
G532 leads its sister engines on the eastbound SCT from Perth at the entry to SCT's Goobang Yard on Friday 12 October. Bernie Baker

# SCT Moving The Goods

**Article by Bernie Baker**

SCT's progression to where it is today has been a slow and steady evolution. Formed in Melbourne back in 1974, the company has grown into a multi-modal transport giant with over 800 employees engaged in the 24 hour, seven-day-a-week job of transporting goods across Australia. This article takes a behind the scenes look at the running of an SCT freight train, specifically an overview of the Goobang-Perth service, and how it fits into the grander SCT network.

## Prior to departure

This story is about working 7GP1; however the arrival of 3PG1 from Perth on Friday morning, and what takes place in the 36 hours prior to our Saturday night departure, also deserves a mention.

Obvious is the fact that less freight travels eastwards from the west coast, as the Friday arrival is practically empty, although some of the wagons may contain some loading such as hay. The train has also conveyed prime movers and front-end loaders on flat wagons as well as piggyback trailers and, more recently, grain loading.

The arrival into SCT Parkes siding is slow, and that's for a good reason; it allows Norm Astill from Gemco to have a good look at 3PG1 as it rolls by. On the other side of the train is SCT's shunter, Rob Raye, also looking for anything out of the ordinary. Once clear of the main line and off train order territory, the train is shunted around the facility by T414. The former BHP DE Class unit is earning its keep at the Parkes depot. The initial climb into the yard off the main is quite steep and 414 uses all of its 875 horsepower to push and pull the wagons around. Like just about everything else SCT, it is painted in the striking red, white and black colours. The G Classes are fuelled within SCT before heading into town for servicing. As for us, Southern Silverton crews take our place on arrival.

Overlooking the entire operation at Parkes is Shane Avram. The former Victorian has been with the company for four and half years and while only a year of that has involved rail, Avram worked with SCT's line-haul business at Shepparton for the first three and a half and has adjusted to the larger rail road operation well. Respected by those around him, he runs a tight and clean ship; the huge shed is immaculate and everything is in its place. He also counts on the inward freight to arrive from Sydney, Brisbane and regional centres such as Bathurst and Cowra in time for the 19.30 Saturday night departure.

Before our Saturday night departure, the three G Classes have been inspected. This is all done at the Rail Technical Support Group's (RTS) facility back in Parkes. Seven bays of the former NSWGR roundhouse still remain, where Silverton called home prior to the sale of its assets this year. Over inspection pits, the Gs are slotted in side by side and are inspected from top to bottom. Repairs are effected, essential items replaced and fluids topped up. It was during one such routine inspection on Friday 15 September when a displaced suspension bearing (the bearing that supports the traction motor to the axle) was found. The bearing was dry and running hot; if not for a diligent fitter, G532 would not have made a successful return journey. What was to follow was precision

with a bit of luck thrown in. Waiting at EDI Newport in Victoria were two reconditioned bogies for G521 (the luck!). These were about to head for Seymour, where recently refurbished 521 was to be converted from broad to standard gauge. Instead the bogies were diverted to Parkes.

Saturday afternoon witnessed good teamwork and co-ordination . A combination of Bernie Buckenhoffer from RTS and Alan Hender from EDI Newport had both bogies exchanged within an hour (excluding attaching the traction motors electrically). We departed on time on the Saturday night with 532 performing faultlessly during the journey.

Typically, the cabs are fitted with an array of radios for the different states they operate in. While all are essential, it's the NSW Country Net system we needed this night. This is a satellite phone and is used for the issue of train orders when operating from Parkes to Broken Hill. (NSW train order territory also covers Orange to Parkes, Orange to Dubbo and Bogan Gate to Tottenham). In fact it's required just to get us from Parkes Loco to the SCT complex on the western side of Goobang Junction, as it's also in train order territory.

Norm had just about completed the testing of the brakes (which included a 70-minute retention test) when we arrived at 18.15. In the cab were Bob Morton and Stan Adamski from Silverton, who had finalised putting the train together. Rob Raye handed us our load and told us that all those who need it had been faxed a copy, including control, which will not permit departure until they have received a hard copy. A look at the load shows plenty of beer, along with shampoos and shaving gear for department stores—these were only some of the products on tonight's train. The last wagon (a VQDW container flat) has two 40-foot boxes on it, one of which is full of dipping sauce for a fast food chain!

Some of the modern conveniences in the cab of all SCT G Class locos include a convection microwave, bar fridge and CD player. Standard Bremshey seats round out the cab fittings. Ensuring crew comfort is SCT's Implementation Manager, Bob Yates. A man who as been around railways since joining the SAR at Peterborough in 1966, he was largely responsible for the refitting of the locomotives, and has ensured crews are well catered for when travelling from Parkes and Melbourne to Perth. All SCT Gs were fitted for online fuelling during overhaul at EDI Newport.

## My Mate

Mate is a term that seems to go hand in hand with working on locomotives in Australia, and fits far better than offsider or co-driver. At the time of writing, Genesee and Wyoming Australia's (our employer) Parkes depot is a two-driver show: Kevin Edwards and me. Kev is nearly 68 and still loves driving trains. Coming from a dairy farm, Kev joined the Signals Branch at Goulburn in 1960. While installing boom gates on the South he remembers having to stand clear for the 38s to fly past on the expresses; it was at that moment he wanted to be apart of the engine crew. He put the request in but his boss wouldn't release him. So, not knowing who else to write to, he penned a letter to Commissioner McCusker and within two weeks Kev was at Eveleigh, black-oiling the very 38s he had witnessed steaming past only a few weeks before. He tells me the 60 Class Garratts were good to fire but the 36 Class engines were pigs by name and pigs by nature; especially 3638 which was fitted with a experimental power reverser. By the time

**Left: Kevin Edwards awaits the arrival of an opposing Down movement as the Goobang-bound SCT train waits at Condobolin, before dawn on Friday 12 October.** Bernie Baker

## Existing locomotive fleet

While SCT is on the threshold of commissioning the first of fifteen GT46C-ACe EDI-built EMD locos (see back cover) the company has steadily built up a fleet of main line and heavy shunting units as follows:

***Main line G Class fleet:***

G511, G512, G513, G514, G515, G521, G532, G533 and G535 were obtained from Pacific National earlier this year. So far SCT's G Class have generally only been used on the Goobang service, as this is crewed by GWA now PN, and is yet to see the use of in-line fuelling.

***Shunting locomotives:***

- Perth (Kewdale): Ex-Westrail locos K208 and H5
- Adelaide (Islington): Ex V/Line T345 and ex-Westrail H2 and H3.
- Melbourne (Altona): Ex V/Line T404 (and Australian National CK2) with former NSWSRA/CRT shunter X209 as back-up.
- Goobang (Parkes): Ex-BHP Whyalla T414 (originally DE02) and ex-NSWSRA/CRT shunter X107

A number of other ex-V/Line, NSWSRA/CRT and Westrail locos are stored at various locations around the country pending future use.

**Above: Newly gauge-converted G521 awaits a path back to Melbourne from Seymour, as Pacific National's 6MB4 charges through with NR46 leading, Friday 21 September.** Peter Foote

Kev was ready to move up to driver, dieseldom had well and truly set in and therefore he would only qualify for diesels. He has worked at Dubbo, Yeerongpilly, Goulburn and Newcastle. He also did a stint on the Alice Springs – Darwin project at Katherine, where I also worked.

## Departure

Tonight's 7GP1 (7 means the day of week of departure, G stands for Goobang Junction, P indicates Perth and 1 tells us that it is the first GP service of the day) is not a monster. Only 3667 tonnes for 1227 metres long; we have run these trains up to 5700 tonnes for 1800 metres. The SCT Parkes siding is in train order territory so, before the road out can be open, we must have a train order. We already know that the Country Net satellite phone works, as the Silverton crew who brought the locos out from Parkes needed a train order to do so. I pressed 'P1' on the sat phone and it started beeping at about one second intervals, then a quick succession of beeps acknowledges Train Order Control (TOCO) answering, "Train Order Control receiving 7GP1...over."

I gave TOCO the train and crew details and also let him know we were ready for departure. Murray Drummond at the desk then said, "7GP1, I will give you an order from SCT Parkes main with shunt access to Trida Main, reporting at Condoblin (546) and Matakana (665), over." The train order was then dictated to me with computer-generated departure and fulfilment codes, which I repeated back in turn. I informed Bob Morton from Silverton that we had a train order with shunt access and we were right to depart.

Once Bob had the road open, I put the reverser in forward, switched on the generator field switch and placed the dynamic brake lever in setup. Because we were in the No.1 end cab, I could hear the electrical cabinet whirring and winding, followed by a gentle clunk that told me the dynamic was in setup. I selected first notch and slowly brought the handle around to

four. As it's downhill out of SCT and as we were departing yard conditions, a 15 km/h speed applied until the train was clear and on the main line. I released the independent brake slowly in a feathering motion (on and off at various stages until fully released). This prevents the loco running out from the train. Gradually the train started to push as the dyno began drawing amps. There was no need to set the countdown feature on the speedo, as Bob was primed to tell me when we'd cleared: "Bernie, you're on the main and your 'Blinky Bill' [flashing red light] is flashing on the rear mate. Have a good trip."

## On the move

I let the dynamic out slowly (again avoiding a runout) and started picking up the notches, one at a time, waiting for the engine revs and the amps to settle before moving to the next.

Once the entire train had passed the yard limit board, Kev contacted TOCO and advised Murray that the road behind us is locked, secured and set for the main line, followed by our departure code, the extent of our order and where we are to report at.

The kettle had just boiled and the first of tonight's coffee was about to happen. By the time we get to Nelungaloo (462 km) we're going 110 km/h and the throttle is back in notch 6.

It was still reasonably early and, although dark, we see shadows at doorways and curtains pulled back as we hotfoot it past farmhouses. We passed Bogan Gate (483 km) at 19.35. The section from Bogan Gate to Ootha, including Yarrabandai, is great for railfans wanting pacing shots, as the road is close and there aren't many trees in between.

We contacted GWA's Transport Control in Adelaide and informed them of our departure time, and in return we were given the mobile number of our relief crew, who are now camped at Broken Hill. Between all of those involved, it was a smooth operation. As a result of departing early (24 minutes up) at 19.06 tonight we had to sit at the yard limit board at Kaleentha (944 km) to wait for the arrival of 7YN3. Although some might wonder why we weren't sent into the loop and the steel train allowed to cross on the main, chances are that TOCO had already issued an order to YN3 to Kaleentha loop, and there is lot involved in cancelling orders and issuing new ones.

We could have run to Kaleentha two ways: cruising along at 90 km/h and maybe be lucky enough to time it so we don't have to stop, or work hard to get there quickly. Because we were not sure how well YN3 was running, we did our 110 km/h, proving to control that we would have a go. This could come in handy later when control might be debating whether to give us run in a tight cross; train controllers have long memories and know who will have a go and who will take their time. We were still a long way off Kaleentha yet, and have passed though places such as Roto (707 km), where the Hillston Line branched off. These days part of the triangle still remains along with the water tank, a humpy and a bogie water gin sitting in what's left of the siding.

We arrived at the yard limit board at 00.16 and we were only there until 00.50; by this stage Kevin and I had swapped seats, so it was now my turn to take train orders and write down the times. We stayed in the good books with TOCO, and now managed to relax with our third cup of coffee.

## SCT's Rail Debut

July 1995 marked the beginning of SCT's dedicated transcontinental rail freight service when V/Line G Class locomotives (often with an Australian National GM Class banking the train from Tailem Bend) began running the 6MP6 (then only once-a-week) service from Melbourne to Adelaide and Perth, with the corresponding eastbound train, 6PM5, commencing shortly afterwards. As was to become the norm in those early years, a locomotive change was effected in Adelaide with ALF Class locomotives (initially) taking over for the run to and from Western Australia. Westrail L Class were, for a brief time, employed on the leg west of Kalgoorlie, but this practice did not last long. Since that time, the use of distinctive ABFY louvre vans in unmodified form has all but ceased (in favour of purpose-built and refurbished vans and containers, see next page), while hook-and-pull contracts with Freight Australia and later Pacific National, coupled to the introduction of in-line fuelling on the Melbourne–Perth trains, have ended the need for regular locomotive swaps en route.

SCT has been very careful and organised in its expansion, and while further growth is expected, the company closely observes railway investment and logistics possibilities before committing to a increased services and traffics.


**Above: Silverton driver Bob Morton (left) and the author discuss getting 7GP1 underway on Saturday 10 November.** Trish Baker

Once YN3 was in the loop and had given up his order, we were issued a new order to Broken Hill, end reporting at Menindee (10.06) and Kinalung (10.65). We crossed NR24/ NR47/8136 on the YN job, and spotted a torch on the off side as the PN crew gave a roll-by from both sides. By now Brett Tuckey was on the board. Brett knows this territory well as he transferred from Orange Control prior to its closure; a friendly rapport with these guys goes along way in covering the 673-kilometre journey.

Kaleentha and Trida are the ultimate way to slow trains down. Both of these loops were extended to 1800 metres, and in doing so the smaller Up and Down loops at each location were slewed across to join to the main line, thus creating a dogleg in each. Kaleentha has a 60 km/h speed limit while Trida is restricted to 70 km/h.

It's not so much the speed but the time lost slowing down for these restrictions and then getting the train back up to speed. No doubt this will be straightened out the day they do something with the 30 km/h over the former swing bridge crossing the Darling River at Menindee, which is the slowest permanent restriction on the Parkes – Broken Hill track). Matakana and Kinalung loops were also extended to 1800 metres, but we can run at normal speed through these locations.

The once-important railway town of Ivanhoe sits between Trida and Kaleentha. At one stage the Ivanhoe Depot boasted 12 drivers/firemen and five guards, who occupied railway houses while the crews working in from elsewhere stayed at the barracks. These days the barracks form part of the detention centre and the wardens live in the old railway houses. The twin water towers and water column still exist. Animals, such as wild pigs, goats, sheep, emus and kangaroos that call the bush home, inevitably meet their end out here, especially at night. One night 13 kangaroos met their demise, and we have also managed to wipe out the other side of Australia's coat of arms. Damage rarely occurs, but stray animals have been known to fracture pipes, causing air leaks. Like a lot of locomotives these days, the taps for pipes are generally behind the headstock, and only the hoses protrude from the front. The G Class has both the main reservoir and brake pipe taps on the front, but these can be isolated from behind if they are damaged.

Whether our train is 5200 or 3660 tonnes, the three G Classes will find their own way and a comfortable throttle position, usually in notch 4, 5 or 6. This allows the train to hover around the 106–109 km/h. It may drop back to 98 at some places, but I've found that if I leave it alone, it'll return back to 110 over the next rise. The train remains stretched and all the freight in the long white snake stays intact (different grades require

different tactics to keep it stretched). There are several sections where the track is level and straight; once again the locomotives find a comfortable notch to keep the train at 110km/h. The G Classes have extended range dynamic brake, which means that if you are prepared for the speed restrictions and locations where you know you will have to stop, you can bring the train to a dead stop just on the dynamic; it is possible to run from Parkes to Broken Hill without using the automatic (train) brake.

As we approached Broken Hill we contacted Broadmeadow West Control and let him know that the changeover crew is on the platform (we had notified them at Kinalung, giving them about 50 minutes to get motivated and ready), and therefore requested the road for the main line. Starting at the 1097 km peg is a series of 70 km/h curves that eventually brought us into the platform at Broken Hill, 1124 kilometres from Sydney. As it is a climb into the platform, Kevin notched the G Classes back to the point where the weight stretched out behind pulled the train up, and he only had to apply the independent (locomotive) brake. We arrived at 03.06, exactly eight hours after our departure. Fuel figures were noted (the engines use an average of 2500 litres each on the GP service) and the train information was exchanged with the fresh crew. Once 7GP1 had departed and we have given it a roll-by inspection, it was time to head to the motel for our eight hours of rest before driving the car back to Parkes. This journey takes longer than the train and it can be interesting. In the first seven weeks, we witnessed one burnt-out semi trailer, a road train loaded with beer on its side, another loaded with sugar in the same predicament, a caravan missing all its wheels and German tourists in trouble with a Toyota van that should never have been allowed on the road.

## Wagon fleet

The former Australian National ABFY louvre vans, which made SCT's earlier services so distinct, have been refurbished as the ABSY, however the bulk of services are now formed 'Greater Freighter' and 'Multi Freighter' vans and container wagons. The use of some of these vehicles between Adelaide and Melbourne is prohibited by loading gauge restrictions. Flat wagons, loaded with either containers of large consignments (for example, farm machinery) are also used on these trains. SCT has also converted a number of Bluebird railcars and NSWSRA 'Daylight' cars for crew vans across the Nullarbor.

**Above: Shane Avram in the warehouse at Goobang on Monday 8 October. Note the three different types of box vans in the background, including a refurbished ABSY.** Bernie Baker

## Post script

Since writing this story we have managed to complete the journey from Parkes to Broken Hill in 7 hours 24 minutes. Another night we completed 15 train orders and once in October a fault was detected with the 3PG1 service at Kinalung. Naturally it was nearly the last wagon on a 1500-metre-long job and once I had rectified the fault and started walking back to the front, a Land Cruiser pulled up beside me and offered a lift. Where else in the world and out in the middle of bloody nowhere at midnight does a car pull up and a voice says, "Do you wanna lift mate?"

Yep, great train, great people and a great country.

**Above left: Crew change over time. 3PG1 has just arrived in Goobang and the incoming crew are relieved by a shunt crew as T414 (ex-BHP Whyalla DE02) looks on, preparing for its own role in the break-up and unloading of the SCT train from Perth.** Trish Baker
**Above right: SCT maintain and operate a growing fleet of (mostly) former state government owned Clyde/EMD and English Electric diesel/electric locomotives for shunting and transfer duties at its handling yards around the country. In addition to T414 at Goobang, SCT employs its own locomotives at Laverton (Melbourne), Islington (Adelaide) and Forrestfield (Perth). One of the two units based at Forrestfield (the other being K208), H5 is seen shunting the recently arrived MP9 train from Melbourne on Thursday 9 February 2006. H5 was the first locomotive in a version of the SCT black livery, and a subsequent change to the scheme design has left its appearance unique.** Bernie Baker