

Handbook for Railway Steam Locomotive Enginememen

By British Transport Commission

A hard backed book of 196 pages, published in 1957 as a training book for use within the industry.

Reviewed by Tony Ashgrove

Every now and again a real Gem comes your way, I do believe this is one. As the name suggests, this is not a book available to the public, it is written by the rail industry to assist in the training of those starting at the bottom of the ladder with the ambition to rise through the ranks of Engine Cleaners, to Fireman then onto Driver. This book forms part of the training program, this gives you an inside view of what is required to attain the position of Driver.

The book has high quality-coloured diagrams, depicting the various states of steam, air, water and oil, so the reader can fully understand what is happening on the footplate.

The responsibilities of each member are listed in great detail as to jobs they are responsible for, the checks they must make prior to, during and after the arrive at their destination. The driver in particular has to have a full set of lights and is responsible for displaying them on the train, no less than 12 detonators, two red flags and tools mandated by the Motive Power Superintendent. He has to be familiar with the route, know of any track problems and remedial actions that must be completed on any malfunctioning items prior to leaving the Engine Shed.

The book then goes through the workings of the locomotive in order, starting with firing, the physics of energy conversion from the coal, getting the correct air mix in the firebox, transferring the heat into power, boiler types, superheaters, cleaning, grates, arches, safety valves, regulators, valves, injectors etc. then onto valves, pistons and valve gear, then to lubrication and braking systems and finally Automatic Train Controls.

A section lists the rules the driver needs to be familiar with and the topics those rules cover. At the end of some of the sections are detailed questions with answers to ensure full understanding.

As I mentioned at the start, this is a little Gem, anyone with a small-scale locomotive, or anyone wanting to aspire to driving on a Preserved Railway this is a book you MUST READ, the detail is astounding and precise, as this was the mandatory training for EVERY BR driver.

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Tony Ashgrove, April 2026

