

There may be trouble ahead... Inside the cab of observation coach No 975025 *Caroline* near West Ham on 14 September 2006. A Class 357 Electrostar No 357219 passes while en route to Fenchurch Street from Shoeburyness. Brian Morrison

The psychology of train driving

Richard Maclennan reviews the challenges facing the men and women in the cab

The role of train driver is an ever evolving one. The complexity of the operational railway is growing, with the advent of technology such as GSM-R mobile communication, Driver Advisory Systems, European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS) and in the not-too-distant future Automatic Train Operation. The skills of drivers must evolve in line with these new challenges.

When I first joined the industry it was my privilege to work with drivers who had started their careers in the 1930s and 40s. The only relevant selection criteria back then were good eyesight and the ability to shovel several tons of coal, day in and day out. The railway was all about hard manual labour, team work and a joined up system where men and machine bonded to bring out the best (and at times worst) of each other.

Boredom and repetition were unknown. Every day and every trip was different, with the crew often struggling to raise steam, make time and stop heavy un-braked freight trains (even at the relatively slow speeds of the day).

A sense of belonging and team work was thus engendered. This fostered a support network which came in handy when things went wrong or life's ups and downs cast their shadow over any member of the railway family. Humour, a friendly arm around the shoulder or some fatherly advice dealt with most things. If matters were of a more serious nature then an approachable, wise and worldly manager or union representative would soon help get

life back on an even keel. The study of human behaviour and chain of care were actions and not concepts. Life seemed simple and orderly.

All that has changed. Revised staffing arrangements mean that the driver is now alone in the cab. Resignalling means trains now sweep past concrete bunkers and the friendly wave from the footplate to the bobby or vice versa is no more. Train driving is now an isolated profession.

Pressure

A spate of accidents at the turn of the century turned the spotlight on to the driving cab.

In my view one of the things that Ladbroke Grove and the other accidents around that time should have prompted us to do was to review the level and appropriateness of the direct supervision and management that drivers receive. But instead of looking at management, we focused on even more



Class 221 driver simulator at Crewe. Brian Morrison