

Brass, Marquetry, Trimming, & More: A Car 54 Progress Report

The main structure of the car is nearly complete, with the north end in place and the south end in process of construction. The roof hoops have been refurbished and secured in position. The water tank for the lavatory at the north end has been finally fitted after testing and lagging to prevent condensation forming. A start has been made on fitting the roof boards.

The complex ends of the vehicle were contracted out, but since the last ones were produced, the supplier has lost a facility, meaning that difficulties were encountered with the machining. Paul Giles, one of our contracted woodworkers, completed the necessary machining in-house.



Repairs to the sides have been progressing and the timber parts of the sidelight and toplight frames have been fitted. We are investigating the fitting of double-glazed units to the sidelights in an effort to reduce the condensation that plagues these vehicles.

The toplight brass frames have been refurbished and polished, and we are experimenting with a hard wax protective finish instead of lacquer to help prevent tarnishing. The wax can be applied in-house at a future date, which removes the need for lacquering the frames in advance. The frames are being glazed using laminated glass and butyl putty. This is rather an involved process that requires the edges of the glass to be sealed with aluminium tape to stop the oil from the putty travelling up between the two pieces of glass.

The skirt rails have been replaced ready for the ply panels to be fitted to the sides. The sizes of these panels will have to be determined with regard to the aluminium sheeting, which will cover them so that the joins do not coincide. The sizes of the aluminium sheets on Car 64 and "Fingall" have been measured as a guide for those on Car 54.

As we have been unsuccessful in our efforts to recruit a mechanical fitter dedicated to working on Car 54, the refurbishment and production of items such as the gangway end plates, handbrake, vacuum brakes, steam heat, and bogies is now largely being done by volunteers under the guidance of staff. This system is being managed by the use of work sheets detailing what needs to be done.

The production of seat backs progresses apace, with our trimmers being able to increase their skill levels on this type of complicated work. Initially, it was thought that it would be necessary to contract out the seat bases. This solution would not have been ideal as there would have been the risk of mismatches between seat cushion and seat back, even if we could have found a company capable of doing the job. Instead,



three of our volunteer trimmers who were about to look for part-time work have contracted with the project to produce seat cushions under the guidance and quality control of trimming team leader Stephen Bigg. Good progress is now being made with these seat bases.

We had anticipated that the original marquetry, which has suffered some damage during changes of ownership over the years, would be repaired by a contractor who had served us well during the restoration of previous Pullman cars. Again, our plans did not work out. We asked that the marquetry be removed from the disintegrating backing boards and fixed to new ply ones, but this was deemed not possible. Instead, it was suggested that the old marquetry be replaced with new an unacceptable solution as our restoration stand; Paul Giles assembling part of the south visible signs of repair. end of Car 54.

Kuristo Demans, the other of our two contracted woodworkers, has had some experience in the repair of marquetry, and following a demonstration of his expertise, he has been detailed to do the necessary repairs. One of the difficulties with these old marquetry panels is that it seems that a new adhesive was used instead of the usual old-fashioned Scotch glue, which means that the marquetry cannot be so easily removed from its backing by heat or soaking. He has been carefully removing the old backing boards with a router, then applying the marquetry to new panels. The repaired panels will be finished with French polish by Kuristo, for which the LBSC fruit van No. 270 has been temporarily equipped to provide a suitable facility while it is receiving work to its brakes at the north end of E road.

Amongst other work which is being undertaken, one of the volunteers is experimenting with casting the call button housings in resin. A set of table brackets is being cast, and the fabrication of new copper roof end caps is being discussed with a potential contractor.

Finally, thanks must go to Derrick Warner, who is a terrific help with both his knowledge and his regular hands-on assistance with the project.

By John Knight & Sheina Foulkes