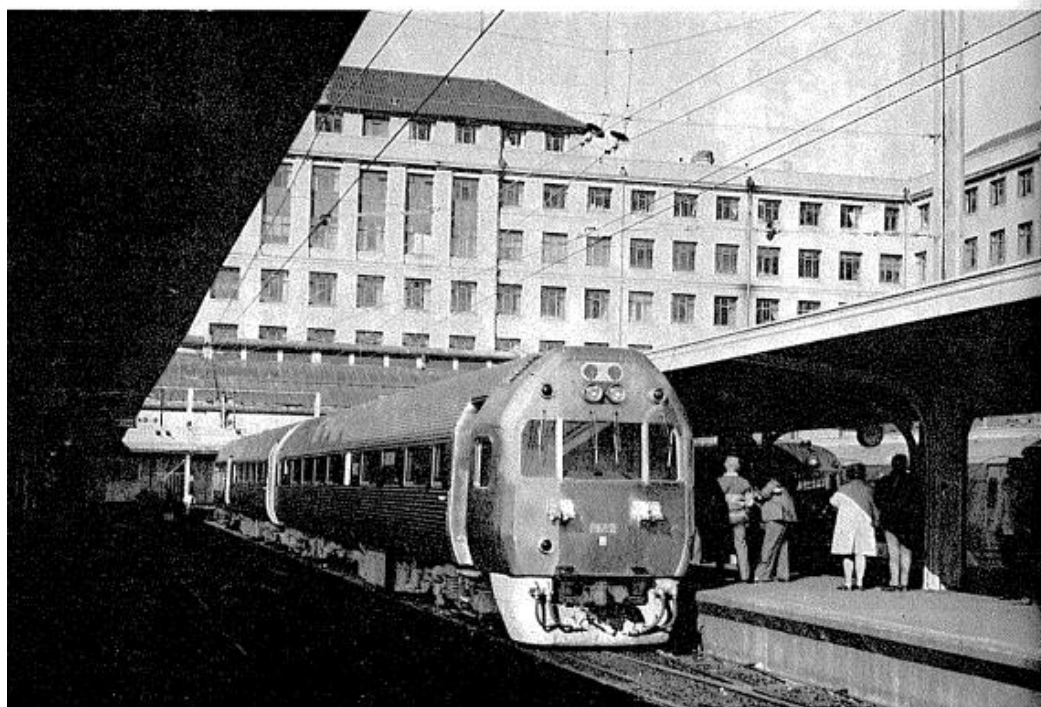


First "Silver Fern" Railcar to Visit Napier

Successful NZRLS Excursion Marks Two 1974 Railway Centenaries

TWO important railway centenaries that fell in 1974 were observed by the New Zealand Railway and Locomotive Society. These were the openings of the first railway at Wellington (to Lower Hutt)

in April 1874 and the first railway at Napier (to Hastings) in October 1874. References to both these occasions have appeared in these pages already in this volume, but on Sunday 27 October a large party of mem-



Photograph: T. L. Richardson.

The Silver Fern railcar "Rm" 2 at Wellington Station's platform 8 on Sunday 27 October 1974 preparing to leave on its first-ever run to Napier, a special arranged by the NZRLS to mark the centenary of the Napier-Hastings line.



Photograph: D. M. Cole.

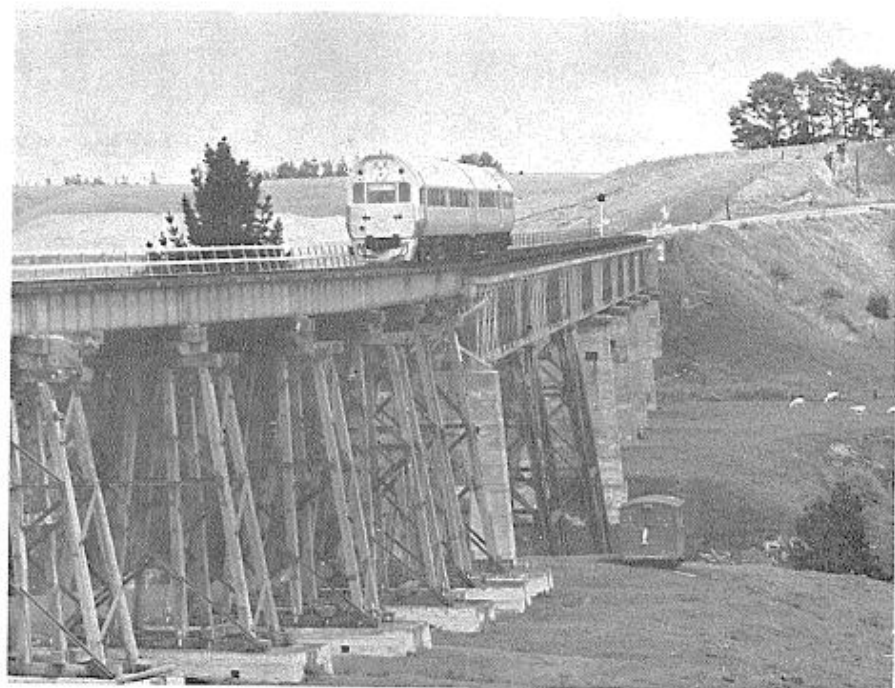
Silver Fern railcar "Rm" 2 at Matamau, highest railway station between Woodville and Napier, on 27 October 1974.

bers and friends participated in a special air-conditioned "Silver Fern" railcar excursion from Wellington to Napier and back. This was the first time that one of these new cars had ventured on to the Hawke's Bay line north of Woodville, and in the course of this journey we traversed most of the Wellington-Lower Hutt section and all of the Hastings-Napier stretch.

One of these cars had earlier made two excursions from Wellington to Masterton, and on another occasion one was diverted via Masterton to Palmerston North

when the line was blocked at Paekakariki. They are normally busy enough on the direct Wellington-Auckland run.

Sunday is usually a rest day for the "Silver Ferns", but on 27 October "Rm" 2 was made available complete with crew, hostesses, and provisions for an 8.25 a.m. departure from Wellington on its 323-km run. Stops were scheduled to pick up passengers at Woburn, Naenae, Upper Hutt, Featherston, Masterton, and Woodville, and provision was made for a number of photo stops north of that station. Arrival



Photograph: D. M. Cole.

The railcar "Rm" 2 crosses the Ormondville Viaduct, longest and highest between Woodville and Napier, during its first-ever run to Napier on 27 October 1974.

at Napier was scheduled for 2.15 p.m., but in the event we arrived at 2.38, having spent a little longer on photo stops than planned and having been delayed about 5 minutes at Hastings while the station working arrangements were sorted out.

Running in the Wairarapa was interesting though not spectacular. A speed restriction for track repairs on the Mangaroa bank held our time from Upper Hutt to Featherston back to 21 min. 35 sec. for the 24.75 km. The allowance for the 33.81 km from Featherston to Masterton was 31 minutes, but this was cut to 27 min. 14 sec., including a 23-second stop at Carterton to exchange tablets by hand (these cars are not fitted with tablet exchangers as they normally work only in automatic signalling areas). The 19.45 km from Featherston to Carterton were run off in 14 min. 48 sec., an average speed of 78.8 km/hr from start

to stop, yet maximum speeds were modest — about 88 km/hr up the climb through Fernside and nothing higher than 83 down the Matarawa racetrack. The car was clearly being held well within its potential capacity. From Carterton to Masterton, 14.36 miles, the time was 12 min. 03 sec., an average rate of 71.5 km/hr. Again 88 km/hr was maintained on the climb to Waingawa, followed by an easing to 78 through that station and a final peak of 84.

The return journey was timed to begin at 3.45 p.m. and to end at 9.13 p.m., an 8-minute stop being allowed at Matamau to cross the Sunday Wellington-Gisborne railcar, and other stops as before to set down passengers. Stops for tablet exchanging and speed restrictions, plus a stop at Dannevirke for supplies, all took their toll. We had taken our leave of sunny Napier at 3.48 p.m. and the arrears gradually increased to



Photograph: E. C. G. Fletcher.

The Silver Fern railcar "Rm" 2 pauses at Paki Paki, a station that was opened on New Year's Day 1875 as the terminal of the railway being built southwards from Napier.

a maximum of 16 minutes at Pahiatua. Thereafter there was a steady but gradual recovery to leave the final arrival only about 8 minutes behind schedule. A log of the Masterton-Woburn section of this run is included elsewhere in these pages.

It was a novel experience for railfans to recline in sealed-in air-conditioned luxury; to be unable to pop heads out of windows; and to be fed or refreshed at intervals by the two delightful hostesses, Mrs Gerrard and Miss Turner. We suspect that the crew, comprising our drivers (Messrs P. Thomson and C. Balderston), our guard (Mr S. Alderton), and the two hostesses may not have known quite what to expect from a party of camera-toting enthusiasts on the NZR's most modern item of passenger equipment; but if they had any fears we trust they disappeared as the day progressed.

Your editor tried his voice on the car's public-address system by giving an occasional commentary on points of historical and geographical interest. This system also proved highly useful for passing out instructions and information about photo stops. Incidentally, to facilitate control of

loading and unloading operations at these stops, all such movement was confined to the entrance adjacent to the driver's position. Some kindly soul also produced a rag with which to wipe mud from boots and shoes as the cross-country cameramen returned to the car. This certainly helped to minimise the tramping of dirt into the carpet. Despite all this, only one stop occupied more than 7 minutes.

Light refreshments were served twice on each journey, and time was available at Napier for those who wished to obtain food or a meal. By the end of the day it appeared that everyone, passengers and crew, had enjoyed the outing. It is interesting to reflect that the combined time of 11 hr. 18 min. allowed for this railcar to run from Wellington to Napier and back was an hour less than the first through trains from Napier to Wellington by this route were allowed back in 1897. New Zealand Railways had certainly demonstrated how far they had developed in the hundred years since the Wellington-Lower Hutt and Napier-Hastings sections were opened.