in Welwyn Garden City due to the fact that the original sheet metal shop at Hatfield was bombed in 1940 (Hitler must have had it in for me although this time he had bombed before my arrival !) The sheet metal shop at Welwyn was building drop tanks for Mosquitos and Vampires, aluminium fuel and water tanks and a lot of pipe work. There was also a Coppersmiths Department at Welwyn in which Derek Perham's father was the superintendent.

The Dummond lathe was sold and we bought a new lathe called the Hobson from Victa Engineering in Maidenhead. The Myford ML7 came out about the same time but the Hobson had Timkin

bearings, six speed gear head and No. 3 morse taper. Now with a new lathe it was time to build another loco. This time it was to be 3½" Hielan Lassie. As we lived near the main line from Kings Cross one would often see the full size one. Lassie was built in 2½ years. It was now 1955 and Lassie was highly commended at the ME Exhibition that year.

I had by now been transferred from the Sheet Metal Department at Welwyn to the experimental sheet metal section at Hatfield. I considered this was the best department to work in since we were working on and building new aircraft. The first Comet was being built. We had the two seater Venom, a test Vampire and the DH 108. The latter was a flying wing and we as apprentices would go outside the hanger to watch flying displays with John Derry taking the 108 through the sound barrier. Geoffrey de Havilland Jr. had been killed taking a similar aircraft through the barrier over the Thames estuary.

I had completed my apprenticeship as a sheet metal worker and in the Experimental Department the next aircraft we started on was the DH 110. This was a much larger aircraft than the Vampire. It was a twin boom type but with two Rolls Royce Avon engines. We build two aircraft; one was painted silver and the other all black. The second aircraft (the black one) had all the latest modifications which the first aircraft did not have. The black 110 had been painted specially for the Farnborough Show. On the Saturday, the aircraft had engine trouble and John Derry flew back to Hatfield and took the silver 110 to Farnborough. This aircraft on that Saturday afternoon was involved in that tragic accident when a lot of people were killed as well as John Derry himself. This was a great shock and sadness to us at work since we knew him well. Both he and John Cunningham would regularly walk round as we were building aircraft and talk to us about the job.

Things were about to change for me now. I met Sylvia at a local dance class-we both enjoyed ballroom dancing-and three years later we were married. She gladly accepted my model engineering which is marvellous because not every wife is happy about such things. After 4 deferments I was called up for National Service in 1956. I went in the R.A.F. and spent my time as - guess what - a sheet metal worker at Middle Wallop in Hampshire. It was quite good though because I was the only sheet metal worker on the site. I travelled home at weekends whenever possible and developed a real respect for the Spam-Cans - they really could go! During my two years in the R.A.F. my father passed away. It was a great loss - we'd been a good team. When I left the R.A.F. I had to move the workshop from where my mother and father lived in Hatfield to the house we now live in.

At the time I came out of the R.A.F., Martin Evans started the series in the Model Engineer on a 3½" 2-6-4 Tank-Jubliee. I had been looking for a new locomotive and I liked the 2-6-4 Tank so I decided to have a go. As I had other locomotives to run I could take my time in building it. I started to put detail onto the loco which Martin Evans hadn't included and I was pleased with the results. It was a taste of what I would concentrate much effort on in later models. I also became a member of the N.L.S.M.E. It was 1959.

I think it was at this time the North London lost its track at Arkley. I remember trying to salvage the rail and the concrete beams for use at a later date. After a while the Water Company offered us the site at Colney Heath. I was Section Leader at the time and on 28th May 1962, with Edd Hobday met Mr Shaw and Mr Boyd of the Water Company at Colney Heath to put forward the plans for the railway at the site. I led the team which built the first (shorter) track at Colney Heath. The brass plate by the traverser gives the names of the people involved. The first working party was on Sunday 17th June 1962. The shorter track was complete and the last section welded on Saturday 11th April 1964 and the very first run was with my Princess Marina at 6.30pm on that date. The site with workshop and station building were all completed by 1965. The extension was built later. My Jubliee tank locomotive was complete and with several other locomotives took part in the grand opening of the track by Mr Stace of the Water Company.

Two members, Geoff Wren and John Sumpter decided to build a Speedy and on a visit to Reeves

they asked me if I would like to build a Speedy too, but I said I would build Pansy. So I did and it was my one and only 5" gauge locomotive.

After I finished Pansy a lot of people asked the question, "what will be your next loco?" A member whose name I can't remember suggested an A4. I always liked the A4 but I knew it would be a long job. A friend offered to make the name plates, works plate, also the record crest and in due course the plates arrived. After that I had to build an A4 and I built it round these plates! I wrote to Clarkson of York for drawings and castings but when I looked at the drawings a lot of dimensions were missing so I wrote to B.R. for full size drawings of engine and tender (G.A. only). They cost 10/6 (50p) each. Having the full size G.A., work was started on re-drawing and cutting metal.

The A4 marked a turning point in my model engineering really because I had to get further information to make a good job of it. Once you start down this road, that is building the first parts to works drawings incorporating the same features, to scale, as the big engine has, you feel you have to continue to the same standard. And so it was that the A4 came to incorporate everything the big loco had, including such details as steam sanders, vacuum brake and water scoop.

I was still working of course, but the company changed its name to Hawker Siddley. I came off the Sheet Metal Bench to take up a new position with the Production Engineering Team. This job was working on the shop floor and involved liaison with the design office.

The A4 was going along quite well. The frames had been assembled, also the front bogie. It was being built as per full size. The expansion link brackets had ball races, also part of the two to one gear and the return crank. It also has the correct Kylchap exhaust system. The casing is 24 swg copper beaten up (sheet metal term) to give the correct shape and silver soldered. I must say a lot of detail was obtained from photographs taken by Geoff Cashmore when the full size locomotive was stripped down in Doncaster works and at a B.R. Exhibition at Marylebone. The loco and tender took 14 years to construct. It was entered in the competition section at the M.E. but "nuff sed".

By this time we had our son Graham who spent a great deal of his childhood with locomotives and of course at Colney Heath. Although he is interested in locomotives and has driven them all, he developed his own passion at about 16 for cycles and cycle racing which he still enjoys. (Incidentally, he has won far more cups than I have!). He carried on the tradition of engineering and served his apprenticeship at British Aerospace later moving on to Monach Airlines at Luton. He is married to Amanda and they have an 18 month old son, Oliver

After the A4 and being an L.N.E.R. type I had a liking for the small N2 Tank Locomotive. One of our members had quite a lot of detailed photos and another member had the full size works G.A. Once again it was back to the drawing board. The frames were cut out and in the rear pony wheel position the frames are joggled. To put this set in the frames I had to make up a joggling tool. This could not be done in a bench vice so it had to be done under a fly press. It is not an easy job joggling 1/8" steel plate. The wheels came from Reeves, I think they were for a 3½" Green King loco they had the castings for. The cylinders were from Molly and the valve gear is Stephenson copied from full size, I think it is a very nice little locomotive - not too heavy to lift around. Well the N2 was finished and I now took early retirement from what was by now British Aerospace after reaching the position of Deputy Chief Production Engineer in 43 years.

At one of our open days at Colney Heath, I ran into Ken Edge from the Peterborough Society and he asked me what I was going to build next. I said I did not know and he then suggested No. 10000. I asked about drawings. He said he had all the numbers as he would like to build it in 5" gauge but I think the casing put him off. I wrote to York for the G.A. drawings, I think they cost about £22 - a lot dearer than the A4. This locomotive being a four cylinder compound had two high pressure and two low pressure cylinders, also with a high pressure boiler. Quite a challenge I thought!

Again, it was back to the drawing board. I find if you are going to build a locomotive from full size, you must draw it out first, as in a lot of cases things do not always fit. A working mock up was made of the valve gear. The boiler was drawn up similar to the one on the A4. To build a scaled down full size high pressure water tube boiler would mean in excess of 1000 silver soldered joints which I did not think very practical. The locomotive being a 4-6-4 (or as some people think it should be, a 4-6-2-2), meant the wheel castings were standard A3 or A4 size and the bogie wheels were also A4. The casting for the wheels and cylinders came from Dave Goodwin but for the inside cylinders I had to make my own patterns and Norman Spink cast them for me.

The casing once again is 24 swg copper sheet and is formed up to represent the shape of the high pressure boiler. The locomotive has the Kylchap double chimney which had been fitted in its last year of service. I must mention the compound operation. It is worked by a lever on the boiler backhead. A shaft goes through a hollow stay which in turn operates a type of two way piston valve in the smoke box. When the lever is pulled out, steam is admitted to the low pressure (L.P.) outside cylinders. Once the locomotive is underway, the lever is then pushed in and the steam in the valve to the L.P. cylinders is shut off and the other port is opened and steam is admitted to the high pressure inside cylinders. The exhaust from the H.P. cylinders is fed into the L.P. outside cylinders thus giving compound working.

The tender is fitted with a corridor which the original had. The loco and tender was finished in a battleship grey as the locomotive was part built at Yarrow and Co., the Clyde ship builders. My locomotive carries the name "British Enterprise". The plates were cast for the full size loco but never carried. No. 10000 steams well and has a working pressure of 100 PSI, but as a compound I do not think it has the same power or the punch of the A4, but as I said it was a very interesting job, a challenge and very satisfying.

Building locos from works drawings of course takes more time than building from published model engineering drawings. I have been asked how much extra time is involved. Roughly speaking I'd say about 1/3 of the time required to build in such a way is spent on research and 2/3 on the actual building.

I think in order to build locomotives, or any other model for that matter, one should be a member of a club because when I was building the A4, I was looking for information on certain items and quite a few members came up with the answers. To name two: Geoff Cashmore and Pete Townend (who was Shed Master at Kings Cross and a one time member of our Society) were a great source of information. When I had finished No. 10000 I thought I might have a go at a boat. Well I built a small radio controlled tug. Although it was quite good fun I would rather work in metal than plastic.

My next project I am still thinking about. I would like to build an A1, but I have built three large 3½" gauge locomotives and three eight wheel tenders so it might end up with an 0-6-0 Tank Locomotive, which would be much lighter to lift around. We will have to wait and see.

Top

Ron Price