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STEAM TRACTION

Lightweight Super Sentinel No 1465 poses at Beamish Museum with other historic transport. JOSEPH DUNN

The Lightweight Super Sentinel

While taking part in road runs and attending shows and rallies provides many opportunities for owners to put their engines through their paces, the chance to use a waggon for the task it was originally built and used for does not come along every day. A request to deliver barrels of beer to the inn at Beamish was not an opportunity that Sentinel waggon owner Guy Rutter was going to allow to pass by.

Not only would the Sentinel be carrying a real load and making a real delivery – it would also be steaming through the period settings of Beamish Museum where the Sun Inn is located. Despite giving the impression that the public house has been there for a good many years this is just one of the many buildings at the museum which have been moved from their original locations and rebuilt on site. The Sun Inn originates from Bishop Auckland and having been re-erected at Beamish it opened for business in 1985. On that occasion barrels of ale were delivered by a Newcastle Breweries dray, drawn by a pair of magnificent shires.

While the pub and its surroundings are not all they seem to be, neither is the Sentinel steam waggon which arrived with the pub's vital supplies. No 1465 was originally allocated to a waggon built in 1916 and which was delivered new to Alton Court Brewery of Ross on Wye, Herefordshire. In 1932 it was bought by Sam Llewellyn and remained with him until it returned to the Sentinel Works during the Second World War. >

Guy Rutter was able to attend to the cask in hand when he was invited to deliver beer to the Sun Inn at Beamish with his Lightweight Super Sentinel waggon No 1465, as Alan Barnes discovered.



No 1465 as built, delivering beer for Alton Court Brewery of Ross on Wye. COURTESY ANTHONY THOMAS



The waggon rallying in the early 1960s. PAUL FEARNLEY COLLECTION



The Fearnley's Sentinel and Foden wagon in the early 1960s. PAUL FEARNLEY COLLECTION



Kegworth rally, July 1961. Arthur Fearnley with a young Maurice Fearnley. PAUL FEARNLEY COLLECTION



Rallying during its days with the later Fearnley name on the apron in the 1970s. PHIL PROCTOR

The (Lightweight Super) engine was basically the same as the Super Sentinel, giving 100bhp at 450rpm but had poppet valves and three forward cut-off positions.

At that time Sentinel, in common with many other manufacturers, was not allowed to build new road vehicles for commercial use as all new production was geared towards the military and the war effort. However the company had found a way around this restriction by buying in second-hand waggons, retaining the works number and registration and building a new waggon for its own internal use which was duly recorded as being refurbished or rebuilt. Sentinel was still not allowed to sell even the refurbished waggons until wartime restrictions were finally lifted. How much of the original waggon was used in the 'refurbished' vehicle varied considerably.

In the case of No 1465, the waggon came back to the Shrewsbury Works in 1940 and after receiving attention it emerged completely transformed into a single geared Lightweight Super Sentinel. It still carried the worksplate from No 1465 and also the original registration number (AW 3321) but that was about all it had in common with the original waggon. Sentinel had introduced its new Lightweight Super waggon in April 1932, a four-wheeler designed to carry a payload of 5½ tons with a new lightweight boiler type rated at 255psi. As Anthony Thomas told me: "The engine was basically the same as the original Super Sentinel giving 100bhp at 450rpm but it had poppet valves and three forward cut-off positions."

To reduce the weight of the waggon the chassis used 6in x 3in nickel steel channels with strong cross-bracing for added strength and it was fitted with pressed steel wheels fitted with 40 x 8 pneumatic tyres. The



Delivering to the Sun Inn at Beamish. ANDY MARTIN

prototype for the Lightweight Supers was Works No 8664 of 1932, which remained at the Sentinel Works until February 1933 when it was sold to F A Head of Boxhill, Surrey. In total only 12 of this type were built, the last two being completed in January 1933 and unfortunately none of these originals have survived into preservation. However there are two examples of the Lightweight Supers which can be seen today – both of which were the result of rebuilds carried out by Sentinel during the war.

In addition to No 1465 there is No 6072 which was originally a Super Sentinel tipper and which was also rebuilt during the 1940s as the Lightweight Super version. As far as No 1465 is concerned it seems very unlikely that very much, if anything, of the original waggon was utilised in the rebuild as certainly a new boiler, engine, chassis and cab would have been required to produce a Lightweight Super.

It may well be argued that the company's official records and internal book-keeping rather than re-engineering played a major role in the emergence of No 1465 as a Lightweight Super Sentinel.

It is believed that the waggon remained at the Sentinel Works, although what it was used for is uncertain as with no more of that particular model being built it was hardly needed as a demonstrator. The waggon was eventually sold to Scientific Roadways Ltd of Shipley where it remained in use until the early 1950s. It was then bought by Arthur Fearnley in 1957 and was towed back to his yard in Castleford and at that time it was recorded as being in a rather plain dark grey livery. The Sentinel was reconditioned and repainted in Ford Imperial maroon and Post Office red and subsequently made its first rally appearance in 1958. The waggon remained with the Fearnley family for the next 20 years until it was sold to John Ward of Penistone. John eventually sold it to Biffen and Harris in 1983 and by 1987 the waggon was in the ownership of Ian Ridley at West Wycombe. It later changed hands again in October 1991 when it was bought by John Woodley of Newton Abbot and subsequently Guy Rutter bought the waggon in 2010.

I spoke to Ian Fearnley who recalled his days with the Sentinel with some affection: "I really do think that this waggon was the 'Grand Prix' version of the Sentinel and could knock spots off any S4 – as well as a good number of motor lorries. Over a hundred yards or so it was practically the fastest thing on anywhere the road and we used to have great fun racing sports cars off the line at traffic lights and we would leave them standing."

"In the early 1970s my father Ron and I had taken the Sentinel to the Stamford rally and for one of the arena events we were matched with a Bedford TK coal lorry in a drag race. The Light Super was so fast off the blocks I think we had completed the course before the poor old Bedford had turned a wheel – it really was no contest. I can safely say that it was the best Sentinel that I've ever been in although while the family owned the waggon I was only ever the fireman. My dad always drove except on one occasion when he did let me have a go although I was officially too young at the time."



Outside the Sun Inn... ANDY MARTIN



... and the vital supplies are unloaded. ANDY MARTIN



Through the period setting of Beamish town. ANDY MARTIN



The Sentinel feels at home on this street, with its terraced houses and tram tracks. BEAMISH



The waggon has a well deserved reputation for being a rather 'nippy' performer. ANDY MARTIN

"On the open road the waggon was an excellent performer and I remember travelling to a Corbridge rally in the late 1970s with the 'boys' in their S4. They turned up one of the steep hills on the route just in front of us and they hadn't gone more than 100 yards when we'd caught them. We stayed right on their tail for the whole 25-mile run to Corbridge and

they just couldn't get away from us. At that time the waggon was running exceptionally well, which I suppose was down to the regular maintenance carried out. The boiler was dropped every four years and she was overhauled every winter and rallied all through the summer. Dad and I spent the off season at the yard 'tinkering' and during the rally season we were out and about

practically every weekend. It was a sad day when the decision was taken to finally sell it but it's good to know that 1465 is still in excellent condition and continues to perform well on the road. I wonder if they've found out that it goes just as fast backwards!"

Paul Fearnley, Ian's cousin, kindly provided some pictures of the Sentinel in Fearnley colours and he can also attest to



The waggon's livery matches the museum's Morris Commercial 'staff vehicle'. JOSEPH DUNN



The waggon travelling through the historic city of Durham. BEAMISH



Surely the draymen don't need directions to the pub!
ANDY MARTIN



The underside of No 1465. JOSEPH DUNN

the Lightweight Super's turn of speed. "Although I was only a small boy when Uncle Ron had the Sentinel, my father told me of the time he had tried to overtake the waggon in his Thames van but Uncle Ron just laughed and opened up the waggon. Dad had no chance of getting by, even though the Sentinel was also towing a caravan."

Those escapades were now more than 35 years ago but the passing years do not seem to have diminished the Lightweight Super's performance or its well deserved reputation for being a rather 'nippy' performer as Guy will confirm. As he observed: "We may not

race many sports cars away from traffic lights but there are not many modern articles that can keep up with us along the Shildon bypass when she's in full cry. In fact it must be said that delivering the beer was one of the Sentinel's more sedate days out on the road, but I can think of no more worthwhile use for a steam waggon than delivering good ale!"

My thanks to Paul Jarman and Andy Martin at Beamish Museum for allowing the use of photos from its collection and to all those kind enough to provide information and photographs used within. ♦

"I really do think that this waggon was the 'Grand Prix' version of the Sentinel and could knock spots off any S4 – as well as a good number of motor lorries."