



4 VEP 3417 'Gordon Pettitt' Returns To London Waterloo!

29th January 2024

The Southern Electric Traction Group & and The Bluebell Railway are proud to have brought No. 3417 'Gordon Pettitt' back to the mainline, alongside GB Railfreight, South Western Railway & Network Rail, to take part in a very special event at London Waterloo on Saturday 27th January 2024. Since the Bluebell Railway purchased this unique EMU in 2009, the SETG has been undertaking a steady and thorough mechanical and cosmetic restoration to bring this piece of Southern Region history back to its former glory.



The return, marking the completion of 3417's restoration to passenger carrying standards, marks the next stage in its preservation career and the start of the next phase of its restoration: mainline passenger service. We were also honoured to welcome Gordon Pettitt and his family, along with various guests of the railway industry, press, supporters and friends to London Waterloo to witness 3417's mainline return. Without the driving force of Gordon's passion,

determination, and invaluable advice and knowledge (along with the help and support of many of Gordon's former work colleagues and associates) this project would have not reached the point where we are today.



The SETG & Bluebell Railway intend to see passengers ride aboard 3417 in 2024 – whilst not in mainline service (yet), the unit will once again be able to transit via the national network to visit preserved lines.

Steve Upton, SETG Spokesman:

"This is a day we've worked patiently towards for years. The SETG is a small group, working on a niche project that has gone largely unnoticed by the wider enthusiast community – after all, an electric unit doesn't have the glamour of a Deltic, The Flying Scotsman or even a rake of Pullman coaches. We are restoring a small part of the working railway that went unremarked and unsung for decades. The efforts that our team have put in are beyond heroic and the project still has a massive amount yet to achieve. This is just the start for 3417's second career."

Paul Churchman, Chairman Of The Bluebell Railway:

"It is a great day that we are seeing 3417 return to the mainline. The years of restoration undertaken by the SETG are amazing and the effort and dedication of the team is something that everyone should be proud of. There is no better way to celebrate this than by also having Gordon and his family at Waterloo on the 27th of January. Gordon's passion and commitment

to the Bluebell is still as strong as ever and his role as President provides guidance and assists in many areas.”

Claire Mann, Managing Director Of South Western Railway:

“Together with our colleagues from across the railway family, we’re so pleased to welcome Gordon and his family to London Waterloo and to see this wonderful train back on the mainline for this special event. “It has taken a huge amount of effort to get to this moment, and the volunteers of the SETG and Bluebell Railway must be very proud of their achievements.”

The Class 423 VEP (or “4-VEP”) is an electric multiple unit (EMU) that operated on the British railway network. The “4” in its designation represents the number of coaches and “VEP” stands for “Vestibule Electric Pneumatic” due to its pneumatic brakes. These trains were primarily used in the Southern Region of British Railways and were a part of the Mark 1 family of EMUs. 4 VEP No. 3417 (originally numbered 7717) was ordered by British Rail in 1965, as part of an initial order of 20 units to replace steam traction on the Southern Region. In total, 194 units were built between 1967 to 1975.



These units would operate throughout the Southern Region until being finally withdrawn from mainline services in 2005. These units served various commuter routes, particularly around London and the Southeast of England. The Class 423 trains were known for their distinctive design, featuring compartment-style seating and being used for suburban and regional services.



3417 was named ‘Gordon Pettitt’ after the former General Manager of the Southern Region of British Rail before it was transferred to the ownership of The Bluebell Railway in 2009. Since then, 3417 has been under the stewardship and restored by the dedicated SETG team (Southern Electric Traction Group), led by Chief Engineer Chris Buckland, who has overseen the effort to return the unit to service.

The unit is currently stabled at Strawberry Hill Depot in South West London. 3417 will become the only surviving Class 423 VEP to be mainline certified. A unique part of railway history and railway preservation.

The SETG launched an ongoing appeal to raise funds for the next stage of the unit’s restoration in December 2023: details can be found online at <https://www.gofundme.com/f/Returning-3417-to-the-Mainline>