

S.T.A.R.S. INTERNATIONAL

TOUR REPORT BELGIUM RAPIDE '08

**Report on S.T.A.R.S. visit of 7th to 9th March
Report by Ray Roberts, sightings by Mike Cooke.**

This report should have covered the first STARS TOUR OF 2008, but that honour went to the Lille Rapide, because the original dates of 1st to 3rd February, had to be changed due to an unfortunate injury to Adrian's back (Football –"playing" or "watching"???) , which occurred just prior to the trip taking place. It would have seemed that this particular tour was fated from the start, because, in addition, the Cross Channel bookings on Sea France had to be altered to P & O, at the last moment, because of an industrial dispute involving Sea France staff at Calais. In addition to a delay of one hour on the original schedule, the participants had to also forego the delights of the Sea France cuisine!!! On the plus side, this tour used the services of two drivers, namely Adrian and Mike Cooke, which always provides an extra dimension to any trip. On Friday 7th March, at a slightly later than advertised time, our party, consisting of 15 persons (one down on the bookings), departed from Waterloo and made our way to Dover, via the M20/A249, and M2, thus avoiding the lorry park established at the Dover end of the M20. As a result of this diversion, the customary stop at the Maidstone services had to be omitted from the itinerary (OH DEAR!!!).

Upon arrival at Dover we discovered that our 0015 sailing (Saturday 8th March), would be somewhat late because of the extra demand on the P & O services, and after witnessing the near calamity of Adrian getting shut in the coach doors, and of certain members spending a considerable amount of their time queuing for coffee at the Caffe Ritazza outlet (staffed by a rather exhausted young man), we finally sailed on an uneventful crossing to Calais, which was followed by the normal night ride to Kortrijk, where the usual permission was obtained for a full depot visit. The only occurrence of any note here was the two French locomotives that passed, double heading a freight train, which caused anxiety as to the identity of one of the locomotives. Then it was on to Tournai, just as dawn was breaking on a chilly, but clear day.

On the outskirts of our next call – St. Ghislain, we stopped at a services area for fuel, where Adrian experienced some difficulty with the pumps, but in the time honoured fashion, he quickly overcame the problem with the assistance of a lady attendant, and we proceeded to St Ghislain station, but not before Adrian had corrected a member, who happened to mentioned "Petrol" instead of "Diesel" (slapped wrist there! – you are never too old to get one, are you Adrian?). We then visited Mons station and viewed the Infra, without incident, before it was time to move onto Monceau depot, where it was pleasing to visit the stored locomotive area in the daylight. Although a lot of the foliage has been removed, the site still holds a considerable number of potential hazards.

Charleroi Sud SP was next, followed by the Infra, then onto Sud Quai depot, where we were disappointed to find the gate securely locked, and without any response on the

intercom, and no sight of a passing vehicle, we were forced to view the depot yard from several vantage points, from which we identified the majority of items outside the shed building. The short run to Chatelet was quickly achieved, and we proceeded towards Brussels, along the motorway. Upon arrival at the Schaerbeek depots, we saw that a new security gate had been installed, but this time we soon gained entry by using the old "one out – one in" method. There were no staff present at the Electric depot, and permission was readily given for a full visit to the Diesel/Preservation site. After a view of Haren yard, we moved on to our next port of call - Antwerpen Noord, which involved some distance by motorway, on which there was some delay through a road traffic accident. However, after clearing this obstruction, we made good time, until a slight misunderstanding in the "cockpit", resulted in an over run on the motorway: a situation which was quickly rectified by the "pilot" and his "co-pilot". Permission to visit both installations at Noord was quickly obtained, and of particular note in the works building were three new electric class E186 locomotives, on hire from Angel (E186-123,124, and 125), also present were two SNCB class 51 diesels (5101 and 5146), being repainted into the orange/yellow livery of the Serco Infrastructure company, for use in Algeria. We had run late throughout the day, mainly because of the ferry problems, and we finally arrived at the Florida hotel in Antwerp just before 1800. This late arrival deterred most members from venturing too far that evening. Most appear to have inspected the new facilities at Centraal station, after which some took the short trip to Berchem, for an hour or so, went to the tram depot, or simply chilled out, with a meal, and a drink or two.

SUNDAY 9TH MARCH, dawned rather cloudy with the threat of rain (which materialised within an hour or so). A late arrival by a hotel employee delayed our breakfast, but the impact was minimized by a "help yourself" situation, and we left Antwerpen to time, for our first visit of the day to Merelbeke depot, where entry was gained via the passenger station subway. As usual, we obtained permission for the yard, but not inside the depot buildings. A list of items inside the shed building was obtained, which helped with identity of most. At Gent Sint Pieters, the view from both the station and part of the yard is seriously curtailed because of construction work. However the area by the Infra depot is still accessible, so we were not completely disappointed. On our way to Brugge, the opportunity for the raffle was taken (blast!!) under the supervision of Mike, who in addition to the usual humour associated with this event, treated us to his Coco the clown impressions (complete with flowing hair!!!). At Brugge we viewed the stabling point from two vantage points (the usual one, and a new area by the Bombardier factory). We omitted Brugge station, because of the considerable amount of building work being undertaken there, and made our way to the new stabling point at Zwankendamme, where 11 x 23 class Electric locos were present.

Next up was Zeebrugge, and then on to Oostende, via Blankenberg. Permission was obtained for Oostende depot, after which we viewed the carriage sidings and stabling point, via the usual "run past" of the local attractions. We then took the normal short break at Oostende station. A quick view of DePanne stabling point, with a visit to the Tobacco Village, followed by a swift run along the coast, saw us arrive in Calais, in time for the booked sailing to Dover. Unlike on the Lille Rapide, the customs check was achieved quickly, but as we suspected, there was some delay to our sailing. Once on the ferry, we had an uneventful crossing until a slight obstruction in the coach doorway prevented several members from boarding the coach for a several minutes (a bit of a bum job, some would say!!). This incident was quickly followed by a session of hand waving from a group of young females seated on a coach adjacent to ours (the waving was acknowledged by some of us). After disembarking, we enjoyed a really speedy ride straight up the M20,

arriving at Waterloo at 2115, some 90 minutes down. Unfortunately, the coach with the girls on board was left in our "slipstream" so no more titillation for the old codgers in the rear seats!!!!.

Despite the various setbacks which occurred, everyone seemed to be well pleased with the weekend activities, varying from the one person on his first trip to Belgium, and more experienced members attempting (and succeeding) in clearing some of their last few required Belgium items. Credit should be given to both Adrian and Mike for overcoming most of the problems that confronted us. Thanks to all those concerned with the arrangements for this trip, and those participating.

SIGHTINGS

What a strange lot we are !!! There was not one participant of this tour that had a full and comprehensive listing of observations over the weekend. Therefore, the sightings are as accurate as can be and are compiled from the contributions of several members. Apologies if something has been omitted. No distinction has been made for locos/units passing at any location.

Saturday 8th March 2008.

Kortrijk	208/14/21/22/25, 314/86, 411/19/42/50/51/62/68/81/83, 1202, 2105 /17/26/28/29/48, 2708/21, 6222, 7814/19, 9101, SNCF 67453/489.
Tournai	232, 445/46/56, 737, 809, 2153/56, 2327, 6323, SNCF 36015.
St. Ghislain	309, 7738/43/45, 7826.
Mons	158, 390, 551/65, 746, ES510, 2705/06/15/17/25/34, 6213/75, 7349/52, TGV 4305.
Monceau	5123/31/47/48/50, 6240/66/73/86, 7301/03/05/06/10/13/14/16/17 /18/20/21/22/23/24/25/26/27/28/30/31/32/33/35/39/44/45/47/48/64 /81, 7737/41/42/46/47/72/81, 7829, 8439/43.
Marcinelle	7823.
Charleroi Gare	452, 691, 714/46, 1205, 2349/73, 2503, 2615/30, 2740, 7363.
Charleroi Infra	6231/62.
Charleroi Sud Quai	153, 670/72, 723/59, 811/13/32/35, 973, 2146, 2223/49, 4106/07/19, 6228, 7346/61/62/78/83/85, 9115/30 (ex 17)/44.
Chatelet	464, 693, 745/57/76, 977/89, 2110/37, 2741, 4103/64, 7365/66, 7740, SNCF 36017.
Schaarbeek	181, 247, 334/35/49/95, 514/31/98, 624/48/68, 701/44/60, 804/28, 902/09/13/25/29/34/45/48/96/99, 1188/91, 1211, 1352, 2145, 2204, 2342, 2704/16, 4402, 4906 (553.29), ES 208, 5205/09/11/12/15, 5303/13, 5403/07, 5506/09/14, 6077 (210.077), 6106, 6249/82, 7354/60/90/91/92, 7729, 8035, 8204/07/08/10/17/19/48. Steam 29.013.
Haren Yard	9105.
Antwerpen Nord	1209, 1335, 2009/11/15/21/23, 2323/24/26/29/32/33/43/77/80, 2501/02/04/06/08/09/12/55/56/57/58, 2603/08/09/10/32/33, 5164 /66, 5404, 5910 (201.010), 6204/21/46/53/54/56/60/68/77/81/83 /94/96/97 /99, 7209, 7382, 7401/02/07/09, 7701/02/04/05/07/08/14 /23/26/27/28/30/31/32/33/34/35/49/61/75/76/80/88/89/90, 7815/18 /32/34/35/38/39/42/43/44/47/48/50/52/56/57/58/59/61/62/64/68/69

/70, 8235/47/50/56/57/60/62/63/66/68/70/74, 8441, Secorail 5101/46, SNCF 36027, DB 186.123/124/125.

Sunday 9th March 2008.

Merelbeke 204/05/28, 322/25/74, 430/38, 535/46, 603/06/26, 728/79, ES406, 1201/03, 1304/06/08/10/13/26/27/28/34/45/53, 2341, 2621, 4115/25/26/27/67/70/71/75/78/79/80/89/90/91/93, 6201/10/12/38, 7311/53/56/67/68, 7716/74/79/91/94/95/97/98, 7806/07/11/12, 9109/23/32/36/38/50.

Gent 178/97, 201/30/39, 314, 443/55, 526/48/60, 609/18/67, 753, 2142, 2737, 4122/71/73, 7792.

Brugge 185/90/93, 229/35, 1352, 2022, 2325/67, 2742.

Zwankendamme 2301/04/10/13/44/46/52/60/76/82/83/88.

Zeebrugge 7796, 7800/01/02/03/05/09.

Blankenberge 193.

Oostende Depot 196, 202/24/36, 441/42/47/50/66/74/75/86/90, 554, 710/41, 1348/49/51/54, 1603/05, 2107/21/23/31/39/52/57, 6229, 7813/21.

Oostende Gare 203/51, 460, 825, 1601/04, 2138, 7793.

De Panne 155, 377/82/97, 435, 528/63, 2221, 2507.

Calais Tioxide SNCF Y6508.