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*The Most Luxurious Train in the World*



**ROVOS RAIL**

## THE BOILER ROOM

The real Pride of Africa is the collection of glorious locomotives all named after Vos family members and each one a sight to stir the senses of any rail enthusiast. There's a story behind each Rovos Rail locomotive, its acquisition and restoration, and each one has its own distinctive character and charm.

The oldest engine in the stable is also the smallest and still sees occasional use, being one of the oldest main-line working locomotives in the world.

A Class 6 locomotive, 439 TIFFANY was built by Dubs & Co. of Scotland in 1893 for the Cape Government Railway. With a 4-6-0 wheel arrangement, these 76 ton locomotives were originally used on main line trains from Johannesburg to Cape Town. Many were rebuilt with Belpaire firebox type boilers, as 439 now carries, which were more efficient than the original round top firebox type.

TIFFANY was used for shunting in later years and on being withdrawn from service was cosmetically restored and placed as a monument on Winburg station in the Free State. Rohan spotted her on his travels and it was love at first sight. He was attracted by her classic steam locomotive lines and purchased her in 1987. Dunns Locomotive works in Witbank undertook the initial task of returning the locomotive to the rails and with the original Rovos Rail workshops being close by, Rovos staff undertook the painstaking cosmetic refurbishment. It was the first locomotive to be painted in the now familiar Rovos green; an automotive paint thus its excellent finish.

Rovos Rail has three 19D class locomotives. They were South African Railway (SAR) general purpose locomotives which were suitable for all but the most lightly laid lines and were thus widespread throughout the system. A total of 235 were built by five different builders in eight batches between 1937 and 1948. Weighing in at 132 tons, they were the final development of the 19 Class series and nicknamed 'Dollies' after the class derivation.

All three locomotives are equipped with high-capacity 'Vanderbilt' or 'torpedo' tenders originally fitted to the 1948 North British batch. These contain more coal and water than the originals fitted to the Borsig built locomotives and greatly increase the working range. They were popular locomotives and a number were sold to industrial users following their SAR careers. In addition, Rhodesian Railways purchased 21 from Henschel; six were built for the Benguela Railway and six for industrial users, two in Zambia and four in Rhodesia.

The first Class 19D locomotive acquired was 2702 BIANCA built by Borsig in 1938. She was purchased in 1986 from Loewenthal's Scrap Metal. Dunn's Locomotive in Witbank was commissioned to return the 50-year-old workhorse to running condition. Rovos Rail staff then completed cosmetic improvements, including a superb paint job, making Rovos Rail's first loco a beautiful sight.

2701 BRENDA with, coincidentally, a number just one digit away from BIANCA, was one of a batch of 40 built by Borsig of Germany in 1937, works number 14752. After withdrawal from service she was sold to Chick's Scrap Metal and bought by Rovos Rail while staged at Volksrust in Natal. She was restored at the Witbank workshops during the early days.

Rohan had had his eye on 3360 SHAUN, since he first saw it standing on the scrap line at Witbank, way back in 1986. A photograph taken in those early days featured son Shaun standing on top of the smoke stack. The engine was overhauled by Rovos Rail personnel in Witbank. Loco 3360 was one of a batch of 50 built by the North British Locomotive Company in Scotland in 1948, works number 26080. The locomotive was destined to go the same way as the other 19 Ds when Rohan purchased it from the Witbank scrap line in December 1986 and sent it to Dunns Locomotive works for restoration.

Rovos Rail also has five Class 25NC locomotives. The 25NC locomotives were the final main line tender engines built for SAR and were some of the most modern in the world. They were built by Henschel of Germany and North British Locomotive Company of Scotland between 1953 and 1954. With a weight of 225 tons, they are truly Giants of Steam. Ninety of the class were built as Class 25C condensing locomotives, where exhaust steam was returned to the tender and cooled back to water, which was useful on the dry sections through the Karoo. Fifty mechanically similar examples were built without the condensing system and classified Class 25NC.

However, the condensing equipment proved expensive to maintain and following the introduction of electric and diesel units on the Class 25's major routes, they were converted to Class 25NCs. These locomotives could be recognised by the long low semi-circular water tank on the tender, the original cast frame of the condensing tenders having been used. They were colloquially known as 'worshund' or 'sausage dog' tenders. The original Class 25NC have the more normal looking 'box' tender. The converted tenders have proved to be very useful in ensuring the maximum possible range although they do nothing for the aesthetics of the locomotives.

3484 MARJORIE was built by North British Locomotive Company of Scotland in 1953, works number 27344 as a Class 25, later being converted to Class 25NC specification and worked on heavy haulage, finishing her service life at Warrenton. One of a large number of the class dumped at the old loco depot, 3484 was one of three bought by Rovos Rail and hauled to its Capital Park depot. 3484 was restored as an oil-burning locomotive with extensive restoration required to bring her back into working order, as many fittings were missing or damaged. The conversion has increased its potential range to 1 400 km before needing to refuel - more than four times the coal-burning loco range. She re-entered active service when a bottle of champagne was cracked over her 'bows' by Rohan's mother Marjorie at the Capital Park opening in May 1999.

3442 ANTHEA was built by Henschel of Germany in 1953, works number 28761, as a Class 25NC, and worked on heavy haulage, also finishing her service life at Warrenton. After extensive work she was restored as a coal-burning locomotive and re-entered traffic in May 2007. Her first revenue earning trip was a steam safari to Victoria Falls and back. Quite a baptism of fire.

3533 KING ZOG was built by the North British Locomotive Company of Scotland in 1954, works number 27393, as a Class 25, later being converted to Class 25NC specification. It worked on heavy haulage, finishing its service life at Beaconsfield Loco Depot, Kimberley. The restoration project was straightforward and by dint of hard work KING ZOG was commissioned into service in late 2008. In keeping with Rovos rail policy, it was named after Vos family members, in this case Rohan's faithful Dalmatian. (For history buffs, King Zog was the King of Albania before World War II. On 7 April 1939 the Italians invaded Albania and he and his Queen fled, never to return.)

In 2008 two further 25NC locomotives, 3440 and 3480, were purchased from scrap dealers at Beaconsfield Loco depot in Kimberley and hauled to Capital Park.

3440 was built by Henschel of Germany in 1953, works number 28759, and is just slightly older than class mate 3442. Initially it was thought that the boiler from 3440 would be used on 3480, which was in need of some boiler repairs. However, on close inspection, the collision damage sustained by 3440 was found to be only minor, so she'll probably be restored in the future.

3480 was built by North British Locomotive Company of Scotland in 1953, works number 27340, as a Class 25, later being converted to Class 25NC specification and worked on heavy haulage, also finishing her service life at Warrenton. This locomotive is awaiting restoration although her 'worshund' tender has been restored and is used as an auxiliary water carrier for her class mates.

A small band of enthusiastic men undertake the strenuous work of driving these steaming monoliths. Many youngsters have dreamt of becoming engine drivers, enticed by the power and glamour of handling gleaming steam locomotives on the front of a train load of passengers or long trains of freight wagons. Getting to that exalted position requires many years of hard graft, working through from a locomotive cleaner, then a stoker before becoming a driver on shunting and local trains. Only then are you appointed to the top notch of the loco driver's art. We salute all our drivers who over the years have helped keep our steam engines chugging around Pretoria, and on occasion through Southern Africa.

Use of steam has become increasingly difficult over the past years as more and more water and coaling facilities have been scrapped. Sadly those days of country-wide steam are behind us and trains are now hauled by efficient yet unspectacular diesel or electric units.