Profile 29 **VGA/VKA Air-Braked Vans**

Build Details:	1981/1983 BR Shildon
Numbering:	210400-210650
Bogies / Suspension:	FAT7 long-link
Dimensions:	29ft 6in wheelbase, 42ft 1in over headstocks
Published Drawings:	Rolling Stock Recognition 2 (Ian Allan)
Areas of operation:	Most areas
Main liveries:	metal/red, then metal/yellow, then maroon

Summary:

Having built 1400 vans to the VAA-VDA pattern in the 1970s, construction turned to the longer VGA design in the 1980s. Based on continetal practices of having doors that curve upwards into a central roof panel, a prototype was followed by a single batch of 250 wagons. While their predecessors underwent numerous conversions, the VGAs were retained on revenue duties, carrying a wide variety of commodities. The only development of note was the recoding of many VGAs as VKAs following the fitting of modified journals from 2000 onwards.

History:

VGA 210453 at Clapham Junction, 31st July 2006. *Martyn Read*

Lot number 4007 was issued for the construction in October 1981 of a prototype air-braked van. Built at BR's Shildon wagon works, this new van was roundly 9ft longer than the previous VDA design and had a very different appearance. Mounted on a 29ft 6in wheelbase underframe with deep central solebar sections, the van had solidly-braced ends (painted red) and a narrow central roof. The two 20ft 8.5in long doors on each side were finished in unpainted aluminium and had 5 vertical ribs. The doors continued upwards, kicking back into the central roof panel, providing an opening with over 7ft of vertical access. As with the VDA, each door could be pulled forwards then slid in front of the adjoining door. TOPS code VGA (VGA-F) was applied and the prototype was assigned design code VG001A.

The design was evidently accepted as a production order followed in 1982. Lot number 4023 covered the construction of 250 VGAs (210401 to 210650) to design code VG001B, the work again being done at Shildon. The only visible difference between these and the prototype was that boards were fitted in the top corners of each end onto which Railfreight and Speedlink logos were applied. The prototype had these logos applied directly to the doors. Within a few years, many of the wagons had had minor modification resulting in the carrying capacity being reduced from 29 to 28 tonnes, these being given design code VG001C. One wagon (210574) was fitted with a different type of floor and this became VG001D with a capacity of 28.5 tonnes.

Most of the wagons were allocated for maintenance purposes to Carlisle Currock depot, though they could be seen across the country on Speedlink duties. With the launch of the new Railfreight identity in 1987, a number of wagons were repainted with yellow ends and the Speedlink Distribution sector markings on the doors. Such repaints usually also included the removal of the original name boards. The abondonment of the Speedlink network in 1993 had some affect on the VGA fleet, with a number of wagons laid up between jobs. However, new traffic flows were eventually found for most, assisted by the resurrection of wagonload services under the Enterprise banner. EWS maroon livery was applied to some VGAs from about 1997 onwards, this involving the painting of the

doors for the first time.

As of mid-1999, 249 VGAs were still in stock spread across 7 pools. 105 were dedicated to Ministry of Defence use carrying explosives, 10 to the movement of lighting components between Bodmin and Leith, 72 to petfood traffic from Deanside near Glasgow, 30 carried bottled mineral water from Inverness, 14 were used by Ford for car parts to Dagenham, 16 worked from Wakefield for an unknown customer and just 2 were out of use. Of this total, 229 had been modified to VG001C standard, 19 remaining as VG001B and 210574 still a VG001D. Prototype VGA 210400 and production batch member 201469 had both been withdrawn. Some of the VGAs used for bottled water traffic had large vinyl labels added to the doors advertising the Lovat Spring brand, while those used for explosives generally had orange hazchem labels applied.

Starting in 2000, a number of VGAs were modified at Wabtec Doncaster with heavy-duty axles and journals, allowing the carrying capacity to be raised slightly. 78 wagons had been done by the end of the year and all were recoded as VKA-A to design codes VK001B or VK001C (from VG001B and VG001C respectively).

By 2008, a further 8 wagons were withdrawn, presumably as a result of accident damage. The fleet then comprised 142 VGAs (11 VG001B, 130 VG001C and 1 VG001D) and 99 VKAs (7 VK001B and 92 VK001C). Of the total of 241, 109 were laid up out of use (38 VGA and 71 VKA). The only active pools were for MoD traffic and brakeforce vehicles, although the type was reportedly still in use carrying paper and zinc from Immingham.

Updates