



SO YOU WANT TO BE THE ON THE FOOTPLATE?

SEVERN VALLEY RAILWAY MOTIVE POWER
DEPARTMENT

GUIDE TO BECOMING A FIREMAN AND A DRIVER



Volunteer Liaison Office (01299) 401776 – not after 9pm

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Introduction

If you are reading this guide, you are probably wondering if you really can achieve the childhood dream of becoming a steam locomotive driver, but you probably also need a few answers to questions to help you decide if it is really for you. This guide helps to answer some of the more common questions, such as:

- Can I really get to become a steam locomotive driver?
- What sort of commitment does it require?
- Do I need any special skills?
- Do I need to buy any equipment?
- Will I need to pay for training?

This leaflet should give you enough information to allow you to take the next step to speak to us and enquire about volunteering – and to encourage you to read on, the answer to the first question really is yes!

The route to driver

If you know a lot or hardly anything about a steam locomotive, you'll appreciate that driving one of them is far from simple. The training to become a driver takes a number of years, but you will pass through a number of different grades and get additional responsibility as you progress. You will also gain footplate experience as you go, so that you can enjoy the real pleasure of being on a steam locomotive as you learn.

The most conventional route to driver is given below. We've added approximate timescales, which are just to give you an idea of the durations involved; some people will progress faster, some slower, and it depends on a number of factors such as ability, aptitude, commitment and vacancies higher up the chain.

Cleaner

Everyone starts here. The cleaners prepare locomotives for duty and dispose of them after work, in between times they assist with locomotive maintenance and overhaul. After a short period cleaners can go on the roster, committing to two regular weekend turns per month. We like you to be on the roster to progress above this level. Cleaner's duties start around 7am and often don't finish until 7pm.

Lighting Up Cleaner (takes typically 1-2 years)

The Lighting Up Cleaner is, as the name suggests, the person that lights the locomotive up and starts getting it ready for duty before the crew arrives. You have to have a medical to get to this stage and will undergo your first formal training with an exam. You will also learn about shunting and coupling up at this point.

Passed Cleaner (takes typically 2-4 years after becoming passed to light up)

Don't be deceived by the name – a passed cleaner means fireman! To be selected for the year-long firing course you will have impressed the department managers that you are made of the right stuff for the footplate. The training is a mixture of classroom theory, practical instruction and formal assessments. You will still be rostered as a cleaner once a month at this stage, but you will also be rostered once a month as the spare fireman, to assist on shed and undertake any additional firing duties required. You will be able to volunteer to undertake any additional firing turns, such as the mid-week timetabled services or special trains.

Fireman (typically 3-5 years after becoming a Passed Cleaner)

Once promoted to this grade you will be rostered as a fireman and be a part of the regular footplate link that provides the steam locomotive crews for most of our weekend services.

Passed Fireman (typically 3-5 years after being promoted to Fireman)

Again don't be fooled by the title – a Passed Fireman is a steam locomotive Driver! You will really have impressed the department management to get onto the year-long driving course. Again the course is a mixture of classroom theory, practical instruction and formal assessment.

Having passed the course, you will still be rostered as a Fireman but now eligible to volunteer for additional driving turns including the mid-week timetabled services or special trains.

Driver (typically 3-5 years after becoming a Passed Fireman)

10 – 15 years after starting you can reach the pinnacle and become a Severn Valley top link driver.

Traction Inspectors

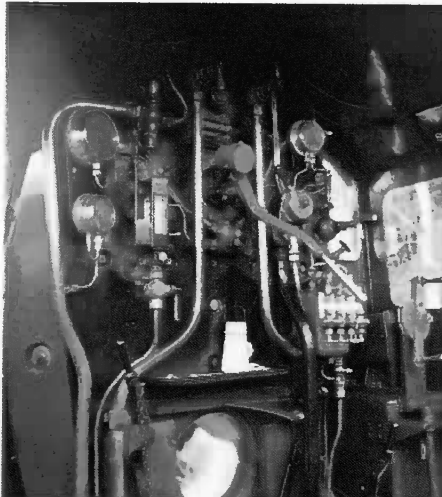
All of our courses are trained and assessed "in house" by our own team of trainers and inspectors. There are opportunities for senior drivers to take on such roles to pass on knowledge and best practice to train our future footplatemen.

Along the Way

There a number of other skills you can acquire along the way to becoming a driver, including JCB driver (for coaling the locomotives), locomotive fitter, Duty Shed Master, Diesel Shunter driver and many more. You are also free to volunteer in the railway's other departments.

Other opportunities

Not everyone is suited to the footplate role and not everyone is able to commit the time, but there are still plenty of ways to get involved and we have the ability to reward hard work in the department with the opportunity for footplate rides.



What is expected from me?

Where will I be based?

You can volunteer to be based at either Bewdley or Bridgnorth, but we will expect you to undertake turns at both locations as requested. Occasionally, footplate turns can commence anywhere along the line.

How often do I need to attend?

There is no minimum or maximum number of days required (although we do have to comply with the safe working time regulations). To progress to Lighting Up cleaner, the first stage on the route to the footplate, you will need to commit to two regular weekend days per month. Generally, you will need to be available to work either Saturdays, Sundays or both, between 7am and 7pm.

What do I need to bring with me?

As a first step you will need to provide your own safety boots and old clothes or overalls. As you progress, you will be able to acquire other items of equipment and railway publications, some supplied by the Company. The department operates a dress code for footplate duties.

How fit do I need to be?

To progress to footplate duties you will need to undertake a Severn Valley Railway medical. You need to be reasonably fit and healthy to undertake most of the work we do. A fireman can shovel 2 tonnes of coal in a day, as well as coupling and uncoupling the locomotive several times in a shift – take some time to watch one of our crews at work during the turnaround at Bridgnorth or Kidderminster to see what is involved. You probably know your own limits better than anyone.

Is there an age limit?

We take volunteers as young as 14 yrs and have a maximum age of 75 for safety critical duties. We don't allow people less than 16 yrs to undertake any safety critical work and the minimum age for firing is 18 yrs and for driving is 21 yrs. If you are over 50, you will need to think carefully before committing to the footplate route – you won't be the first though, so do speak to us if you think your age is just a number!

Do I need any special skills

Generally we teach you everything you will need to know, although we always welcome any new skills into the department. So long as you are prepared to learn, knowing nothing about what we do should not hold you back.

A Final Word

Although the timescales can appear daunting, it really is possible for you to become a fully qualified steam locomotive driver on the Severn Valley Railway – if you are in any doubt about it, go and ask one of our crews how much they enjoy it! You'll be joining one of the country's foremost heritage railways and working with like-minded people to deliver a top-quality service. And friendships made with us can last a lifetime.

The next step

If you're ready to take the next step then you will need to formally enquire through the volunteer liaison office (see front page for details). If you're still unsure – just speak to any of our footplate crews or enquire at Bridgnorth or Bewdley sheds for more information.