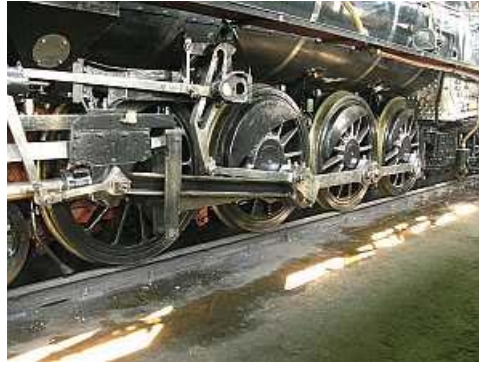


Introduction :

There's that old cliché that sometimes we have to just stop and smell the roses, or in our case, the coal smoke. It is hard work being involved in a steam locomotive preservation group - and one has to work hard if one is to keep the group financially solvent, the coaches running full, safety rules complied to, operations kept fully legal and the locomotives themselves kept running reliably and efficiently. Sometimes our locomotives seem to burn as much money as they do coal. And the club has to wrestle with regulator maintenance, surprise jobs and juggling the ever popular 3-year boiler inspection and certification so we always have several roadworthy locomotives from which to choose. Then there's the unseen marketing work, the administration, book keeping, training, safety updates and the necessity to keep working with the structures of a sometimes reluctant national goods carrier upon which we are only a guest. In amongst that hard work - the footplate staff, the workshop teams, the coaching crews and the administration teams and marketing people probably all forget at times the beauty of what we are trying to preserve.

I was poking around the newly cleaned Class 15CA just as the fire was being prepared for lighting - the rhythmic scrape and ringing clank of Andreas's shovel clearly audible from the front of the engine. The locomotive smelt of fresh paint - as the tender frames, bogies and the smokebox ring have been repainted. But I noticed that the inset web of the connecting rods were painted black too - and I couldn't even remember whether this was a new Attie de Necker cosmetic initiative or whether it was an existing painted-in detail.



It made me stand back and look at the locomotive in her 14 wheeled entirety. It's about time we see some locomotives as well as tubes, pistons, valves, hard hats and grinder sparks. I thought I'd share some pictures with you about what steam preservation is at - even on a single steam engine doing humble shunting work and being prepared for service in the unglamorous surroundings of an old steam loco depot.



FP01 - Connected to three coaches and drawing off the air in the train vacuum brake lines, a clean Class 15CA No.2056 "Dorothy" looks good as she sizzles gently to herself in a rare calm moment on this blustery dusty highveld day!



FP02 - Hard to believe this rusty wreck is of the same series and class as our well loved "Dorothy". This locomotive was officially set aside for preservation but was never taken into a place of safety. Some scrap metal bandits sealed its fate but cutting the frames away (with a hacksaw!) and extracting the valuable axle bearings for sale as scrap.



FP03 - The locomotive takes the points into the covenor tracks just past the old forge house. This photo is taken from halfway up the diesel tank steps. That fellow on the front steps is 71 years old, ex railways and is today's shunter. The two young men in the cab are 29 and 27 years old, neither of whom ever worked for the railways. Reefsteamers is preserving the skills to go with the locomotives.

FP04 - Rolling back on the first shunting move of the day, the newly fired bed of coal still smoking a bit. This picture represents a YOUNG steam lover's triumph. Andreas Mathee, a new training fireman, started firing this engine 2 hours late because of leaking fusible plugs, and without undue stress to the boiler, he managed to get the engine in steam in time for the afternoon shunt.



FP05 - The shed, the loco and the water tower. Don't those polished stainless steel sheathed cylinders look great?



FP06 - Rear view for a change. That buffer beam is a brighter, cleaner red than the end-of-train marker.



FP07 - Running under a clean stack, Dorothy trundles over the new pedestrian walkway on her way to the coaling stage. That's Attie de Necker on the right buffer beam (left in the pic) and Lex Wehmeyer who was to take his first official trip as train manager on the following day.



FP08 - Back from coaling, our Class 15CA, currently the only example running in South Africa, glints in the lowering sunlight as Dawie Viljoen knocks off from a day of working astride the boiler of the Class 12AR.



FP09 - The lack of water hoses coupled to tomorrow's "water canteen" is suspicious. Yours truly, as loco minder for this evening, is just about to climb on board the tanker and check. (For the record, the tanker was full, after all.)



FP10 - The new formal clubhouse catches the last light as the yard empties for the day. Club members prepare to go out to a restaurant for the night, Andrew King continues assembling and installing diesel shunter pistons and Lee Gates prepares the engine for the night's loco minding. Tonight, the Reefsteamers yard doesn't sleep.



FP11 - Sizzling on through the night. It's 1am on Sunday morning and boiler pressure is stable at 950kPA with a drowsing, banked fire. An issue with this locomotive is the slightly leaky regulator which means that you can't really "button up" the boiler for the night. A refreshing cold front has just passed, with an excitingly blustery wind and I've just had a representative of the overnight caboose gang shamelessly begging for my chocolate.



FP12 - Its nearly 5am and this marvellous creature of living steel has just coupled up to the waiting train. It's worth being up all night to be able to see and absorb such a sight.



FP13 - The waiting train has also woken up, the diesel generator plant starting well on this chilly morning. There were more than a dozen people, including the 6 footplate crew, manning the train today all of whom are volunteers and wouldn't leave for home until about 7:30 that Sunday night.



FP14 - A turret valve's universal jointed shaft has jammed up. Dawie (Trainee - left) and Andre (Fireman) free up the shaft and adjust it to make sure that it won't jam on the trip. (You can't mount the cab roof under electric wires!)



FP15 - The locomotive waves her own golden banner. Even a thin stack discharge takes on its own life when backlit at night.



FP16 - Less than 2 minutes to departure. Pushing the train out the yard and backwards along the main line is characteristic of a Boksburg East start as there are no turning facilities there. After a short haul to Boksburg, running tender first, the loco will run around to the front of the train, and will be facing the right way for the westbound run to Magaliesburg.