

On your Marks... Sophie all set to become first female driver at Liverpool

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TransPennine Express (TPE) is delighted to be celebrating an important first, as they welcome their first qualified female driver at Liverpool Lime Street.

Sophie Marks joined TPE in March from **West Midlands Trains**. She is currently in the process of 'route learning', and plans to be driving solo by November.

Sophie said: "It feels good to represent women in a male-dominated industry. I come from a family of railway employees, my mother is a booking clerk, and my father and my uncle are both train drivers for **Chiltern Railways**."

"I've always loved trains from a young age. I never saw my gender as a barrier to working with them, but I do hope to use my position to challenge perceptions and encourage more young women to consider a career within rail."

Kathryn O'Brien, customer service and operations director at TPE said: "We are working hard to break the stereotypes of traditional roles within the rail industry, and we continue to make huge progress in

developing a more diverse workforce.

“There’s still a long way to go, but we have more women in senior roles than ever before. I’m part of an executive team made up of 40 per cent women and, during the past 12 months, 35 per cent of our new employees have been women.

“Sophie is making history and we’re so thrilled to finally have female representation amongst our drivers at Liverpool Lime Street. Hopefully, she will encourage other women to follow in her footsteps.”

Q&A with Sophie...

What made you want to become a train driver?

I come from a family of railway employees. From a young age, I’ve always loved trains, my favourite TV show as a child was Thomas the Tank Engine. I had a Thomas the Tank Engine hat, gloves, and lunchbox! Whereas most of the other children my age had Barbie dolls and aspirations of becoming singers, I always wanted to drive trains!

How did you become a qualified driver?

I first joined the railway in 2012 as a conductor at West Midlands Trains, where I worked my way up to be a senior conductor. This was a rewarding role where I was very public-facing and took care of passengers.

In 2019 I successfully applied for a driving position based at Crewe. I went through a series of interviews, psychometric tests and then a medical check. When a position then became available at TPE for Liverpool, I didn’t hesitate to apply!

What is involved in the day-to-day learning to become a train driver?

A lot of route learning. As a driver, you need to know every speed change, every gradient, different signal aspects and every station location on the route, even if you don’t stop there. You need to be able to drive a train doing speeds of 100mph in thick fog and still know where you are at all times.

What do you love about your job?

Every day as a driver is a new day. It doesn’t matter if you’ve been on the job for four months or 40 years, no two days are ever the same.

I also love the scenery, since joining TPE I’ve been absolutely spoilt for the views of the Pennines. When the sun is shining it’s stunning, like a Bob Ross painting. When it’s misty and the top of the hills disappear into the clouds, it’s like driving through Jurassic Park. It’s an absolutely fascinating route to drive through.

Finally, I love shift work and getting to experience the TPE routes at different times of the day. I could never work in a standard 9-5 pattern again.

Why should more women apply for jobs within rail?

It's a brilliant career! You are treated as equals on the railway, whatever your gender, you get the same fair wage, a fantastic pension, and equal opportunities. Joining the railway was the best decision I've ever made; I hope to continue and have a successful career at TPE for many years to come.

Image credit: TransPennine Express