

After a busy August session with our jolly boiler testers Den and Roger, only one locomotive had failed. My 3.5" gauge 'Hiellan Lassie' stubbornly refused to raise steam; we could not even get past the starting line! It was 4 years since the locomotive had run so I guessed the usual 'tube brush-through', 'suck with 'Henry'' and squirt with the compressor were simply not good enough.

After the testers left I dropped the grate and with the help of a powerful lamp started to dig around the firebox. Well, these Gresley-Thompson Pacifics have a shelf either side of the firebox which leads down from the firebox door all the way up to a tubeplate way down the boiler, so I shone the lamp into the firebox and started to prod around. Lo and behold large quantities of part burnt coal tumbled out. The coal had hardly caught, never really alight – see the picture. I biffed the lot and replaced it with coal the next size down, kindly supplied by Roger. This size of coal is known amongst reputable coal merchants as 'peas' and Roger (being Roger) kindly supplied some. I also cleaned the tubes again, this time using a brush soaked with a mixture of paraffin and engine oil. Finally a good blow through using my compressor. The testers returned and the problem was solved, the fire glowed quickly with working pressure achieved in minutes, passing both hydraulic and steam tests.

Tony Mason (cleaner)

