

Profile 28

VEA/VFA Air-Braked Vanwides



Build Details:
Numbering:
Bogies / Suspension:
Dimensions:
Published Drawings:
Areas of operation:
Main liveries:

Converted 1978-1983 at BR Ashford, Horwich and Shildon
 230000-230549
 FAT19 Friction Link
 17ft 6in over headstocks, 10ft wheelbase
 Nationwide
 brown, grey/red, grey/yellow

Summary:

The VEA vans (and ODA opens) were traditional wagon designs refurbished and fitted with air brakes in the early 1980s to suit customers who could not handle the longer wheelbase of newer designs. A total of 550 wagons were dealt with and they could be seen across the country on Speedlink trains as well as military specials. A decline in Ministry of Defence requirements lead to most of the wagons being withdrawn in the early 1990s, with just a handful finding further use in the departmental fleets. However, many survived in internal use at Army bases.

History:



VEA 230026 at Bridgwater,
 3rd September 1981.
 Paul Bartlett



VEA 230341 at Hoo
 Junction, 25th October
 1987.
 Paul Bartlett

2000 Vanwides were built to diagram 1/217 in 1962, this being the ultimate development of the traditional 12 ton van. A pair of sliding doors on each side gave an opening width of 9ft (and gave the type its name), allowing the type to carry pallets as well as general merchandise. Under TOPS, the wagons were coded VWV, VMV (for wagons dedicated to Ministry of Defence traffic) or VEV (for wagons updated with roller bearings). Despite the delivery of large numbers of long-wheelbase air-braked vans from 1969 onwards, most of the Vanwides remained in stock in 1977. The main reason for this was that their short wheelbase allowed the type to traverse tighter curves than the newer vehicles. The MoD in particular required this attribute, as they had a number of rail-served depots around the country, whose track layouts precluded the use of long-wheelbase vehicles. To retain this traffic while allowing the ongoing conversion of all freight services to air-braked operation, it was decided to upgrade some of the Vanwide fleet.

An initial batch of 50 wagons was refurbished at Ashford Works in 1978 under lot number 3918. As well as being fitted with air-brakes, the suspension was upgraded to FAT19 friction link standard to permit operation at 75mph. The vans were renumbered in the air-brakes series as 230000-230049 (presumably leaving the 220000 range free for future new van builds) and given TOPS code VEA (VEA-M). The design code was VE001B, VE001A perhaps being used for the VEV wagons. The batch was delivered between April and November 1978 and entered service in freight brown livery.

Additional batches of VEAs were converted in 1981 (60 wagons numbered 230050-230109 to lot 3982), 1982 (290 wagons, 230110-230399, lot 4017) and 1983 (150 wagons, 230400-230549, lot 4028). The 1981 batch was produced by Horwich works, the remainder at Shildon. All 500 wagons wore the new Railfreight livery of grey with a red top, and were allocated design code VE001B.

In service, the type could be seen almost anywhere in the country, either

in block trains or as part of Speedlink consists. Although not documented, it is likely that they saw some general merchandise use in addition to their main MoD-related duties. For operational purposes, the entire fleet was allocated on paper to Currock Depot in Carlisle, and many VEAs carried the appropriate fox logo. Another common addition to the livery was the application of orange Hazchem labels, particularly for wagons involved in the movement of munitions.

New TOPS code VFA was applied to 25 wagons in 1984, to indicate those fitted with alarms on the doors. Design code VF001A was used but all reverted to VEA during 1987. Following the launch of the Railfreight sector liveries in 1987, many VEAs were eventually repainted in dark grey with yellow and red Railfreight Distribution logos and yellow ends.

The fleet remained largely intact until 1991, by which time the closure of several MoD depots was having an impact on their main traffic. In July that year, 25 VEAs were recoded as ZSA (ZSA-K to design codes ZS200A and ZS200B) and given DC prefixes to their numbers. These wagons were used as brake force runners on the Midland region. 31 more VEAs were assigned to the Signals and Telegraph Engineers and recoded ZRA (ZRA-E to design codes ZR214B and ZR214D) with KDC prefixes. Many other VEAs were withdrawn following damage or when they became due for maintenance and the fleet had reduced to 300 wagons by the end of the year, and to just 122 by the end of 1992.

With many newer wagons available for transfer to departmental use, the future looked bleak for the VEAs. At least five were transferred to BR internal use including four at Perth. However, a much larger quantity was sold to the MoD for internal use at their installations. Marchwood acquired a large fleet, while Longtown and Biscester also received examples. All were given new (non-TOPS) numbers in the WGB4xxx series, and though a few were later sold for preservation, at least 43 were still extant at Marchwood in 2008. By the start of 1994, only 31 VEAs remained in stock and these had all been withdrawn by August, leaving 17 ZRAs and 15 ZSAs. These too were gradually withdrawn over the next few years and all but one had been removed from TOPS by 2008. The survivor was allegedly 230276, listed as a VEA stored at Toton. It is likely that the wagon had in fact long since been disposed of. Apart from the MoD wagons, the only VEA known to survive are about 22 preserved examples, including four with the Cambrian Railway Society and nine grounded bodies at Peak Rail.

Updates