

Severn Valley Railway cranks up the guest list for its Spring Steam Gala

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GWR Small Prairie 4555 will be joining the line-up for the Severn Valley Railway's Spring Steam Gala. As the only member of the original 4500 class currently in service, it looks set to be a popular attraction at the event which takes place between 14th and 16th April.

The three-day Gala has a GWR-theme, which means 4555 will fit in very nicely alongside the already-announced visitor 4079 'Pendennis Castle', the SVR-based 4930 'Hagley Hall', 7812 'Erlestoke Manor' and GWR Pannier tank 7714, freshly painted into BR livery. Other members of the home fleet will also appear, including SR 34027 'Taw Valley', freshly repainted into a stunning 'wartime black' livery. The SVR is still in negotiations with a number of owners for a third guest locomotive for its spring event.

Seventy-five of the original 4500s were produced at Swindon between 1906 and 1924, and 4555 was one of the very last batch to be built. It has the distinction of having never been sold for scrap, thanks to its sale in 1965 by British Railways to preservationists who first ran it on the Dart Valley Railway. Designed as a small, mixed-traffic engine, it's well suited to hauling trains along a branch line such as the Severn Valley.

Duncan Ballard, the SVR's head of steam locomotive engineering, said: "We're delighted that 4555's owners, the Dartmouth Steam & River Boat Company, have agreed to it coming to our Gala. It's been on hire at the East Somerset Railway for the past three years, and now that their Large Prairie 4110 looks set to return to service, the Small Prairie can come to us.

"I think it's going to be popular with our footplate crews, because of course, the SVR is already home to another of the class, 4566. This particular loco was withdrawn from service in 2017, but it's worth spending some time viewing it at The Engine House, Highley where it's now on static display, pending overhaul."

Tickets, including money-saving multi-day rovers, for the SVR's Spring Steam Gala are available at svr.co.uk.

Special excursion tickets are also now on sale, for three round trips hauled by 4079 'Pendennis Castle' on Thursday 13th April, the day before the Spring Steam Gala, with a 10% discount for those who've bought Gala tickets as well.

Photo credit: Martin Creese