

Black Powder Trains

An article by **Bob Stevens**

While perusing a 1957 copy of *British Rail London Midland Operating Area (Central Division) Loads of Freight Trains*, and coupled with my interest in Black Powder, the following caught my eye.

“Gunpowder vans (loaded or empty) which are fully fitted (with vacuum brakes) have screw couplings or instanter couplings in the short position, bolted springs and oil axle boxes may be conveyed on Class C Express Freight Trains and may also travel in the fully fitted portion of Class D Express Freight Trains.

Gunpowder vans not fitted with the vacuum brake or pipe, but fitted with oil axle boxes may be conveyed on Class D Express Freight Trains as follows;-

Empty vehicles – In any position in the loose coupled portion of the train

Loaded vehicles – Attached next to the fitted portion of the train. A screw coupling or instanter coupling in the short position must be used to attach gunpowder vans to the fitted portion”.

I must confess that the carriage of gunpowder by British Rail express freight trains in ten or twelve ton, four wheeled vehicles at up to 50 mph had never occurred to me before. It certainly didn't while I was standing on overbridges watching them rocking and rolling beneath me, or on platform ends as they flashed past three feet away, train spotting.

Perhaps we should count ourselves fortunate that we only have twenty ton containers of Nuclear Waste travelling through our stations at express speeds these days or perhaps not!

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