

# Be careful what you wish for

They say you should always be careful what you wish for because it might not be what you really want.

But in this case I couldn't be more delighted that mine came true... and it's all thanks to the power of the Press. Some weeks ago in my column [in the Mid-Somerset series of newspapers], I mentioned that I had been on the West Somerset Railway and it reminded me how much I had loved both steam locomotives and steam rollers as a child. And just like lots of little boys I had always wanted to drive a steam train.

And thanks to Roy Procter of the East Somerset Society of Model and Experimental Engineers (ESSMEE) who got in touch and said the club would be happy to give me a go. However I have to be honest when I set out last Wednesday to the railway at the Royal Bath and West showground, near Shepton Mallet I was excited but also full of trepidation. What if I failed?

Although there were some hairy moments – particularly when the steam locomotive seemed to run away with me at all of six MPH - I needn't have worried. It truly was a morning to remember which started when Roy let me loose on his pride and joy a self-built, scale model of a Class 42 Warship loco number D 808 Centaur, so that I could get used to the track..

The club has two tracks - one which is 7¼" and the other 5" - and both are about half a mile long. I quickly learned that driving at four miles an hour seems a lot faster than it does in a car.

Roy had warned me that once I moved up to the steam locomotive I would find it more difficult as half-a-ton of engine is apt to run away with you on what appear to be quite slight, downhill sections. He was right but fortunately he was acting as brakeman and literally kept me on the straight and narrow of the track.

George White, who had led the team that built Mendip the steam locomotive that I drove, calmly taught me what to do - although if I was ever to drive a train of fee-paying passengers I've got a lot more to learn. If you were going downhill it took much longer than I expected to slow it down and vice versa going uphill it was quite easy for the train to come to a grinding halt. But by my third circuit I did feel slightly more in charge and was feeling quite proud of myself. And even more so after

various gentlemen said I had been better than many others driving a steam locomotive for the first time.

Perhaps the most fascinating thing about the visit was the fact that it was just like a normal-sized railway but smaller. The signal box was a revelation because there was so many levers to be pulled to change the points and signals. The scale models, that many of the members make, were beautiful and as one member told me that he had started his in the 1950s they certainly are true labours of love.

It was in 2011 that members began developing the idea for Mendip when they bought the plans for it. It was finally commissioned in 2017 and everyone at the club had been involved in the project. To create beautiful things you need a good workshop and the one at the club is glorious and would bring a gleam into every engineer's eye and many of the members – not surprisingly - are retired engineers.

The club was founded in 2001 And finally started to set up the railway on the Bath and West site in 2004. It is open to the public every year during the famous show in late May and other events when requested by showground management.

ESSMEE chairman Robin Duys had invited Rupert Cox, chief executive of the Royal Bath and West Society, to come and meet me. Brave man he even travelled on the steam train and seemed to enjoy it. He is obviously a huge fan and thinks the railway is a wonderful

asset. And I couldn't agree more. If you would like to see for yourself there are open days on 7th & 8th October. And before then ESSMEE will be playing host to the international Ground Level five inch Mainline Association and their scale models will be showing off their paces at the railway on 21st, 22nd and 23rd September.

As I left a number of the members, who had all made me so welcome, said perhaps I would like to join the club. I know I have not got the skills to make the wonderful scale models but I would like to learn to drive the steam locomotive like a professional so I am still thinking about it.

Anyone who is interested in joining should email [membership@essmee.org.uk](mailto:membership@essmee.org.uk).

