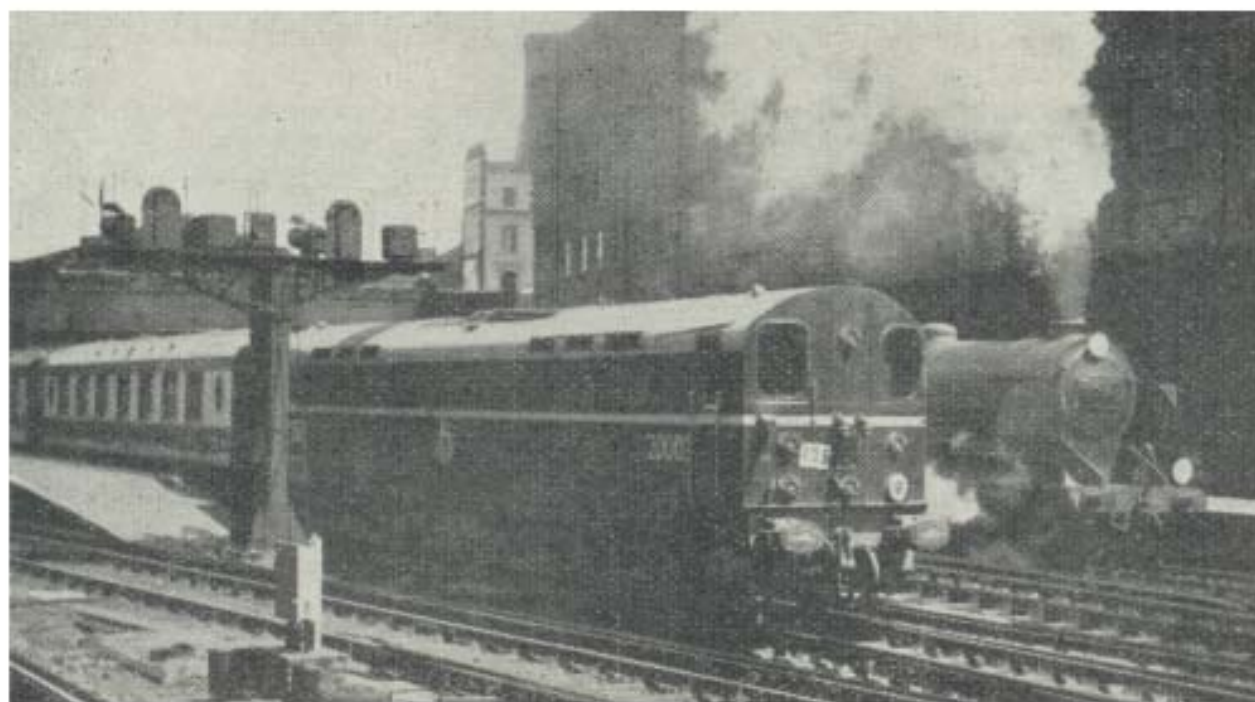


Derby Day, 1952, at Epsom Downs

By M. W. G. SKINNER



Photo]

[K. P. Perry

The Pullman special train leaving Victoria for Epsom Downs on May 28

ONE of the most interesting and carefully planned arrangements for intensive traffic on the Southern Region of British Railways is that prepared for Derby Day at Epsom, Epsom Downs, and Tattenham Corner Stations. By far the heaviest traffic is dealt with at Tattenham Corner, which immediately adjoins the racecourse. I was on duty in the signalbox at Epsom Downs this year on May 28 (Derby Day) and was able to get firsthand knowledge of the working at that station.

Epsom Downs is the terminus of the suburban branch from Sutton. It has eight platforms (of which Nos. 3 to 7 inclusive are electrified) and deals with a frequent electric passenger service to and from London Bridge and Victoria. There is no electrified siding accommodation, and trains are berthed and cleaned in the platforms. It is interesting on account of the symmetrical layout, and for the 20 lower quadrant signals of L.B.S.C.R. and early Southern Railway vintage at the end of the platforms. These consist of eight platform starting signals, and on the reverse side of the same posts eight platform home signals, and four platform

calling-on signals, which are locked by fouling bars in the platforms. These signals are really route indicators, as the applicable signal must be lowered before the down home or calling-on signal outside the station can be worked. The only way a train might be stopped at one of these signals is by replacing it immediately in front of a train in case of emergency. Trains are block signalled on a Tyer's two-position, one-wire instrument.

As soon as the timetable and rolling stock staffs had completed their task of planning the required trains, based on the experience of previous years, proof copies showing the service, carriage working arrangements, and general instructions were sent to the Area Inspector and Stationmaster for their examination and suggestions. These officers studied the arrangements, in conjunction with the signalmen at Epsom Downs, and made slight alterations and improvements to suit local conditions. When the workings were finally decided, they compiled a list of departing trains, platform numbers, and formation from incoming services. Another list was prepared showing de-

parture times, platform numbers, details of the stations at which each train called, and changing points, for the use of the train announcer, ticket inspectors and other station staff. These lists were carefully checked for any possible mistakes. A meeting then took place between representatives of the various departments concerned, at which the lists were handed in for printing, and final preparations were made to ensure that all the plans were in order.

In the days immediately preceding the racing, the special telephone circuits and loudspeakers, still in position from the Spring Race Meeting five weeks earlier, were connected up and tested; the grass which grows (intentionally) on the platform surfaces was cut; and the station generally prepared for the rush.

A temporary signalbox is situated between each of the regular boxes on the branch. These are known as A, B and C intermediates, and are used only on Derby Day. Therefore the blocks sections are Sutton Junction—A Intermediate—Belmont—B Intermediate—Banstead—C Intermediate—Epsom Downs. For the remainder of the year the signal arms controlled by the intermediate boxes are removed. These are replaced on the previous Monday, and the boxes opened for a short while for a test to be made of the instruments and signals.

In previous years a van of canteen equipment arrived a few days before the racing for the use of a well-known firm of caterers which provided the railwaymen with a mid-day meal. This was placed in No. 1 platform by the local freight train, making one of its rare "if required" trips, so as to be adjacent to the former Royal Stables used for the canteen. This year, however, a local caterer supplied the meal, and the van was not required. Other items from the past which have not been required for some years are the Royal Trains (which had a platform of their own), the special trains conveying Lord Derby and his party, and the floral decorations arranged on the buffers.

On Derby Day this year, the station opened at 5 a.m., as on normal weekdays, starting with the ordinary train service, the staff consisting of one signaller, one porter, and a senior porter booking on at 6.40 a.m. The first signs that Derby Day had arrived were a few early racegoers, and the arrival of the additional

staff at various intervals. The lists of trains were distributed to all concerned, and Epsom Downs was ready for the rush.

When the racegoing passengers were pouring in by their thousands the station had the appearance of a London terminus, with about 15 different grades on duty. All the trains were numbered with paper figures which were stuck in the front windows of the electric trains and removed from the incoming trains. The passengers were counted as they passed through the ticket barriers, and details of the number arriving on each train, and the number of minutes late arrival (if any) were passed by special telephone to the control office set up at Tattenham Corner Station.

Signal, telegraph, and permanent way men stood by ready for any failure, and a breakdown gang was ready in case of a derailment, so that delays would be reduced to a minimum. The breakdown tool van arrived in the morning, hauled by the local freight engine. After placing the van in No. 8 platform, the engine ran light to Wimbledon for other duties. Gradually the number of passengers increased until around mid-day the trains, arriving every few minutes, were packed full. About 660 Metropolitan Police came by rail. In the afternoon, while the racing was taking place, the normal train service was run.

During the whole day 202 trains were run, 98 passenger and three empty down, and 93 passenger and eight empty up. Over half of these trains were between 11 a.m. and 7 p.m. All the trains were formed of two four-car suburban third class units, with the exception of the first passenger train in each direction, formed of one unit only, and the Pullman and first class special, which left Victoria at 12.35 p.m., and returned from Epsom Downs at 5.40 p.m. The special was hauled by electric locomotive No. 20003, and used No. 6 platform at Epsom Downs.

As soon as the big race was over, the crowd began to make the homeward journey. If a queue formed outside the normal booking office window it would block the main entrance, so a booking office was brought into use outside. As the evening drew on the majority of the crowd had returned, and the staff gradually lessened until the normal one signaller, one porter, and one carriage cleaner remained.