STEAMING AGAIN

On the Footplate of the Kingston Flyer with Russell Glendinning, senior enginedriver at Lumsden.

A CALL for an enginedriver to transfer to Lumsden? A normal call? Oh, no! Not at all, for the Railways were to reintroduce a steam passenger train, the legendary "Kingston Flyer".

Some time later: "Please note you are appointed to Lumsden as senior enginedriver," read the notice. And so I took the transfer — a chance to be steaming again — and I've never had occasion to regret that move.

My introduction to the two "Ab"s, 778 and 795, was rather disappointing. When I first saw them in the Invercargill shed they looked rather shabby; but after five weeks of labour those old work horses began to look like they should, gleaming and bright. Then, on the first run to Kingston with the official "invited-guests-only" train, I was rather apprehensive. You see, it had been a long time since I had been required to work a steam passenger train, and this was in effect a new run.

I thought I had troubles! The look on the face of the last man in the pipe band that piped us into Kingston was a picture. I'm sure he had never had a great locomotive rolling so close to his heels before. I knew how he must have felt, for I had to thread that train through a throng of four thousand elated, excited people who welcomed us at Kingston. I can tell you it was nerve-wracking, yet to me it has become one of the highlights of my service and one that has left a lasting impression.

I was proud to be an enginedriver and proud to be a part of the Railways' "Kingston Flyer" team, a feeling that has not dimmed one little bit. To be entrusted with the only remaining scheduled steam train on New Zealand's railway system gives one a special feeling. To be doing something which no other person is doing, something which my training has made second nature to me, makes me very proud indeed. No words can explain the utter joy I feel every time I open the regulator on the "Ab" or work on its machinery. It's simply ambition come true. I can feel for the private preservation groups because their joy of achievement must be equally high



Photograph: N.Z. Railways Publicity

Keeping a watchful eye on the road ahead, Russell Glendinning at the throttle of "Ab" 778 with the Kingston Flyer in tow.

when the various projects they undertake reach fruition.

We soon settled down to the routine of running the "Flyer". It was not long before a pattern evolved and it became evident to all that the steam locomotives were the greatest attraction. This was probably as intended. If, in years to come, it should be found more practical to run older-type steel-panelled cars on the "Flyer" because of increasingly costly maintenance on the present wooden-sheathed cars, I'm sure this train would lose none of its appeal to the average traveller. I must add though that many of the older folk really go into raptures over finding a steam locomotive and a birdcage car together.

One very old lady came to me one day with her small great grandson and said that, 60 years ago, she had travelled in a birdcage car on the old "Kingston



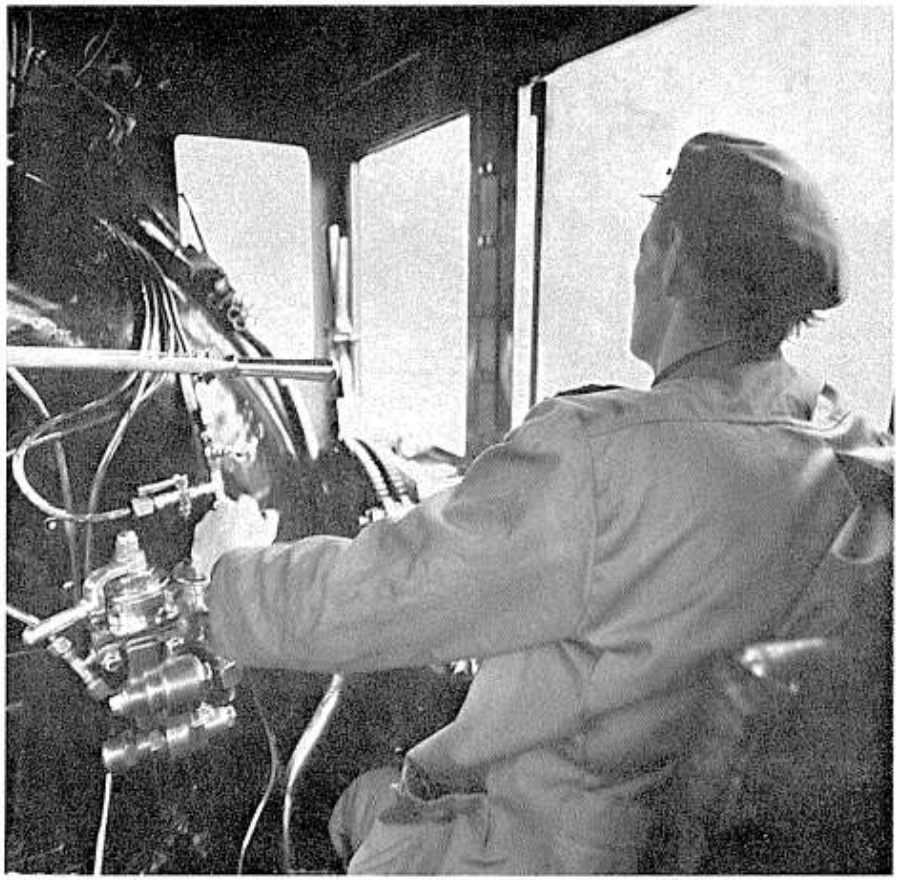
Photograph: N.Z. Railways Publicity

The fireman of the Kingston Flyer on the left-hand seat box in the cab of the "Ab" looks after the fire and the supply of water to the boiler.

Flyer" on her honeymoon. In a quiet voice, however, she confided that the only difference now was that her husband was no longer with her. I felt so sad for her; she sounded so alone.

As she walked away with the wee chap clasping her hand, I thought, "Yes, this train is very personal to some people and that is the way we must keep it, a people's train for the people. The impressions we create must last for a very long time."

Having a regular engine is the ultimate ambition of most steam enginemen, so a good deal of time is spent on keeping the "Flyer" pair in good running trim, especially in the evenings when they have been shedded. One particular evening, whilst I was working on 778, a group of visitors with a very nice looking collie dog came into the shed. We were chatting away while I tinkered about when my eye was drawn to the collie which was, as dogs seem prone to do, sniffing the

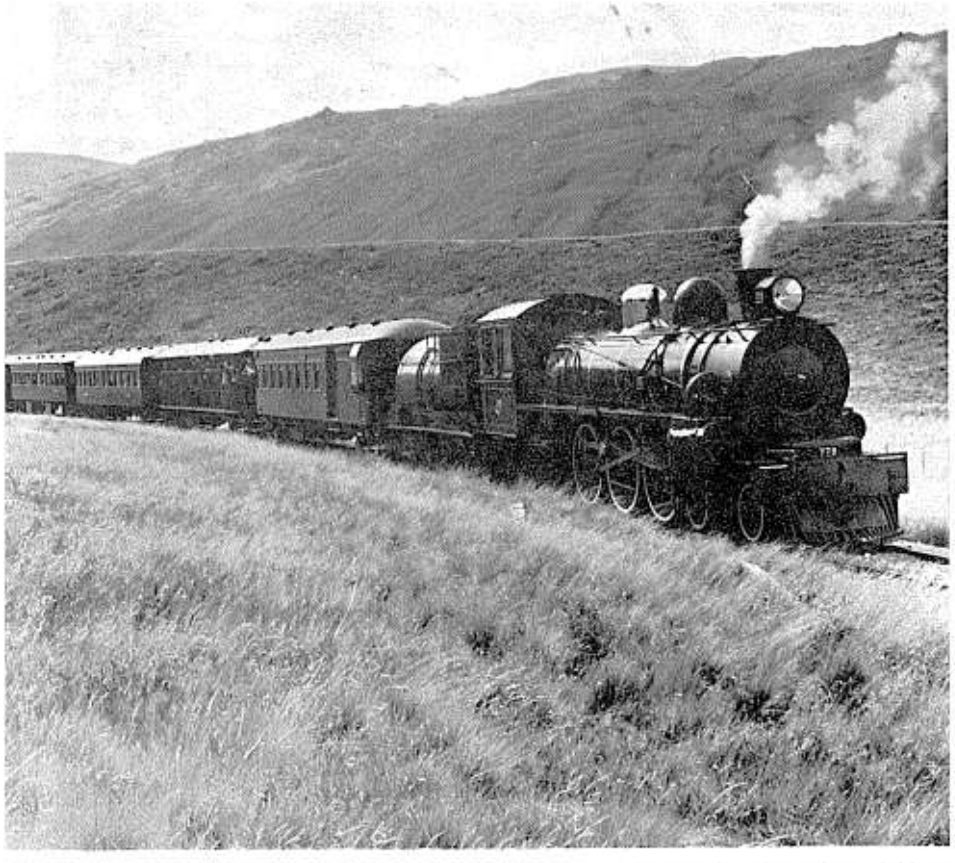


Photograph: N.Z. Railways Publicity

"To be entrusted with the only remaining steam train on the NZR gives one a special feeling." Russell Glendinning on the right-hand side of the Kingston Flyer's "Ab".

wheels very hopefully. Not wanting to be rude to my visitors, yet not desiring my engine to be set upon, I didn't quite know how to stop the inevitable happening. No. 778 itself solved the problem just at the crucial moment by letting loose with a short run of hot water on to the offending animal. For a startled second it stood quite still. Then it took off very rapidly, no doubt seeking safer places for its doggie designs.

Many people ask us, when the inevitable questions get asked during stops or at the depot, "Just what is it like, driver, still working on steam engines?" This we do find difficult to answer as, on reflection, just what is the attraction? Perhaps it's the pride of driver, fireman and machine all working together, one being no better than the others will allow it to be, each dependent on the others for the well being of the service.



Photograph: N.Z. Railways Publicity

During its fourth season, 1974-75, New Zealand Railways' only steam train, seen here on its 60 km run from Kingston to Lumsden, carried more than 36,000 passengers.

Perhaps it's the fireman continually pitting his skills with the locomotive, understanding its moods. Maybe it's the driver listening for odd sounds, evaluating them, mentally seeing each part doing its job, noting the exhaust beat . . . watching, feeling, until all three, fireman, driver, and locomotive are one working unit. Perhaps it's the feeling of pride when working, the feeling that all is well, that the world is your oyster, and that the proper order of things is established.

Of course there are times when things don't go as planned, there are times when other people's work seems momentarily more interesting than one's own, but this is an affliction that plagues most of us in our various occupations at times. It usually passes. They are times such as, for example, when you are explaining to a group of school children how easily a locomotive is balanced to turn it on the turntable, it sticks. Or, on explaining how simple it is to load coal into the bunker by tub, the tub decides to tip the wrong way and half fills the cab. Or even while you are adjusting a wedge, normally quite simple work, the lock nut

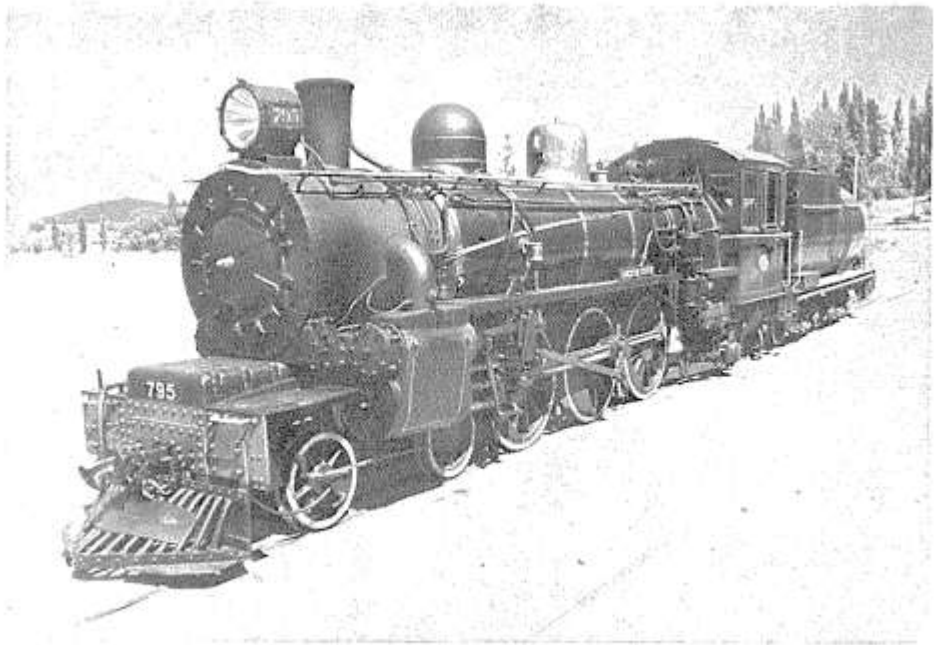


ABOVE: Russell Glendinning with a party of school children in front of the Kingston Flyer at Kingston.



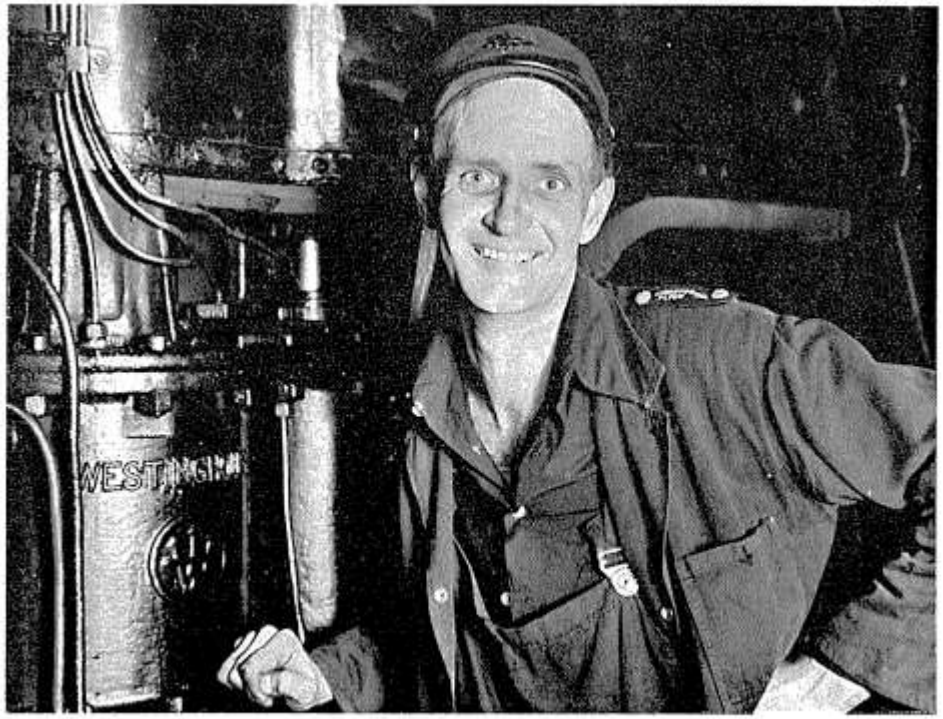
RIGHT: The 100,000th passenger to travel on the Kingston Flyer is presented with a special memento of the occasion by Railways' District Traffic Manager from Dunedin, Mr M. J. Linehan, at Lumsden in February 1975.

Photographs:
N.Z. Railways Publicity



Photograph: N.Z. Railways Publicity

Photograph: G. T. Radcliffe



will not budge. Then the spanner slips, leaving you sprawled flat on your back, usually in front of a barrage of movie cameras. And everyone laughs! Of course they do. Wouldn't you?

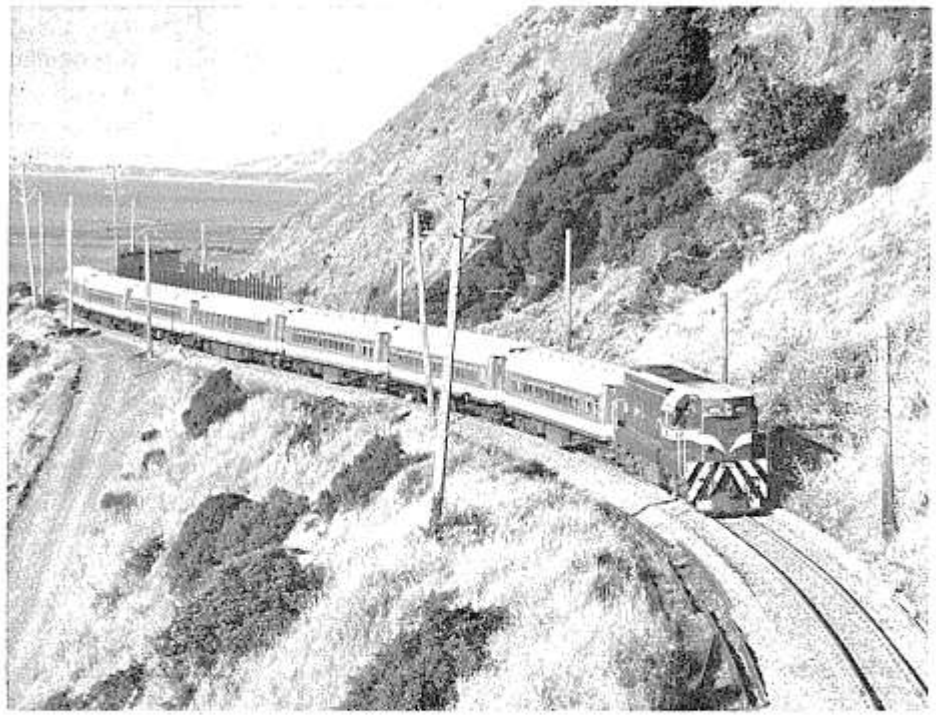
Still, what is important is that we are "steaming again" and loving every moment of it; well *nearly* every moment. I wouldn't change my work in the foreseeable future for any other occupation.

We received this article from Russell Glendinning in mid 1974. Members and readers will join with us in congratulating him upon the award of the British Empire Medal in the Queen's New Year Honours List, January 1975, for his services to tourism in Southland. Keep up the good work, Russell!

Editor, NZRO

OPPOSITE, UPPER: The Kingston Flyer's "other" steam locomotive, "Ab" 795, photographed at Kingston.

OPPOSITE, LOWER: Russell Glendinning "captured" alongside Steam Incorporated's "J" 1234 during a visit to the North Island in May 1974.



Photograph: D. M. Cole

The Napier-Wellington "Endeavour" express one sunny evening in January 1975 climbs the 1 in 66 gradient towards Pukerua Bay. It is approaching what used to be No. 11 tunnel but is now No. 6.