



steamsounds Riding behind steam The A4s

In the 1930's railway companies were becoming concerned with speed. Increased competition from road and air for longer journeys was responsible for this and, along with other UK companies, the LNER's Chief Mechanical Engineer, Nigel Gresley set about producing an express passenger loco designed for high speed running.

The first of this design, the A4 Pacific, emerged from Doncaster Works in September 1935 and these locos quickly proved themselves capable of attaining high speeds. Indeed, in 1938 one member of the class, 4468 *Mallard* achieved a world record high speed for a steam locomotive.

With their reputation for fast running and streamlined design they soon became popular with railway enthusiasts for both performance and appearance and, as trainspotters in the 60s, we always called them Streaks.

I can still remember the excitement of copping my first Streak. That was at York so let's start this CD with a recording of that self same A4 departing from York...

1. During the summer of 2007 the Scarborough Spa Express which had started running once again on the old, proper, route taking in the morning and evening circles passing through Leeds and Harrogate and I was very happy to have a few opportunities to ride.

Among the pool of locos booked to work these trains was the ex LNER A4 Pacific 60009 *Union of South Africa*, the very same A4 that was the first of the class that I saw and in this recording we hear it departing from York ready for a good run around the evening circle.

2. The A4s saw out the end of their career in Scotland working the 3 hour expresses between Glasgow and Aberdeen. Pocket money didn't run to trips that far north so I didn't get to ride behind an A4 in Scotland until the 1980s.

This recording was made in the November of 1992 when *Union of South Africa* worked a charter south from Aberdeen and, as it starts we are passing through Montrose and are soon on the 1 in 88 climb beyond. The gradient continues for a mile or so before easing slightly at Usan but there is more climbing to do before 60009 reaches the summit.

3. My first steam hauled ride in Scotland was in 1983 when 60009 worked a train from Edinburgh to Aberdeen and back. I particularly recall that it was a long day as the train started in Newcastle diesel hauled and, by the time I returned to my bed in Leeds having started from there in the early hours of the previous day, well over 24 hours had passed; it was worth it though!

In this recording made near the end of the return journey 60009 is heard passing Inverkeithing. Beyond is the steep climb onto the Forth Bridge and the A4 makes some fine sounds during the ascent.

By this time it was dark and the rain of cinders from the chimney had to be seen to be believed. It is just as well that there are no thatched roofs in North Queensferry!



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- Perhaps the most famous A4 is the record breaking 4468 'Mallard' and this iconic loco returned to the main line after being overhauled by the National Railway Museum. The loco's first public main line outing was on 9th July 1986 when it worked a train from York to Scarborough and back. This train returned to York via the rather more interesting route via Bridlington, Beverley & Selby and during the return journey, with York driver Harry Wilson in charge, *Mallard*, after slowing at Hunmanby to join the single line section to Bridlington makes a fine sound climbing the 1 in 112 gradient beyond.
- In 1988 *Mallard* celebrated the 50th Anniversary of that record 126 mph run with a further programme of main line trips.
On 16th July we had a run with the loco over the Settle - Carlisle line and before our run over the Long Drag, 4468 took water from a road tanker at Gargrave.
With this operation completed, in this recording 4468 is heard departing and climbing the gradient to the summit at milepost 229½.
Driven hard the A4 did well and speed was maintained in the low 50s throughout most of the climb.
- A couple of weeks later on 30th July 1988 *Mallard* was out again this time working a from York to Manchester and back. The outward route was via Sheffield and the Hope Valley and in this recording the A4, with 13 coaches behind the tender, is heard departing from Sheffield and making a fine sound climbing the 1 in 100 gradient to Totley Tunnel.
- When steam first returned to the main line in the 1970's only a very few routes were passed for steam and while we might dream of getting hauled by an A4 on their old stamping ground; the East Coast Main Line, such things were mere fantasy. However, on 11th June 1995 there we were being steam hauled all the way from Newcastle to London Kings Cross behind 60007 *Sir Nigel Gresley*; dreams can come true you see.
Performance was excellent with 60007 running at above 70 mph much of the time. I indeed we covered the 44.1 miles from Darlington to York, start to stop in a few seconds over 44 minutes and we must have presented a spectacular sight passing through the middle road at Doncaster at 75 mph!
After stopping at Retford for water, Sunday engineering work caused a number of stops and slow running until we were south of Newark where performance returned to the standard that we had become accustomed as you can hear in this recording which begins passing Grantham as the A4 begins to climb the 1 in 200 gradient beyond and ends as the train enters Stoke Tunnel at the top of the climb.
- Beyond Stoke Summit we were on the long descent towards Peterborough where, 57 years previously, classmate 'Mallard' had set the record for high speed steam so it was quite fitting that the highest speed of the day with 60007 occurred.
While our speed was some 40 mph slower than that recorded by *Mallard* who would have thought that in 1995 I would have been able to record an A4 at speed passing Little Bytham!
- In 'real' steam days A4s rarely ventured off the Eastern, North Eastern and Scottish Regions. That hasn't been the case in preservation and in 1986 *Sir Nigel Gresley*, then



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carrying the number 4498, was employed working trains between Salisbury and Yeovil Jc. In this recording, after a photo stop, 4498 is heard making a fine sound departing from Templecombe heading for Yeovil.

10. A4s have been regular performers over the Settle - Carlisle line and on 31st July 1993 *Sir Nigel Gresley* worked a southbound Cumbrian Mountain Express from Carlisle to Bradford.

Around this time it seemed that almost every southbound train on this route set some kind of record for the climb to Ais Gill and this one was no exception.

With Carlisle driver Jack Eden in charge we managed to reach Ais Gill summit in just 20 minutes and 26 seconds after departing from Appleby.

This track records the complete run from the start at Appleby to passing Ais Gill summit.

Speeds were 64 mph at Ormside (4 minutes 25 seconds from the start), 55 at Grisburn (7:18), 64 again at Crosby Garrett (9:42), 58 at Kirkby Stephen (12:49). The minimum speed after Birkett Tunnel was 50 mph. This recovered to 55 mph across the easier gradients at Mallerstang (16:33) and Ais Gill was passed at 53 mph. The load was 10 coaches.

A fine performance with which to round off this CD.

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1. 60009 departing from York.
2. 60009 from passing Montrose to the summit beyond Usan Box.
3. 60009 climbing from Inverkeithing onto the Forth Bridge.
4. 4468 departing from Hunmanby to near Speeton.
5. 4468 departing from Gargrave and climbing to the summit at MP 229 $\frac{3}{4}$.
6. 4468 departing from Sheffield to Totley Tunnel.
7. 60007 passing Grantham and climbing to Stoke Summit.
8. 60007 passing Little Bytham at speed.
9. 4498 departing from Templecombe.
10. 4498 departing from Appleby to passing Ais Gill.