

Metro drivers reflect on the 'amazing' new Stadler trains during first test runs

May 31, 2023



Metro drivers have given a big thumbs up to the new Stadler Metro trains after the first few test runs out on the network.

The new trains have now completed a series of night-time tests as part of the detailed preparations to get them ready for entering service at the end of the year – a process that will carry on throughout the coming weeks and months.

Metro drivers Jon Doughty and Chris Mongan were there for the first test between South Gosforth and Monkseaton on 10 May.

And they were left amazed by the quality and performance of the Stadler Class 555 Metro train, likening the switch from the old fleet to the new as akin to going from a classic car to a super car.

The Stadler Class 555 Metro train, the first of 46 that Nexus has on order, is undergoing a period of testing and driver training before entering service for customers.

The new Metro fleet will offer a comfortable, new, air conditioned, open plan layout, sleekly modelled interior, transforming the customer experience, while setting new standards for accessibility.

Metro driver and RMT union rep, Chris Mongan, said: "It was a big moment for me personally as I've been involved with the project for the last three years. These new trains are great for Metro and for the whole region.

"It's a once in a lifetime opportunity many of us that have been involved and to be able to go out on the new train's first night of testing on the system was a real privilege.

"I don't think the test could have gone any better to be honest. We know what the new train is capable of, and we know what a great asset it is going to be. We have watched it grow from a sketch on a piece of paper into the finished product that we see now.

"We knew it was going to be good, and we know we have taken a light year leap forward, but to actually be on board it, and experience it first hand, was amazing.

"The new train outperformed anything that we could have imagined. The drive was smooth. The braking system was operating perfectly well, and the dynamic braking and power were spot on."

Metro driver and ASLEF union rep, Jon Doughty, said: "The testing is vital to get the new trains ready for customer service.

"They are testing the brakes at different speeds. Testing the doors. Testing the automatic sliding step.

"Everything went exceptionally well on that first test run. The train was out on the network for four hours without any major problems. It was an excellent and historic occasion for the Tyne and Wear Metro, and for the North East."

He added: "The torque on the new Stadler train was unbelievable compared to what we are driving at the moment. It's just a hundred times better. It's smooth, we have air conditioning, and we have brand new seats in a modern new driver's cab. It's just a move the future.

"We have been driving the same trains for 40 years, and they have technology which is over 40 years old. Going to the new train is like making the switch from a mark one escort to a Lamborghini.

"It's an absolutely fantastic piece of kit to drive. It's unbelievable. We are just so excited to actually get behind the wheel of these new trains and drive them, and to welcome customers on board."

Stadler, the Swiss train manufacturer, are building a total of 46 new Metro trains on behalf of Nexus.

The fleet will enter service in phases and the aim is to have all of the new trains in service by 2025.

Stadler has delivered three new trains to North East England so far, and more are set to arrive later this year.

The Class 555 Stadler train is a unique design for Metro and in the months ahead will undergo rigorous testing to ensure that it interfaces correctly with signalling systems and other Metro infrastructure.

Metro drivers will also start a process of training at the controls of the new train.

The new trains have been designed and shaped by customers, and in response to vast consultation will include modern features such as linear seating, charging points, air conditioning and will deliver a step-change in accessibility.

Among the new features will be an automatic sliding step at every door to enable seamless boarding, making travel easier for Metro's 50,000 wheelchair passengers as well as people with children's buggies, luggage or bicycles.

Photo credit: Nexus