

Dawn of a new Brighton Belle epoch

Martyn Pring celebrates the restitution of the art deco icon once loved by Olivier – as long as kippers were served

The Brighton Belle Pullman, an Art Deco icon once much admired by Laurence Olivier and fellow West End theatricals, is set to return to the rails as an all-electric luxury dining train this year. Olivier, like other actors who lived in Brighton, was a regular on the train to London, and renowned for taking his right to British Rail's mandarins to save kippers on the breakfast menu in 1972.

His favourite meal of kippers and scrambled eggs remained but, despite desperate attempts to save the train, the railway authorities succeeded in their attempts to kill it off later in the year. The Brighton Belle, which enjoyed its first run on June 29 1934, was eventually withdrawn on April 30 1972.

And that, it seemed, was that. Until later this year when the much-loved railway icon is due to make a dramatic return to the tracks.

The miraculous re-emergence of the Brighton Belle is almost entirely down to the efforts of a team of railway stalwarts who in 2009 teamed up to create the 5-BEL Trust, having secured ownership of six of the original 15 Pullman carriages that had plied the route.

More than a decade – and £6 million in donations – later, final testing of the restored train, consisting initially of four fully revamped carriages, will take place this year. With a fair wind, the trust is confident that it will be back on the rails during 2020 (OK, it could possibly be early 2021), with regular excursion services between London and Brighton and trips – many including fine dining – further afield into the county of Kent and the Garden of England.

There will be some modifications to the train graced by the likes of Olivier and indeed royalty.

In the original incarnation there



Brighton Belle Pullman cars, today reduced to three to accommodate widening girths. Other modern touches will include mobile phone recharging and USB ports beneath the mahogany wooden tables, which will all be covered with white tablecloths, lit with specially made table lamps and graced by china tableware and glass designed specially for the train's renaissance.

"The quality of the accommodation puts today's first-class carriages in the shade, with the restoration of each car individually designed in the style of the period by a different leading British design house," said Gordon Rushton, a trustee of the 5-BEL Trust. "It was – and will be again – the leading icon of the art deco period."

The work on the train has been carried out largely by craftsmen at Barrow Hill and Shirebrook in

BACK TO THE FUTURE

The Brighton Belle, above, is returning; the carriages' art deco interior, left; Laurence Olivier, below

wealthy train enthusiast benefactors and an international fundraising operation. For devotees, the Brighton Belle is second only to the Flying Scotsman in the affections of British train lovers.

"Our aim is to have this wonderful train running on the mainline for many years so that future generations can enjoy an authentic Thirties travel experience," said Denis Dunstone, chairman of the 5-BEL Trust and originator of the project.

The re-emergence of the Brighton Belle will no doubt come as welcome news to long-suffering users of Southern's regular London-to-Brighton service, and they may well be tempted to splash out on the sumptuous art deco option from time to time.

Olivier would also have been delighted. The train's owners have made a firm promise that on the breakfast menu there will most certainly be kippers.

For more information on the Brighton Belle and forthcoming trips, visit brightonbelle.com

Martyn Pring's *Luxury Railway Travel: A Social and Business History* (RRP £35) is available for £30 from Telegraph Books (0844 871 1514;

