

Network Rail's new high output ballast cleaning system for the UK - update

Plasser UK's Mark Simmons reports on the latest progress with the system's different elements and machines.

Further to *Rail Infrastructure* Issue No: 115 (and seven previous magazines back to Issue No: 104), the last machine of Network Rail's fifth High Output Ballast Cleaning System (HOBCS 5) - the USP 6000 ballast regulator - received its authorisation into service from the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) on 14th March - two years and 12 days after the contract was signed, which was a remarkable achievement by all concerned.

Dedication

It has been fantastic to be involved with all the dedicated people from Plasser & Theurer, the ORR, SNC-Lavalin, Ricardo Rail, Plasser UK and the project team from Network Rail to deliver in the quickest time ever for such a system. When Network Rail's Steve Featherstone and Ben Brooks came to the Plasser & Theurer factory in Linz and challenged us to do our best to get the system developed and produced in record time, we accepted the challenge knowing it would be an immense task. It is fantastic to be able report that we all rose to the challenge and conquered it.

For reference, HOBCS 4 was delivered to the UK and ready for service two years after contract signing and then had to begin testing and commissioning. In contrast, HOBCS 5 had, within 22 months, all of its machines delivered to the UK and 52 of its 53 machines completed testing and commissioning having received ORR authorisation into service. By the two-year mark, the core kit (RM 900 ballast cleaner, 09-2X-CM tamper, NB-PW power wagon, S-PW power wagon and MFS wagons) had been in revenue earning service and the final machine, the USP 6000, was completing its testing and commissioning, only waiting for its ORR authorisation.



The 09-2X-CM tamper (above) and RM 900 ballast cleaner (below) preparing to start work.



The S-PW power wagon (above) and NB-PW power wagon (right), which head up the sets of MFS wagons that, together, sandwich the 09-2X-CM tamper and RM 900 ballast cleaner.



New Equipment

The three photographs on this page illustrate the RM 900 commencing its work.



Into service

The crew operating the HOBBS 5 core machines in these first service shifts have done a fantastic job and been enthusiastic and dedicated. They have also been supported on the shifts by Plasser & Theurer staff to ensure the best possible introduction. They have been working out of the High Output Operations Base (HOOB) at Taunton and the accompanying photos, taken by Network Rail's Peter Flynn, show the machines in operation.

The next steps on this journey of introduction to service is to obtain the final sign-off from the SRP and Product Acceptance teams within Network Rail for stage two - 'operation on third rail track with the third rail in-situ' - and then to carry out service shifts on third rail sites. The way the project has progressed, by the time you are reading this article those shifts are probably already happening!

