



WINTER WONDERLAND GALA AS ALMOST THREE THOUSAND PEOPLE VISITORS DESCEND ON GREAT CENTRAL RAILWAY

Seven engines in steam and a flurry of snow make for a magic special event

Increase in visitor numbers and revenue on previous year despite economic downturn

The Great Central Railway is celebrating after a magical Winter Gala. The event, which took place on Friday, Saturday and Sunday (30th, 31st Jan and 1st Feb) was visited by an estimated two thousand, eight hundred people. Trains were standing room only during Saturday.

The event witnessed a substantial increase not only visitor numbers but in revenues over the same event staged in 2008. There was evidence of many guests travelling to the event from all over the country and booking into local hotels so they could enjoy all three days. One party travelled from Cumbria and stayed for the whole weekend.

“The Winter Gala is usually a popular event” said commercial manager Alan Brassey **“but we were slightly nervous this year. With the economic situation there was always the risk day trippers and weekend visitors might choose not to come. Against that background, a boost in visitor numbers and revenue is really heartening! It vindicates our strategy for the event which was set ourselves an ambitious programme. Compared to the 2008 event we ran more days and steamed more engines. Given the economic uncertainty it would have been tempting to 'do less' than last year - but 'doing more' and going all out to attract passengers worked very well.”**

Celebrity 'end of steam' survivor, Oliver Cromwell topped the locomotive line up, as the Great Central ran demonstration freight trains and travelling post office drops. In the evening of Friday and Saturday the railway's recently formed band, made up of volunteers from the engine shed' entertained the crowds in the beer tent.

Even when the weather began to turn on Sunday lunchtime, the platforms were crowded during the snow flurries. The event was the first steam gala to be held at the line since the completion of the first phase of improvement works at Leicester North station.

“If this was a test of our 'enthusiast' audience,” concluded Alan, **“then our Thomas event in two weeks time will be the first test of our family markets. So far, so good in 2009!”**

The award winning Leicestershire line's financial year has just ended and the line will give details of its 2008 performance next week. 2008 featured a number of high profile visiting engines which have significantly boosted revenue streams.

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