

# Restored Family Saloon returns to K&ESR in 2023 season preview

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A once popular and now beautifully restored 123-year-old Victorian carriage will be the star of the show at The Kent & East Sussex Railway next month, when it returns to the rails during the Half Term holiday (Saturday 11 – Sunday 19 February, excluding Monday and Friday).

On Saturday 11 February, Carriage No177 the Family Saloon will carry its first paying passengers in over a decade, following a painstaking restoration by the railway's volunteer Carriage and Wagon team.

Built in 1900 by the South Eastern & Chatham Railway at the Ashford works, the Family Saloon was originally designed for use by wealthy Victorian families intending to travel together to destinations outside the reach of their home railway. In fact, it is the kind of carriage that might have hosted the fictional Grantham family from Downton Abbey on their trips around the country or been the setting for Agatha Christie's Poirot to gather his suspects together in a train murder mystery.

In its new role, the Family Saloon will be used for special events on the K&ESR, starting with bird-spotting and story-telling sessions for children during the February Half Term week. It will then be available to hire exclusively for special celebrations and group bookings when the 2023 season formally begins in April. The

saloon carriage can accommodate up to 20 people.

The Family Saloon has been restored to the highest possible standard both inside and out. Thanks to a generous donation of a substantial quantity of paint by specialist company Craftmaster Paints Ltd, who are amongst the K&ESR's longest standing supply partners, the carriage's external livery has been returned to its former glory down to the smallest detail. In addition, internal features such as velvet upholstery and authentic signage have all been meticulously sourced or sympathetically restored and installed by the Carriage and Wagon team.

The Family Saloon first entered service in February 1900 with a separate luggage compartment, featuring double doors at one end; a saloon area; a vestibule and a short corridor leading to a five-seat compartment, plus a WC cubicle on one side of the corridor and another with a wash hand basin opposite. Seven years on, social and transport changes, particularly linked to the advent of the motor car, led to a change of use and layout alterations, when the vehicle was converted to an invalid saloon. It was later sold to the Longmoor Military Railway and finally arrived at Tenterden in 1985. The current layout, as a 'picnic' style open carriage, features side bench seats, sympathetic to the design, which were fitted in 1992 at the start of the current restoration.

Robin Coombes K&ESR general manager, said: "Prior to its withdrawal, the Family Saloon was an exceptionally popular part of the vintage set so we are delighted to finally bring it back into service in time for its birthday next month.

"With its new open style layout and quality finish I have no doubt that it will be just as popular with today's travellers, as well as providing the railway with an innovative new venue for special events, private hires and tour group packages.

"The quality of the restoration is both sympathetic and authentic and I must therefore pay tribute to the dedicated team of volunteers who have delivered such a professional result. We are also extremely grateful to Craftmaster Paints for so generously providing much of the required paint so that we could complete the transformation to the highest possible standard."

Craftmaster Paints' General Manager Adam Brown said: "We are delighted to lend our support to the Kent & East Sussex Railway on this project. As enthusiasts ourselves it is nice to play a small part in such things. We value the long-term custom that we have received from the K&ESR and are always willing to listen to similar proposals from all our customers."

*Photo credit: K&ESR*