

The History of DMU vehicle M51566

M51566 in BR Service

Class 108 vehicle M51566 was ordered from British Railways, Litchurch Lane Works, Derby on 20th March 1959. It was part of lot number 30461 which comprised of vehicles M51561 to M51572.

The vehicle is a power car of type DMCL (Driving Motor Composite Lavatory), indicating it has a driving compartment, is powered, contains both first and second-class seating and a toilet compartment. The vehicle is fitted with two BUT (Leyland) 6-cylinder horizontal engines, each of 150 bhp.

On completion, M51566 was initially coupled to DMBS (Driving Motor Brake Second) vehicle M50929. Its livery on delivery was BR Green with cream lining and 'whiskers'.

Its first allocation was to Llandudno Junction depot (6G) on 28th November 1959. Subsequently it was reallocated to Chester Northgate (6D) in November 1959, and Chester (6A, later CH) January 1960.

In 1984/5, M51566 was split from M53929 (now renumbered from M50929) and paired with M53933. In January 1986, set M53933/M51566 was reallocated to Buxton (BX) and formed into a 3-car set with the inclusion of TSL (Trailer Second Lavatory) 59387 as set BX494.

Further reallocations followed, to Tyseley (TS) March 1987, Eastfield, Glasgow (ED) October 1987 in set 108 383 which also included vehicle 59387, Haymarket (HA) July 1988, Chester (CH) October 1988, Haymarket (HA) March 1989, Eastfield, Glasgow (ED) May 1989 and then to Chester (CH) on 1st October 1989 (minus 59387) as 2-car set CH634. Its final move was to Tyseley (TS) in September 1990 as set T072.

M51566 was withdrawn from service on 11th December 1992 and sold for preservation to Mike Hancock and Derek Mason. On 7th April 1993 the vehicle was transferred from Tyseley to Peak Rail, Darley Dale.

M51566 was subsequently resold to the Dean Forest DMU Group and moved to Lydney on 9th June 2008.

M51566 in DFR Service

Restoration work commenced on the vehicle following arrival at the DFR and during 2008 the exhaust stacks and pipes were chemically cleaned and the roof vents blanked. The door locks were removed and renovated and the multiple unit jumpers were overhauled. Internally, all the internal seats were stripped out and all damaged ceiling and wall panels removed. The roof water tanks and the toilet

were also removed as the DFR do not require these in service. As part of the internal restoration, the first-class saloon was converted to second-class.

In Autumn 2009 "rain caps" were fitted to the tops of the engine exhaust pipes to prevent water getting into the exhaust system.

By April 2011, M51566 was mechanically refurbished enough for a non-passenger test run to Parkend which was successful, the vehicle still carrying its 'as withdrawn' livery of Blue and Grey with all yellow front end. Later in the year the roof was stripped and repainted. During the summer a new cab front fabricated from aluminium (to replace the rotten steel example) was fitted to the vehicle, which represented about half of the external bodywork restoration.

During 2012, work on the interior restoration of M51566 progressed. Damaged lino in the cab and vestibule areas was replaced, and a buffet was installed, along with associated main electrical wiring and other facilities. A lot of Formica panel repairs were also made.

Restoration work on M51566 continued in 2013. Both engines were removed, cleaned, inspected, tested, any repairs made and finally refitted to the vehicle. An important repair was also made to the chassis after a crack was noticed, requiring a special strengthening plate to be designed and fitted. Bodywork was completed after steelwork repairs to the corridor end were completed in the spring and the aluminium bodysides cleaned and prepared for repainting.

Following completion of its restoration, M51566 made its debut in DFR service on 27th July 2013, freshly repainted in BR Green livery with cream lining and 'whiskers'. In the annual 'Railcar of the Year' competition in 2013, organised by the Railcar Association, M51566 was narrowly beaten to first place by Class 119 vehicle 51073.

During January 2016 the buffet area of M51566's interior was refurbished and repainted.

Over the past few years, M51566 has been in regular service either as a 2 or 3-car set. In 2020 the vehicle was withdrawn from service to allow some essential maintenance to be undertaken, which included the fitting of a replacement engine and wheelset, re-entering service in 2022.