

Helensburgh's Electric Trains

1960 - Class 303



The North Glasgow electrification in 1960 heralded the introduction of mainline electric train services in Scotland – a few industrial sites already had their own private electric railways. Unfortunately the new mainline trains lasted for only a few months, when they had to be withdrawn because of transformer explosions. The voltage in tunnels (6,250) was quite different from that above ground (25,000), and the transformers were unable to cope with the change from one voltage to another. The Class 303 trains were built by Pressed Steel at Linwood near Paisley and were reintroduced in

1961. Because of the colour in which they were painted they were nicknamed the "Blue Trains". They ultimately proved very reliable, remaining in service until 2002 - their demise was partly delayed by the problems with the introduction of Class 334 trains. The poster on the left was painted by Terence Cuneo as part of the publicity for the introduction of the "Blue Trains" and shows a Helensburgh-bound train passing Bowling harbour.

Each unit consisted of 3 coaches, with the two at either end being identical; this pattern has been followed by all subsequent Helensburgh electric train classes. As designed, they had wrap-round windows for the driver's cab, a guard's van and no corridor between coaches. Over the years many modifications took place, with the result that the wrap-round windows and guard's van both disappeared, and connecting corridors were introduced. Likewise the external colour scheme was changed several times.

1967 - Class 311

These trains were virtually identical both inside and outside to the class 303 trains; in fact one of the main differences was that they had fluorescent lighting. They were built for service on the newly electrified routes on the south side of the Clyde running out of Glasgow Central, but after a while they appeared on the north side as well. Because Pressed Steel had closed down, these trains were built by Cravens of Sheffield. There were only 19 units produced, as opposed to 91 for the Class 303. They were withdrawn from passenger service in the 1990s. Because they were so similar to Class 303 no separate picture of one is shown.

1979 - Class 314

These trains were built at British Rail Engineering Ltd (BREL) in York. After the introduction of the Class 334 trains in 2002, Class 314 trains ceased running to Helensburgh, but they still run out of Glasgow Central high-level on a variety of services, such as the Cathcart Circle – see photo on the right.



1986 - Class 318

Having been built at British Rail Engineering Ltd (BREL) in York, this class had been in service since 1986 on the services to Gourock and Ayr from Glasgow Central high-level. When Class 334 trains were introduced on these services in 2002, some class 318 trains became surplus to requirements and so were transferred to the North Clyde services. Between 2005 and 2007 they



underwent a refurbishment which included the removal of the inter-unit gangway connection; this considerably altered their external appearance when viewed head-on, as can be seen from the photos above. They can often be seen running in tandem with Class 320 sets.

1990 - Class 320

Following their introduction, these trains provided the bulk of services to Helensburgh. They were also built at BREL in York. However in 2010 the line between Drumgelloch and Bathgate was re-opened; it had been closed to passengers in 1956 and to freight in 1982, with the track subsequently lifted. The re-opening meant that most trains from Helensburgh Central started to run right through to Edinburgh Waverley. At that



time class 320 trains had a top speed of 75mph which was too low for the new route and so they were largely superseded by the faster class 334 trains which had a top speed of 90mph. Subsequent modifications raised the top speed of class 320 trains to 90mph. See photo above.



2002 - Class 334 (Juniper class)

These trains were built by Alstom in Birmingham in 2000 but, because of teething problems, only came into service two years later. With the exception of class 318 trains (which have only ever been used on a small number of Helensburgh services) they were the first electric trains for the Helensburgh route to be built with toilets from the outset; the earlier classes had had toilets added during rebuilds. Since the introduction of services through to

Edinburgh in 2010 this is now the most frequently seen class of electric train in Helensburgh. See photo above.

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