

## Unpublished Letter from Angus Eickhoff to Steam Railway

relating to David Wardale's two-part article "[Steaming into the Future](#)" - SR 272 June 2000 and 273 July 2002

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Dear Tony Streeter

With regard to Chris Newman's letter (SW 279), it was precisely because the 5AT does seem to be the Last Great Hope for steam that I felt I had to write in and comment in the first place.

My words reflect a viewpoint that this indeed being the case, everything possible should be done to produce a machine which would compare with "modern" traction and demonstrate the full capabilities of steam power. Reading between the lines of the 5AT proposal, I worried there was a hint of a very limited budget being available and so leading to limited goals for the machine.

This is not a case of "missing the point", neither is it quixotic, as Mr Wardale has suggested. As I write we have the prospect of horribly beweaponed war being unleashed in the Middle East for reasons seen by many for protection of Western oil interests by a political leader whom many also see as an oil industry puppet. Surely it is hardly quixotic to develop alternative traction in our troubled times and whilst the engine does not really push the boundaries out far enough, it is in no way fanciful to suggest that it will perform as intended, as some have doubted. The original LMS Black 5 has been recorded at 1800 dbhp, although only for about 6 minutes, (Railway World, Feb 1973; "Stanier 4-6-0s at Work", Powell, Ian Allan 1983) so 2500 dbhp doesn't seem an outlandish goal at all. That being said, I'm sure Railtrack (or whatever they are going to be called this year!) will want it tested, to find out how it behaves out on the line, before they allow it to be it loose at 100 mph.

It is clear from the outline of the machine that it is not intended as a "heritage engine lookalike". It does not offer a helping of nostalgia for lost youth (or whatever) to those who give up their beer money to pay for its construction so it will have to exist in a much more harsh economic environment. This suggests that commercial sponsors and investors will be involved. The material on the 5AT website ([www.5at.co.uk](http://www.5at.co.uk)) includes articles from some well respected journals ("The Economist" comes particularly to mind) and it is possible that there would be support available from that part of the commercial sector concerned with developing alternative traction. These people would of course be most the interested in demanding improved thermal efficiency and power output.

Of course there will be supporters from the enthusiast world as well. That David Wardale's book has had something like three print runs and that Adam Harris of Camden Books has published Chapelon's "Locomotive a Vapeur" in English means that there must be some supporters out there for advancing steam! They cannot all be sitting in their armchairs dreaming. They are more likely to reach for their chequebooks if they can be persuaded that at long last, Dr Diesel's horrible creations are going to get the thrashing they most assuredly deserve! (Oh yes they do!) Hence my thinking about compound expansion and other "blobs and gadgets". Indeed I was very surprised at David Wardale's attitude to compounds in his letter, the more so after what he has written in his own book! (pp 492,493) Moreover, Porta, his own mentor is a compound man through and through, whose most recent design is for 3 cylinder compound shunting locomotives, burning biomass!

So having built the 5AT, how should it earn its living? Surely not just by hauling the odd charter train at weekends or whatever. Locomotives are very expensive to build and lacking the nostalgia element, this one will be expected to produce some return on the investment for will major backers put up the money otherwise? This suggests that to earn its keep, it will have to work almost every day, which in turn suggests some kind of regular service and to balance the workings, surely it would be more sensible to build two! Of course the operation would be more profitable if it were self contained so why not set up a steam TOC! Such an outfit would have to be very innovative in the way it did business - something like the way that the fledgling Orange 'phone company shook up the mobile 'phone market when it bust upon the scene.

A steam TOC? Regular services? Am I just a crazy dreamer? Possibly I am, though presumably so also were the A1 builders, the 71000 group, the 1264 group, the Welsh Highland and many others throughout the history of latter day steam right back to the original Talylyn rescuers . I can even remember a time when none other than the Severn Valley was regarded as a lame duck because it might have to build a bridge over a road! All of these are now highly respected operations. It is clear that provided the will and organisation is there, the most astonishing dreams can be realised. There are now more engines in steam every week than in 1968 and the charter train business has grown considerably over the last 20 years. To have commercial steam again in some form seems like the next logical step really.

Everything I have written about this engine is about pushing the boundaries, pushing them a little bit further so as to make progress with new ideas. As a completely new locomotive in a 21st century world its going to have to present itself in a new and innovative kind of way if it is to be successful. Everything about it has to be considered, not just the engineering and so its very important to have some kind of debate, throwing lots of ideas into the ring. In the meantime lets offer our support to David Wardale and this new engine and go out and get the money to build it.

Yours sincerely,

Angus Eickhoff