

RAILMOTOR

The steam engine that rewrote railway history

Robin Jones

March 2011 saw the reappearance of a 'fossil' steam locomotive, rebuilt in all its original 1908 glory, which has now rewritten the history books. Great Western Railway steam railmotor No. 93 is now arguably one of our greatest steam era survivors. Comprising a steam locomotive built into a carriage fitted with driving cabs at either end, it marks the true beginning of the modern railway network as we know it. Today's railway passenger services are mostly comprised of railcars and multiple units, which are not hauled by a separate locomotive but are self-propelled. All of them can trace their ancestry back to the steam railmotor concept.

Only one steam railmotor operates in Britain today. GWR No. 93 survived withdrawal in 1934 by being converted into a coach, and later an office, before it was acquired for preservation by the Great Western Society at Didcot Railway Centre more than 40 years ago. A truly astonishing story of re-birth saw it restored to a gleaming example of Edwardian magnificence, right down to the last detail, both inside and out. Furthermore, a matching trailer was sourced and restored to run with the railmotor, accurately reflecting a type of train regularly seen in service in Britain a century ago but which has all but been forgotten by time.

The book also covers a now-unique vehicle which reflects the very next stage in railway evolution, North Eastern Railway petrol-electric railcar No. 3170 built in 1903. It is the sole surviving example of the world's first train to be powered by a petrol-electric engine, and is therefore of immense historical importance. It is now being rebuilt to original condition by acclaimed carriage restorer Stephen Middleton at the Embsay & Bolton Abbey Steam Railway in Yorkshire backed by the Heritage Lottery Fund, and once operational in 2012, will provide a perfect northern counterpart to the steam railmotor.

Together, they form the missing link in the real story of how our railways developed. Backed by a wealth of both archive and modern-day pictures, this unique and ground-breaking book reshapes the way we look at the history of passenger rail transport.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A graduate of the University of Central England, Robin Jones, founding editor of *Heritage Railway* magazine, was a news editor and chief investigative reporter at the *Birmingham Evening Mail*, and over the years has produced several books and special publications, along with historical features for numerous other newspapers and periodicals.

He has been interested in railways from a very early age, when his elder brother Stewart took him trainspotting at Widney Manor station in Solihull at the age of four, at the end of the British Railways steam era.

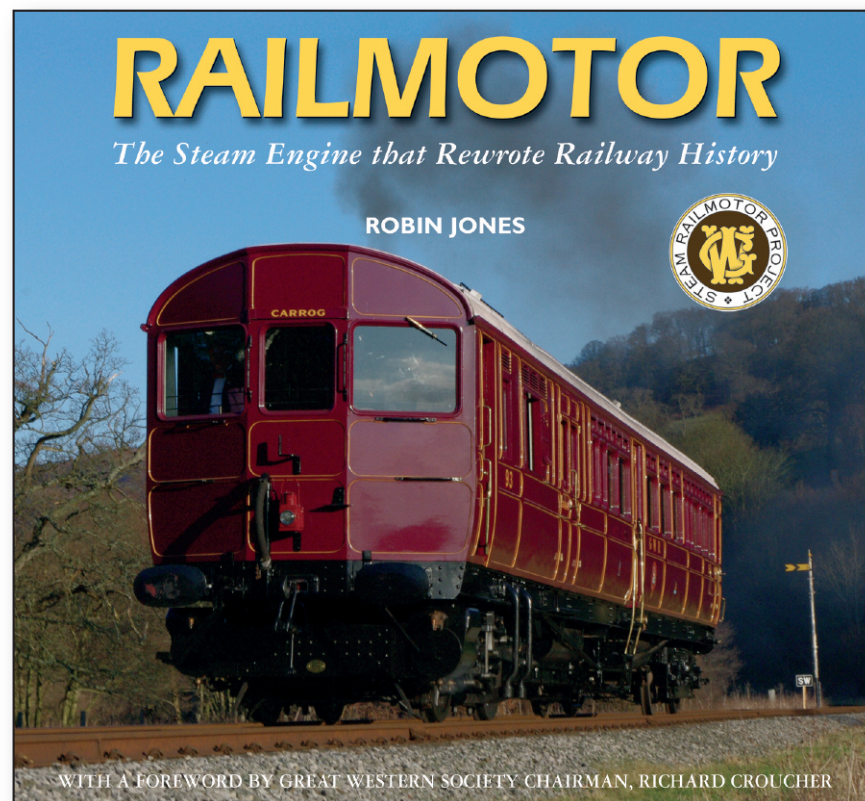
Also by Robin Jones:
Steam's New Dawn
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RAILMOTOR

THE STEAM ENGINE THAT REWROTE RAILWAY HISTORY



Above: Would we dare have plush moquette like this on seats in a suburban train of the twenty-first century? *ROBIN JONES*

Right: The evolution continues: GWR railcar No. 22 alongside British Railways Class 121 'bubblecar' No.55034 at Didcot. *FRANK DUMBLETON*



Britain's greatest two-hall locomotive project came together for the first time at the steam railway's Didcot Railway Centre home on 17 June 2011, when No. 93 lined up alongside the 63 million PageOne A1 Pacific No. 69001. www.pageone.co.uk



Above: No. 93 meets the Llangollen Railway's award-winning restored 1958-built Wickham two-car DMU No.56171, one of the first generation DMU types produced by private companies and a direct descendant. *ROBIN JONES*



CHAPTER ONE THE STEAM ENGINE THAT REWROTE RAILWAY HISTORY

DURING MY CAREER as a railway magazine editor, there is precious little that has come my way that has not been written about before. The railway sector ranks as one of the biggest subjects by far as far as popular history is concerned, and in the ever-rising mountains of books on the subject, there are so many mainstream areas that have been covered time and time again that these rarely cannot be anything new to say about them, other to empty old wine into new bottles.

Once in a lifetime, however, emerges a topic that is truly different from the rest. In most cases, it is often the restoration of an obscure industrial locomotive, maybe the rediscovery of the remains of a long-lost early railway, or perhaps some archive documents which throw fresh light on the dawn of steam.

Yet what happens when a largely-unknown form of traction, not a model or miniature



Restored GWR steam railmotor No. 93 in an engine room after dark at Llangollen, 24 March 2011. The Chiltern Railway head north the early steam railway service in the Broad valley. www.chilternrailway.co.uk

Example of a double-page spread.



GWR 517 class 04-2T No. 1157 at Box on the daily working to Calne, about 1907. *THE LATE PAUL STRONG COLLECTION*



The picture that underlines the huge heritage and educational importance of GWR steam railmotor No. 93: six generations and 100 years of development of drive-from-each-end trains are lined up at Didcot on 28 May 2011: left to right are No. 93, built in 1908; an auto-train comprising 1444 class locomotive No. 4866 and auto-trailer which replaced the railmotors by the 1930s; an example of their successors, GWR diesel railcar No. 22 of 1940; a Chiltern Railways Class 121 'bubblecar' of 1960; a First Great Western Class 166 Turbo-train of the 1990s, and a new Class 172 for Chiltern Railways, delivered just two days before and yet to carry a passenger. *FRANK DUMBLETON*