

ANOTHER RUNAWAY TRAIN

Friday 13 August turned out to be an unlucky day for the Northern Line, which had an engineers' train run away at the build up to the morning peak. This resulted in an investigation being launched by the Railway Accident Investigation Branch (RAIB), as well as LU instigating its own investigations and enquiries.

This is not the first time that a train has runaway in recent years on the Underground. In the early hours of 19 February 1984, a Bakerloo Line train stabled overnight in the southbound platform at Queen's Park ran away and ended up at Regent's Park, once the line had levelled out and the momentum of the train had stopped. In this instance the problem was caused by insufficient handbrakes being applied (two out of four) and one of those two that were applied was defective. A rail anchor was correctly applied, but this snapped with the weight of the train on the downhill gradient. (See *Underground News* No.268, April 1984).

A more serious runaway occurred on 16 May 1990 when a tamping machine (on loan to LU) was working south of Chorleywood station in non-traffic hours. Its 'protection' wagon in Chorleywood station was incorrectly stabled and ran away on down gradient, colliding with the working tamping machine, which resulted in four fatalities. (See *Underground News* No.343, July 1990 and No.345 September 1990).

The third instance was when a train ran away backwards from Belsize Park on 8 July 2000. The driver had fallen asleep at his controls and the train ran backwards, only stopping when being tripped on a signal at Chalk Farm. (See *Underground News* No.465, September 2000 and No.470, February 2001).

During the night of 12/13 August 2010, a diesel-powered Rail Grinding train owned by Schweerbau in Germany was working on the southbound Northern Line between Highgate and Archway. It is believed that the machine was the same one that disgraced itself on the Jubilee Line at West Hampstead on Saturday 17 July 2010, which had to be dragged back to Neasden depot, damaging some trainstops on the way (see *Underground News* No.585, September 2010, page 532).

On this occasion, an electrical defect was reported just after 04.00 with engineers and operating officials being summoned – the crew found they were unable to restart its engine to leave the work site. It was noted that there were no other engineers' trains on the Northern Line that night which had battery locomotives, which could have been commandeered to rescue the Rail Grinder. Because of that, it was decided to use an empty train of 1995 Tube Stock from Highgate depot, run it to site, and pull the train back to Highgate out of the way using an emergency coupling adaptor.

By 05.35, the assisting train had reached Highgate southbound to pick up LU's Emergency Response Unit (ERU) team and then moved forward to attend to the Rail Grinder. The braking system of the rail grinding unit was de-activated to allow it to be towed and once coupling up had taken place, the intention was to pull the offending train in the wrong direction (northbound on the southbound line) to north of East Finchley and then stable it in Highgate depot. In the meantime, the plan was to reverse the service north to south at Archway which indeed commenced from 06.20.

Shortly after 06.30 the 1995 Stock train began to pull the Rail Grinder north. Just after 06.40, after passing through Highgate station heading north on the southbound line, the coupling bar (which was later found on the track) between the 1995 Stock and the Rail Grinder gave way. The former stopped but the Rail Grinder began to roll away southbound on the down-hill gradient, the Operators of the Rail Grinder decamping onto Highgate platform as it passed through. In its way was a southbound train in the platform at Archway about to depart. Realising what was happening in the control centre, the Train Operator was told to proceed immediately and run non-stop – it stopped to detrain at Moorgate. Once the train had cleared Camden Town, the route was set for the Rail Grinder to proceed via the Charing Cross branch, which had been cleared of trains on the southbound. Moreover, the points at Mornington Crescent had been reversed, with the hope of reducing its speed, which it may or may not have done. However, the Rail Grinder continued through Mornington Crescent, having 'run through' and damaged the points in the process. It arrived in the

southbound platform at Warren Street just before 07.00 and then rolled back into the tunnel and stopped where the line was on the level.

Because the points at Mornington Crescent had been damaged by the Rail Grinder, the northbound service via Charing Cross was suspended too, with six trains being held in platforms (at Mornington Crescent, Euston, Goodge Street, Charing Cross, Embankment and Waterloo) – no passenger trains were stalled between stations. It goes without saying that the RAIB soon became involved, not only with the Rail Grinder but with the assisting train as well, the latter remaining north of Highgate on the southbound line. At this time the Northern Line was suspended on the Charing Cross branch entirely and between Archway and Finchley Central with a reduced ‘special service’ in operation over other sections, the service between Camden Town and Archway having been restored at 08.00.

By 09.40, two ‘rescue’ battery locomotives (for the Rail Grinder) had been organised and departed Ruislip depot, arriving in King’s Cross loop at 10.45. For these to access the Rail Grinder, the three empty trains in platforms north of Charing Cross would have to be moved out of the way and in turn they were moved ‘wrong line’ to Charing Cross and across the crossover to the southbound line and thence to Morden depot. This operation began at 10.55 and the three trains had been cleared by 11.40. The three trains in northbound platforms at Charing Cross, Embankment and Waterloo were then moved to Morden, being able to shunt north to south normally at Charing Cross. The battery locomotives in the meanwhile moved southbound from Euston (City) to Kennington siding, thence to Charing Cross. They then crossed over and moved northbound on the southbound line to Warren Street under a ‘wrong direction move’.

The ‘rescue’ 1995 Stock train north of Highgate was moved to Golders Green depot via Euston and King’s Cross loops, arriving in depot at 13.25. This enabled through services to be resumed between Archway and Finchley Central from about 13.00. With the battery locomotives at Warren Street it was decided to split the formation so that there would be a locomotive at both ends of the Rail Grinder. The south end locomotive then ran to Charing Cross (reverse), Mornington Crescent (reverse over previously run through points) being in position at the north end of the Rail Grinder by 15.40. At 16.30 the Rail Grinder, with a battery locomotive at each end was moved cautiously to Kennington siding, where it was eventually stabled at 17.55. In the meantime and in readiness for service resumption, the points at Mornington Crescent were secured for through running.

At 18.00, services via the Charing Cross branch resumed and for the evening peak, a special 59-train service was operated.

As with all such serious incidents, some media reporting can often be regarded as ‘sensationalist’ although we should not forget the seriousness of the incident. For example, the Mirror said, following its “COMMUTER TERROR AT RUNAWAY TUBE TRAIN” headline, “.... A runaway Tube train brought terror to rush-hour commuters yesterday as it *hurtled* out of control across one of the network’s busiest sections. The unmanned maintenance loco *bolted* through SIX stations – nearly smashing into a packed passenger train ahead Tom Redfern had just *climbed* on to a Northern Line train at Archway ... when the early morning drama unfolded. He feared he and other commuters would die as their driver went *at breakneck speed* to avoid being hit by the runaway behind the driver came on the Tannoy and said, ‘There is an emergency. Will everyone move towards the front of the train’. There was a ripple of panic We went at full speed. We knew the situation was dangerous because we were going fast. Even by the driver’s voice we could tell it was serious. They raced through the next seven stations, with the out-of-control loco right behind them, stopping only at the eighth, Moorgate.

The SCOTTISH DAILY RECORD said “.....it came uncoupled and *thundered off* down the track”.

Anorak.co.uk said on its website –

“The other trains in its path were cleared out of the way as the *jet-train* from Archway to Warren Street did what passengers aboard the Misery Line dream of – it went fast?

(There seems little doubt that, without unconventional action in getting the southbound train at Archway to “go, go, go” and the Buster-Keaton-esque change of the points at Camden Town behind it, a violent contact could well have occurred. Also, of course, that there were no other trains close in front of this train to delay its progress in getting out of the way).