

# **Tour celebrates a milestone in UK railway preservation history**

**A railway tour reached Edinburgh on Saturday marking a milestone moment in UK railway preservation history.**

This mainline tour – the Pilgrim Centurion – was the 100th to use the locomotives owned by The Class 50 Alliance, a volunteer run preservation group. The name is a nod to the first outing of the group in November 1996 when 50031 Hood travelled from London to Plymouth via Birmingham with The Pilgrim Hoover. The class of locomotive has a fan which sounds like a vacuum cleaner.

The Alliance owns and maintains the locomotives, and The Fifty Fund supports the work of the Alliance through fundraising and promoting the locomotives and their operation.



The class 50 Locomotives were introduced in the late 1960s to power the express trains from London to Glasgow and Edinburgh before electrification reached the Scottish cities. Their introduction on the route resulted in frequent double heading to make the most of their 100mph top speed and this greatly reduced journey times for passengers. The tour took in large parts of this route and is a nod to their original work.

The origins of the group began in 1989 when a small group of dedicated followers of this popular locomotive (which were operational under British Rail ownership between 1968 – 1994) realised that the end was nigh with the introduction of more modern and reliable trains.

Next stop (and destination) for the remaining number from the original build of class 50 locomotives was the scrapheap and the cutter's torch. So, The Fifty Fund was formed to fundraise with the goal to purchase a locomotive for preservation. In 1991 a cheque was handed over to British Rail for a total of

£16,500 and 50035 Ark Royal was then in the ownership of the fund.

A merger with another class 50 preservation group, Project Defiance in 2006, resulted in the creation of The Class 50 Alliance. The Fifty Fund name remains as the fundraising arm of the organisation whereas the Class 50 Alliance is responsible for the operation of the locomotives.



Based at The Severn Valley Railway in Worcestershire since 1992, the group now have six examples of the class under their ownership.

These locomotives were:

- i 50007 Hercules
- i 50031 Hood
- i 50033 Glorious
- i 50035 Ark Royal
- i 50044 Exeter

▪ i 50049 Defiance.

A spokesperson for The Class 50 Alliance said: “We have a good number of regular working volunteers who’ve had a large range of skills (and not all of them have a railway background) that regularly give their time and expertise for free.

“Many of the volunteers travel great distances from home to help on site at Kidderminster, our home throughout the year, rain or shine.

“We are fortunate to be able to call the Severn Valley Railway our home depot, with access to state of the art maintenance facilities. This has enabled us to maintain and improve our fleet throughout the years.

“In fact the locomotives are in a better condition than in the days of British Rail.

“We won a Heritage Railway Award in 2020 for diesel preservation along with a highly respected reputation in railway heritage, our volunteers often give advice to other class 50 preservation groups.

“There are 18 class 50 locomotives in preservation around the UK.

“With a huge following all over the UK class 50s are a popular locomotive with enthusiasts, be it at diesel galas or railtours as hundreds of people are always at stations or line-side to capture the moment on their cameras.

“Seeing the pure joy the locomotives bring to so many people is always heartwarming to the hard working volunteers past and present, whose dedicated driving force to ensure the safeguarding and preservation of these wonderful locomotives for future generations to enjoy, is their ideal destination.”