

Auckland to Wellington In Less than 9½ Hours!

By T. A. McGavin

THE fastest journey ever made by rail between Auckland and Wellington was accomplished on 28 January 1967 when a double-bogie diesel railcar chartered by Mr J. A. Murphy for a group of railway enthusiasts covered the 423.0 miles in 9hr.26min. This represented an average speed, including all intermediate stops, of 44.8 m.p.h.

The aggregate running time, though with no allowance for temporary speed restrictions, was 8hr.42½min., giving an average running speed of 48.6 m.p.h.

HITHERTO the fastest running time recorded over this route had been 8hr.56min. This was achieved on Sunday, 21 August 1938, by the General Manager's four-wheel inspection railcar, when the journey from Wellington to Auckland was completed in 10 hours, with a 64-minute stop at Ohakune for lunch. The distance at that time was 425.0 miles.

On the more recent occasion, the party of railway enthusiasts had set out, for the first time in history, to make a return journey by rail between Wellington and Auckland within less than 24 hours. A schedule of 10hr.59min. was offered by

New Zealand Railways for the northbound journey, with a running time of 10hr.17min., and for the southbound trip an overall schedule of 10hr.35min. was worked out, with a running time of 10hr. 11min., almost certainly the fastest schedule ever laid down for this route. Departure times were set at 12.01 a.m. from Wellington, and 12.01 p.m. from Auckland.

At the time of the run, the fastest regular schedules on this route were 13hr. 20min. for the Wellington-Auckland "Night Limited" express, a train of 300-380 tons hauled by a "Da" class locomotive



Photograph: K.J. Hesz
 Passengers off the record-breaking railcar "Rm" 30 gather for a photograph shortly after arrival at Auckland at 10.20 a.m. on 28 January 1967.

north of Paekakariki, and 12hr.30min. for the summer holiday Auckland-Wellington "Scenic Daylight", a 250-ton train.

The railcar used for the special trip on 28 January 1967 was "Rm"30 *Aotea*, the prototype of six 29½-ton double-bogie 52-seat cars built in 1938-39 at New Zealand Railways' Hutt Workshops. Each car is now fitted with two 115 h.p. Meadows diesel engines, and has a designed top speed of 65 m.p.h. Since 1955, these six cars have been allocated to the Wellington-New Plymouth service.

Leaving Wellington at 12.01 a.m. on 28 January 1967, *Aotea* reached Auckland at 10.20 a.m., 40 minutes ahead of schedule. Sufficient time had been gained north of Taumarunui, in favourable weather and traffic conditions, to avoid the need for the scheduled 13-minute stop at Whangamarino to pass two southbound

trains. Instead, these trains were passed on the double line north of Amokura.

Highlights of this northbound run were record times of 98min.03sec. from Wellington to Palmerston North, an average speed of 51.8 m.p.h. from start to stop over the 84.7 miles, and of 94min.10sec. over the 85.9 miles from Frankton to Auckland, an average start-to-stop speed of 54.7 m.p.h. The overall running time from Wellington, but excluding any allowance for temporary speed restrictions and signal checks, was 8hr.54min.

Maximum speeds attained on favourable sections of the track were held to between 60 and 65 m.p.h., but it was possible, in the absence of the usual numbers of station stops suffered by New Zealand trains, to hold this level of speed for quite long stretches. Factors which enabled the record times to be achieved

N.Z.R. WELLINGTON-AUCKLAND
Diesel Railcar: "Rm" 30, Aotea (230 h.p.)
Date: 28 January 1967

Dis- tance	Timing Points	Schedule Times	Actual Times	Average Speeds
miles		min.	m.s.	m.p.h.
0.0	WELLINGTON	0	0 00	—
1.6	Kaiwharawhara	—	3 47	25.4
6.1	(Summit)	—	10 44	38.9
11.0	Porirua	17	16 05	54.9
15.2	Plimmerton	—	20 21	59.1
18.9	Pukerua Bay	—	25 34	42.6
24.2	Paekakariki	40	34 50	34.3
26.0	(McKays)	44	37 33	39.8
43.8	Otaki	65	55 42	58.8
49.3	Manakau	—	63 05	44.7
56.1	Levin	82	70 00	59.0
66.3	Shannon	93	79 40	61.3
80.7	Longburn	—	93 40	61.7
84.7	PALMERSTON N.	112	98 03	54.7
5.3	Bunnythorpe	—	7 18	43.6
10.4	Feilding	—	12 24	60.0
18.3	Halcombe	—	22 55	45.1
24.5	Greatford	31½	32 18	39.6
27.3	MARTON	36	37 00	35.7
6.4	Porewa	—	9 30	40.4
15.6	Hunterville	—	20 08	51.9
—	(signal stop)	22	21 06	—
22.2	Mangaonoho	26	35 00	—
31.5	Mangaweka	50	44 48	—
44.4	Taihape	74	55 17	53.2
50.1	Mataroa	86	57 29	38.3
56.3	Ngaurukehu	95	84 16	38.9
60.8	(north end sigs.)	117	95 15	33.8
68.3	Hihitahi	119	115 10	29.2
68.3	Waiouru	131	124 25	—
85.0	Ohakune	152½	126 35	42.6
94.7	Pokaka	—	137 09	42.6
103.6	National Park	183½	154 40	57.2
119.1	Owhango	210½	169 01	40.6
128.7	Piriaka	—	179 45	49.7
135.2	TAUMARUNUI	236	201 53	42.0
			215 10	43.4
			224 16	42.8

included the recent completion of automatic signalling and centralised traffic control over the whole of the route, finally eliminating any need to reduce speed to 45 m.p.h. through stations for automatic tablet exchanging. The several line improvements in recent years, such as the Porirua-Plimmerton, Longburn bridge, and Milson deviations, also played their

Dis- tance	Timing Points	Schedule Times	Actual Times	Average Speeds
miles		min.	m.s.	m.p.h.
6.7	Okahukura	11	8 43	46.1
14.2	Ongerue	24	18 03	48.2
14.4	(signal stop)	—	18 36	—
22.7	Waimiha	—	21 49	—
28.4	Parataraa	48	33 13	43.7
31.7	(signal stop)	—	34 49	—
32.1	Mangapehi	—	44 17	36.1
48.4	TE KUITI	81	44 43	—
60.0	Oterohanga	—	52 11	26.5
74.1	Te Awamutu	114	53 49	—
80.4	Ohaupo	—	55 07	—
89.9	FRANKTON	134	76 10	46.5
			89 15	53.2
			S/R	—
			107 10	47.2
			114 03	54.9
			123 37	59.6
6.9	Horatiu	—	S/R	—
10.3	Ngaruawahia	14	8 45	47.3
19.5	Huntly	—	12 08	60.3
30.5	Te Kauwhata	39	S/R	—
34.9	Whangamarino	47	22 20	54.1
			33 11	60.8
			38 51	46.6
41.4	Mercer	60	—	—
44.2	Pokeno	—	46 20	52.1
46.8	(Whangarata)	—	49 25	54.5
49.0	Tuakau	—	52 28	51.1
53.6	Pukekohe	—	54 39	60.4
61.7	Drury	—	59 40	55.0
64.9	Papakura	—	67 56	58.8
69.3	Manurewa	—	71 16	57.6
73.3	Papatoetoe	—	75 34	61.4
75.6	Otahuhu	—	79 23	62.9
76.4	Westfield	113	81 46	57.9
80.0	Tamaki	—	82 45	48.8
83.8	Orakei	—	S/R	—
85.9	AUCKLAND	127	87 26	46.1
			91 27	56.8
			94 10	46.4

part, as did the higher speed now permissible over the Rukuhia swamps south of Frankton.

On the outward journey, there was nothing exceptional in the initial stages. In fact, the 4-mile climb through the long tunnels was distinctly below par. Thereafter, running was normal, but it was not until Levin was passed at speed, now 12min. ahead of schedule, that it was possible to discern a foretaste of things to come. North of Palmerston North, there were slight complications with goods trains, *Aotea* being diverted through the crossing loops at both Kakariki and Greatford to pass long freights on the main

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Diesel Railcar: "Rm" 30, Aotea (230 h.p.)
Date: 28 January 1967

Dis- tance	Timing Points	Schedule Times	Actual Times	Average Speeds
miles		m.in.	m.s.	m.p.h.
0.0	AUCKLAND	0	0 00	—
2.1	Orakei	—	3 49½	32.9
5.9	Tamaki	—	8 16	51.3
			S/R	
9.5	Westfield	12	12 43	48.5
10.3	Otahuhu	—	13 46	45.7
12.6	Papataetoe	—	16 14	55.9
16.6	Manurewa	—	20 16	59.5
21.0	Papakura	—	24 26	63.4
24.2	Drury	—	27 44	58.2
			S/R	
32.3	Pukekohe	—	37 44	48.6
36.9	Tuakau	—	42 39	56.1
44.5	Mercer	—	51 01	54.5
55.4	Te Kauwhata	68½	63 53	50.8
65.4	Huntly	83	74 48	60.5
75.5	Ngaruawahia	—	84 57	53.8
79.0	Horotiu	—	88 46	55.0
85.9	FRANKTON	113	96 11	55.8
5.6	Rukuhia	—	6 37	50.8
9.5	Ohaupo	—	10 18	63.5
15.8	Te Awamutu	—	17 17	54.1
22.1	Te Kawa	28	24 53	49.7
29.9	Otorohanga	—	33 20	55.4
41.5	Te Kuiti	53	45 52	55.5
50.2	Puketutu	—	58 52	40.1
57.8	Mangapehi	82	69 05	44.6
61.5	Perotarae	—	74 03	44.7
75.7	Ongarue	—	91 34	48.6
83.2	Okahukura	—	101 13	46.6
87.0	Taringamatu	124	106 33	42.8
		128	106 57	—
	(signal stop)	—	109 48	—
89.9	TAUMARUNUI	139	114 17	37.5
3.6	Manunui	—	6 11	34.9
			7 04	—
6.5	Piriaka	—	12 04	34.8
			15 31	—
	(signal stop)	—	20 45	34.4
			20 53	—
9.8	Kakahi	—	22 08	—
16.1	Owhango	29	33 27	33.4
24.4	Raurimu	—	45 54	40.0
31.6	National Park	58	59 42	31.3
35.9	Erua	—	65 23	45.4
40.5	Pekopu	—	66 38	—
44.1	Horopito	—	74 13	36.4
50.2	Ohakune	85	77 44	61.4
56.5	Karihi	—	85 43	45.8
61.2	Tangiwhai	—	93 43	47.2
65.9	Waiohau	—	99 19	50.4
74.4	Hihitahi	111	106 56	44.9
85.2	Mataroa	—	116 11	48.6
90.8	TAIHAPE	153	132 08	40.6
95.8	Utiku	—	140 28	40.3
			145 50	55.9
103.7	Mangaweka	175	S/R	—
			160 06	—
113.0	Mangaonoho	—	170 21	54.4
119.7	Hunterville	197	178 56	46.8
128.8	Porewa	—	188 21	58.0
135.2	MARTON	216	195 52	51.1

Dis- tance	Timing Points	Schedule Times	Actual Times	Average Speeds
miles		m.in.	m.s.	m.p.h.
140.8	Kakariki	—	202 21	51.8
144.2	Halcombe	—	206 30	49.2
152.1	Feilding	240	216 44	46.3
157.2	Bunnythorpe	—	221 42	61.6
162.5	PALMERSTON N.	252	227 06	58.9
3.9	Longburn	5	4 41	50.0
18.4	Shannon	—	18 44	61.9
26.5	Levin	31	28 50	60.0
35.3	Manakau	—	33	29 16
			38 14	45.5
40.8	Otaki	51	42 20	—
58.7	(McKays)	72	50 12	42.0
60.5	Paekakariki	75	67 40	61.5
65.8	Pukerua Bay	—	69 38	54.9
69.4	Plimmerton	—	77 35	40.0
73.6	Porirua	95½	82 01	48.7
78.6	(Summit)	—	86 24	57.5
83.1	Kaiwharawhara	—	91 36	57.7
			96 17	57.6
			S/R	—
84.7	WELLINGTON	113	99 34	29.2

line. Little time was spent at Palmerston North and Marton, so we were about 14min. ahead of time on pulling up in the loop at Hunterville to await the arrival of train 227, the express from Auckland. Fortunately, this express was on good time, and we were away again, still three minutes ahead of schedule.

Following speed restrictions in the difficult country between Mangaweka and Utiku, it was novel to hurtle up the climb from Utiku to Taihape at an average of almost 50 m.p.h., and then to pass Taihape at 40 without stopping. No self-respecting train in ordinary service would dream of passing places like Taihape, or Ohakune, or Te Kuiti, without pausing, even briefly, but we did!

Up the long grades beyond Taihape, mainly at about 1 in 70, speed was maintained generally between 30 and 40 m.p.h., being dictated by the curves rather than by the grades. At Mataroa we were 14min. ahead and went on Ngaurukehu, where for 20min. we sat at the north end of one of the crossing loops awaiting the pleasure of train 229, the down "Limited". There was a short stop at Hihitahi to consult Train Control, and then came a very satisfying scamper over the heights of



Photograph: K.J. Hess

The railcar "Aotea" at Taumarunui on 28 January 1967 during the record 9 hr. 26 min. run from Auckland to Wellington.

Waiouru and down the long tangents leading towards Ohakune. The long climb from Ohakune up to Pokaka, mainly at 1 in 60, was carried at a minimum little below 40 m.p.h. From National Park it was all down hill to Taumarunui, where *Aotea* arrived at 6.3 a.m., 24 minutes ahead of time.

We spent almost 37 minutes at Taumarunui, instead of the scheduled twelve, so refreshments were enjoyed at leisure. On this final stage of the north-bound run, we set off in a lively manner, with rapid acceleration and high speeds between the numerous easings for sharp curves. Between Ongarue and Manga-pani, a series of signal stops for crossing goods trains and as a result of a signal fault prevented the car from gaining very much time, but amends were made on the easier stretch north of Te Kuiti, the 41.5 miles from Te Kuiti to Frankton being covered in the remarkable time of 47min.27sec.

North of Frankton, there were speed restrictions for track repairs near Horotiu, over the Taupiri bridge, and for overbridge construction work near Tamaki, but the accompanying condensed log of the run shows the results of travelling at 60 m.p.h. or slightly over wherever track conditions permitted.

On the return journey, departure from Auckland was about 37 minutes late owing to some difficulty in obtaining the correct grade of engine oil for this type of car, which rarely visits the Queen City. This delay, however, was perhaps just the incentive that was needed, though I doubt whether many of the passengers expected we would be on time again as early as Taumarunui! The time of 96min. 11sec. for the 85.9 miles to Frankton was not quite up to the standard of the morning run, but it was nevertheless a gain of nearly 17 minutes on the 113min. schedule. From Frankton the car was through Te Kuiti, 41.5 miles, in less than

46 minutes, and then proceeded to soar up the 20 miles to the Porootarao summit in the unprecedented time of 28min. 11sec.

Our lateness was thus reduced to only 12 minutes at Mangapehi. Down the picturesque but tortuous section of line past Waimiha and Ongarue, there were sharp reductions of speed for the sharpest curves, followed by rapid accelerations. We were scheduled to wait for four minutes at Okahukura to cross the northbound "Scenic Daylight", but we were signalled through and went on to Taringamotu, where a pause of less than three minutes was enough to let the "Daylight" pass by unchecked. This enabled us to reach Taumarunui four minutes early, in the truly remarkable time of 3hr.31min. from Auckland. How far away are the days when a time of five hours over the 175.8 miles between Auckland and Taumarunui was regarded as good!

A non-stop run over the 162.5 miles from Taumarunui to Palmerston North in 252 minutes had been laid down (would this have been the longest ever non-stop run in New Zealand?), but it was not to be. A stop at Piriaka, to pick up two errant passengers who had been left behind at Taumarunui and had to follow us by taxi, and other short stops at Kakahi, Erua, and Mangaweka, mainly to cross goods trains, caused some delay. Nevertheless, the 162.5 miles were completed in an overall time of 227min. 06sec., a gain of 25 minutes on schedule.

Highlights of this run included a minimum of 33 m.p.h. on the long 1 in 50 from Kakahi to Owango; 29 m.p.h. up and around the Raurimu Spiral curves with a recovery to 32 m.p.h. on the continuation of the 1 in 50 climb above the Spiral into National Park; a brisk scamper through Pokaka and down the long straight through Horopito until it was necessary to restrain the headlong flight in deference to the curves on the final few miles approaching Ohakune; and a remarkable average (I have no other adjective for it!) of more than 50 m.p.h. from Karioi up to Tangiwai. This

4.7-mile section includes almost three miles at 1 in 60. This bank was carried with a minimum of 43 m.p.h.

The character of the remainder of the run is clearly evident from the condensed log published with this article, but cannot be dismissed without comment on the attainment (almost) of even time from start to stop between Palmerston North and Levin. The time of 28min.50sec. for the 28.5 miles was achieved without exceeding 64 m.p.h., and with a minimum of 55 on the Koputaroa bank, 2½ miles at 1 in 100.

The car was now so far ahead of time that it was possible to go right down to Manakau to cross the northbound Auckland express, train 684, after which it was plain sailing, almost completely unchecked, all the way home. I wonder if the 43.9 miles from Otaki to Wellington had ever been covered before in less than 50 minutes! What would Rous-Marten have said?

Arrival time in Wellington was 10.04 p.m., following an Auckland departure at 12.38 p.m. The 26 passengers, each of whom had paid almost double the first-class fare for the privilege of occupying a double seat on such an unique occasion, appeared to have been well pleased and thrilled with their experience.

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