

Railway Support Services 'skates' a steam locomotive

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Railway Support Services (RSS) has been called in by Crewe-based Locomotive Services Limited to recover LMS 'Black 5' 4-6-0 no. 45231 The Sherwood Forester and its disabled tender, from Llandeilo, about 20 miles north of Swansea, to Port Talbot by rail. The locomotive and tender were then taken to Crewe by road over the weekend of 17th April.

The driver of the locomotive, which was working a private special train, was forced to make an emergency brake application. As a result, the tender wheels locked and the leading pair sustained significant 'flats' thanks to them sliding over the rail for some distance before coming to a halt. This meant that the locomotive could not continue its journey.

The locomotive was fortunately able to be stabled in a nearby spur until rescue could be arranged while the rolling stock was separately recovered.

Andrew Goodman, CEO of RSS was asked by Locomotive Services Limited (LSL) to recover the locomotive, for which the RSS WheelSkate was deployed.

He explains: "This device comprises two pairs of frames, each carried by small wheels, that support a disabled axle with the running wheels lifted a few millimetres above the rail. This enables the vehicle to be recovered to a suitable location for repair.

"RSS has developed the WheelSkate from a basic concept created many years ago by British Railways at Derby. We are usually called on to recover diesel and electric multiple-units that have suffered a transmission failure or other seizure of the axle.

"This is the first time the WheelSkate has been used to recover a steam locomotive."

The recovery involved two of LSL's Class 37 diesel locomotives being deployed to take the disabled 45231, kept in light steam for cylinder lubrication purposes, at a maximum speed of 20mph (5mph over switches and crossings) via a complex 35-mile route mainly via freight-only lines, including the Swansea avoiding line, to Port Talbot.

"From there, we loaded the locomotive and tender on to road transporters to return them to Crewe, where the tender will be repaired," explains Andrew Goodman.

"Because of narrow roads and weight restriction, quite apart from lack of space, the locomotive could not be loaded onto road transport where it failed."

Shortly after this incident, RSS was called to move a failed multiple-unit from Bournemouth to Southampton – the kind of use for which the WheelSkate was designed.

Railway Support Services is a Warwickshire-based specialist business providing 24/7 emergency assistance to rail operating companies, including WheelSkate recovery, re-railing derailed locomotives and rolling stock, specialist road transport for rail vehicles and hire of 08-class diesel shunting locomotives to industry and rail operators.

Photo credit: Andrew Goodman