The ups and downs of buying a model steam locomotive: Part 2, The Steaming - Roger Stephen

This photo belies Princess Marina's dented boiler cladding and scruffy paintwork! However, she does have some nice detailing such as engine and tender brakes, hand-rails, dummy sand boxes and dummy steam pipes on the smokebox.

Last time we heard about buying and tinkering with my Princess Marina 3½" gauge 2-6-0 tender locomotive. Having sorted out a few problems I was encouraged to steam her to find out what would happen. For this first steaming I set her up in the garden standing on her axle box spring pins so that the wheels were free to go round and the suspension springs were properly compressed.

Firing Tony Mason's Jeanie Deans the previous day was a great help because it gave me a good idea how much wood and coal to use, as well as how long the process might take. Firing up the Princess proved to be pretty straightforward except that the fire hole is so small it's quite tricky getting coal in. I used my foot-pump powered auxiliary blower device (á la pre-war LBSC) and it worked a treat, although foot-pumping whilst feeding coal in is a bit like rubbing your tummy and patting your head at the same time. From putting a match to the wood it took just over ten minutes before the loco blower started to work and from there the fire took off and steam pressure came up quickly. One safety valve opened at an indicated pressure of about 50 psi but I didn't feel inclined to adjust it because I didn't trust the calibration of the pressure gauge yet (David Saunders has since checked the gauge for me). At least a safety valve did open!

With the drain cocks open I put her in full forward gear, opened the regulator and .....… nothing happened! I grabbed a wheel and coaxed it round by hand: with a shower of water out of the chimney and drain cocks she was away and seemed to run reasonably happily. Shut the regulator, open it again, and this time she started OK on her own. Having played with her in forward gear for a while I tried reducing the cut-off and she stopped dead! Evidently she likes full gear at the moment.

What about the lubricator: is it working? When she was running, the mechanical lubricator seemed to stick at the start of every pumping stroke and then go on round, so I will have to have a look at that to find out why. I thought some oil was getting through but I did not find those little spots of oil which you see all over the boiler cladding on the club Simplex!

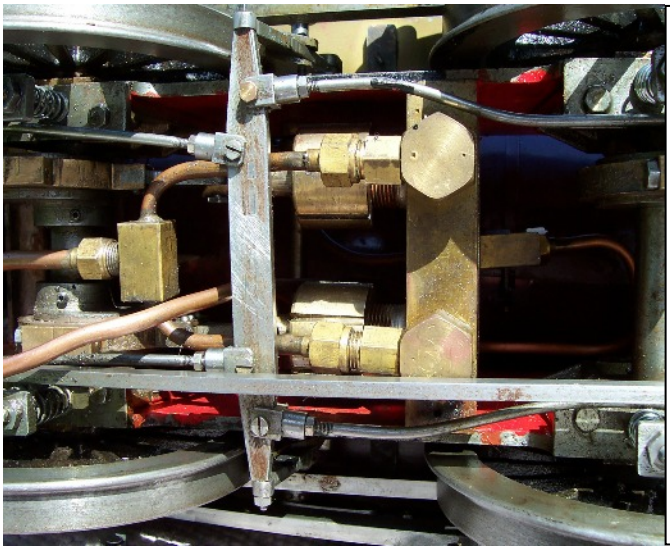
By this time I thought I ought to check the water level. Plenty there, although when she was running so much water was pouring out around the axle feed pumps I don't think they were getting much into the boiler! I will have a look at them too. I also found that when I opened the bypass the tender tank filled with steam, indicating that a check valve was still not working properly. Fortunately, the tender hand pump seemed to work OK.

I wonder if she will run backwards? Into full reverse gear, open the regulator and .....nothing happened again! Grab a wheel, etc, and away she went. Enough of that; we are supposed to be going forwards so into full forward gear again. She needed a little coaxing again but then ran quite nicely. After about half an hour I felt that the water level was getting a bit low and I was starting to doubt whether the tender hand pump was working any more, so I decided to let the fire go out and pack up before anything nasty happened.

Overall I felt quite elated and more than a little relieved because I now knew that my Princess Marina does actually work. She may not have the smoothness of Tony's Durlston Manor but I suspect she may loosen up and run a bit better after a few circuits of the track. So, on the roller-coaster ride of buying and owning a model steam locomotive I suppose I had just had the highest 'up' - and there was nowhere to go now but down!

The next day I took Princess Marina's axle pumps to pieces and discovered the gland nuts were slack and there was no packing of any kind in the pump glands! The pump rams do not have seals and were a rather slack fit in the bores - hence the pumps could not overcome boiler pressure and the water simply squirted out from the gland nuts. I began by packing the glands with graphite yarn (as specified by LBSC) and hoped that would do the trick, but more of this in next month's Gazette.

To be continued…..



Here you can see the twin axle driven pumps and split feed pipe hiding behind a brake beam. There was no packing in the pump glands! To the right of the pump body/frame stretcher block you can just see the pipe bracket whose fixing screw holes were drilled into the pump water passages.