

Profile 16

SAA Steel carriers / FPA Container Flats

Build Details:	1966, 1970-1971 BR Ashford
Numbering:	B920500, 400000-400299
Bogies / Suspension:	
Dimensions:	LOB 11251mm, wheelbase 6325mm
Published Drawings:	British Railways Wagons - The First Half Million (Don Rowland, David & Charles, 1985)
Areas of operation:	See text
Main liveries:	Bauxite, later grey/red and various others

Summary: The SAA fleet of 2-axle steel carrying wagons had a very short life in their original form, and the majority saw extensive use as barriers and runners. After 10 years of under utilisation, over half of the wagons were rebuilt as FPA container flats and were used to carry coal, mainly in Scotland.

History: The prototype for this fleet was B920500, built at Ashford Works in 1966 as an 'Experimental Double Bolster' to lot number 3569 and diagram 1/455. The number was in series with earlier-built Double Bolster wagons, although B920500 has sometimes been referred to as a plate wagon. Photos of it in later life show it had similar fold-down side stanchions to the production run of SAAs, the main visible difference being its straight-bottomed solebars. Little is known about the original use of this wagon. At some point it was rebuilt to carry steel coil, gaining six half-height wooden partitions. It was also treated as being in the air-braked number series and presumably lost its B prefix, although this would put it amongst the range used for bogie steel-carrying wagons. By 1983 it was in use as oil train barrier wagon and had gained a new prefix, becoming TDC920500. It had also been fitted with a vacuum through pipe and its new TOPS code was ZSB (See photo in Working Wagons. Volume 3). A year later it was still a barrier wagon but now for nuclear flask trains, and had reportedly been recoded to RBA. This would have resulted in the dropping of the TDC prefix, and suggests that the vacuum pipe had been removed. It still had the wooden partitions in place (Photo in Rail magazine, Issue 252 (May 1995)). The pipe had certainly been removed by 1987 when it returned to the departmental fleet once more, this time as a ZVA wheel/bogie carrier to design code ZV230A. The number now gained an ADC prefix and the partitions would have been removed at this point. It survived in this role until at least 1995 but was gone by 2000.



KTA 400188 at Whitemoor, 28th June 1980.
Paul Bartlett



FPA 400193 at Aberdeen on 22nd August 1988.
Tom Young



FBA 400042 at Willesden Sudbury, 25th October 1987.
Paul Bartlett



FPA 400166 at Tees Yard, 10th October 1999.
Paul Bartlett

Lot number 3728 covered the 300 production SAAs (then known as Steel ABs), built at Ashford Works in 1970 and 1971. The wagons featured the standard 20ft 9in wheelbase air-braked underframe on which was a floor made up of eight turnover bolsters. These could be laid flat or turned over to allow unloading by fork-lift. Each side had four fold-down stanchions and the low ends were also hinged. Original livery was bauxite and the fleet was numbered 400000-400299, starting a new series for 2-axle steel wagons. The first 46 wagons had vacuum pipes and were coded SAB, the remainder being SAAs. The build was split into two designs, with minor differences in the position of the side stanchions. Up to 400199 (also quoted as b 400249) were to diagram 1/440, later changed to design codes SA001A (SAA) or SA001B (SAB). The remainder were to diagram 1/453, which became design code SB001A. This suggests that TOPS code SBA would have been used but there is no evidence of this taking place.

Early casualties were 14 wagons scrapped after a derailment at Beattock in October 1971.

Although the S-group of TOPS codes were for '2-axle steel wagons (excluding coil)', the type was also suitable for such traffic, coils being loaded eye to the sky on a flat floor. SAAs could be seen in block trains in South Wales and Scotland but the arrival of bogie types such as the BAA and BBA rendered many of them surplus. Some were put to use transporting agricultural tractors while 35 were recoded KTA for strip coil use but the majority were transferred to non-revenue duties as barriers and runners. In most cases no modifications were made but the TOPS codes were changed to RBA or RRA respectively.

Two SAAs were rebuilt as SPA plate wagons in 1977, acting as prototypes for the large fleet that was to be built over the next few years. 400100 was renumbered 460000 and was later rebuilt as a structure gauging car with TOPS code ZXQ. 400142 became SPA 460001, subsequently being used as a runner recoded RRA. Another pair of SAAs were modified to carry imported nuclear flasks to Sellafield, being fitted with steel floors and removable covers. 400004 was recoded XNB in 1979 while 400181 became an XNA in 1982. Both were sold to Nuclear Transport Ltd in 1982/1983, being renumbered as PXAs NTL95750/95751 respectively. Both were deregistered in 1987.

In about 1980 there was a plan to rebuild another 100 SAAs into SPA plate wagons, lot 3995 and new numbers 461502-461601 being issued. This was cancelled before work started. However, in late 1983 a programme was started to modify 170 wagons as FPA container flats under lot number 4050, retaining their original numbers. The conversions were carried out at BR Derby and Doncaster and involved the removal of the stanchions and floor, and the fitting of container support runners and clamps. The completed wagons were resprung at Motherwell wagon works then dispatched for use on services in Scotland carrying specially designed 30ft long coal containers. Because of the industrial dispute affecting the coal industry at the time, some of the wagons were initially used to carry rock salt from Winsford to Scotland. A further 22 SAAs were converted to FPAs in March 1986, these being intended for Dolophines traffic between Thrislington quarry and Ravenscraig steel works. Further FPAs were introduced in 1987 following the removal of the bodywork from 29 VCA vans, although these retained their numbers in the 200xxx range.

In 1989, together with the 192 FPAs, 82 former SAAs remained as runners. 49 of these were traffic wagons coded RRA or RRB (the latter comprising most of the first 46 wagons), while 33 were in departmental service as ZEA with the fishkind of Bream. 400105 was a ZDA Sleeper carrier but was converted to a FPA by 1994. Four wagons had been rebuilt as FBA MiniLink container carriers in the latest round of intermodal experimentation but these were all withdrawn by 1994. Finally, six wagons were recoded as ZXA starting in 1989, these being slightly modified to carry 'wacker' plates (vibrating compactors).

By January 2007 just under a third (98 wagons) of the batch remained in stock. This total was made up of 67 FPAs, 25 RRAs, 2 RRBs, 3 ZXAs and a single OSA. The OSA code had been introduced in 1997 when four ZEAs were modified as sleeper carriers. As an aside, the number range



had been extended in 2006 when EWS acquired 44 PFA container flats from British Gypsum and renumbered them 400300-400343 with TOPS code FPA.

Updates