



Harlech Castle – A review

David Williams checks out the 'other' castle...

The Llanfair Garden Railway Show saw Roundhouse Engineering unveil 'Harlech Castle', the latest addition to their Diesel Series of models. The full sized prototype for this new model is

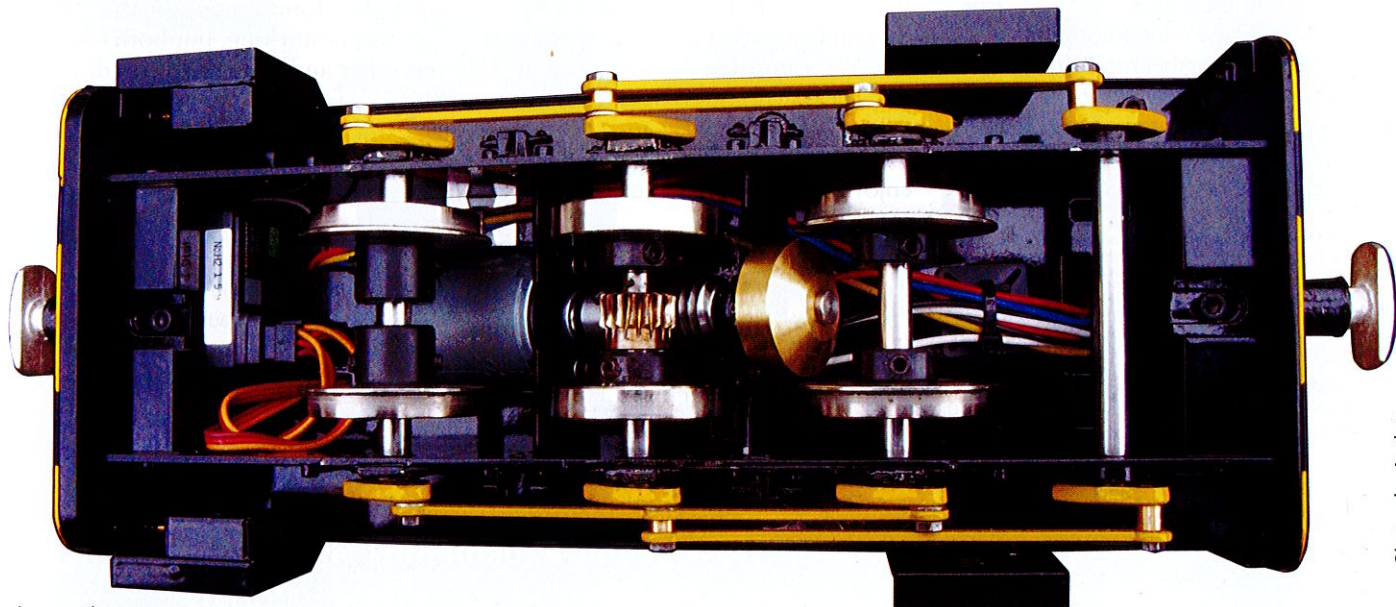
Top Harlech Castle approaches Sparrow Falls Bridge on the Pear Tree Light Railway with an empty coaching stock movement

Below: An underside view of the well engineered chassis. Note the substantial motor and gear train.

an 0-6-0 Diesel Hydraulic, built in 1983 by Baguley-Drewry of Burton-On-Trent, for Instituto Nacional do Acucar (National Sugar Institute) in Mozambique. Subsequently the order was cancelled and she eventually came into the ownership of the Bredgar and Wormshill Railway. During 1985 it undertook initial trials on the Ffestiniog Railway, but was found to be too large for the loading gauge. However, in 1988 the Ffestiniog Company purchased it in part

exchange for the ex-Harrogate Gas Works Peckett.

It entered Boston Lodge works to be rebuilt for use by the Permanent Way Department, re-emerging with a new cab profile and fitted with 'RAF Waggon' type couplings and no vacuum brakes. The fully enclosed cab and 180hp CAT Diesel Engine marked it out as a significant improvement on the other departmental locomotives. The loco was named *Harlech Castle* (*Castell*



Harlech), the nameplate being displayed in English on one side and in Welsh on the other as per Ffestiniog Railway tradition. The experience gained with *Harlech Castle* showed great potential for passenger haulage and resulted in *Criccieth Castle*, which was built new, utilising some Baguley Drewery components. However, the Boston Lodge designed bodywork reflects the close link between these two locomotives.

Harlech Castle gave many years of reliable service before receiving a major overhaul in 2009 during which it received a new gearbox and had its wheels re-profiled. During the winter of 2011 the locomotive's wiring was completely renewed, and a new radiator and turbo were also fitted. Since then it has been in regular use, and could be seen at work during the recently completed new works at Porthmadog Harbour Station.

Steel and Bronze

So, what about the new Roundhouse Model? Well, the *Harlech Castle* utilises the same proven chassis as the *Criccieth Castle* and features a powerful Buhler motor and a robust steel and bronze gear set. It comes complete with excellent representations of the jack-shaft drive

and compensated springing found on the prototype. One of the major differences between the two locos is that *Harlech Castle* carries 10 rechargeable NiMh batteries as opposed to the eight found on the 'Cric', resulting in a better running duration and additional power. This has been achieved by the exclusion of working lights (as on the Cric) the resultant reduction in circuitry allowing extra space for the batteries. The loco is fully radio controlled for speed, direction and sound (if fitted) with the power switch and charging jack located in the cab.

Moving on to the aesthetics, the locomotive shares the same general proportions as the Cric, with the usual high standard of fit and finish. However, all of the key external detail differences are present, with the most noticeable being the narrower front hood and running boards, as opposed to the full width hood found on the Cric. All of the panels and cut-outs in the body are correctly represented and the two sets of wide footplate cab steps are present, along with the lifting eyes on the Bufferbeams. The correct front grill is present along with the more traditional style of exhaust pipe and single air horn. Both front and rear headlamps are present

although they are simple cast items as previously explained. All of the handrails are correctly positioned and are finished in the body colour as per prototype. The cab is fully glazed and the roof simply lifts off to facilitate access to the power switch and charging jack. It is worth noting that the detailed driving desk incorporated into the Cric is not replicated, but this wouldn't normally be seen anyway. It should also be noted that the correct bi-lingual plates are supplied as standard and that the prototypical yellow and grey, livery is available from the factory for an additional £40.00 – a vinyl transfer being used to achieve the effect. Oh, yes the age old cheese head screws are present on the bufferbeam, but when painted black as part of the Wasp Stripe livery applied to the bufferbeam they went un-noticed, until I actually thought to look for them.

So far the model has stacked up well, but how did it actually perform. Well I won't keep you in suspense; this Roundhouse product performed flawlessly, but with some nice surprises thrown in. The first job was to read the instructions, followed by charging the batteries using the Axtronics intelligent-charger provided. An initial full charge can take about five hours, although subsequent charges may take less. When the batteries were fully charged, the LED on the charger turned from Red to Green – time to take the locomotive out on to Pear Tree Light Railway metals.

Scale Walking Pace

The loco was supplied for review with a CR2S.V2 2.4Ghz radio control hand set, which is off the r/c car variety, with a centre off, sprung hand wheel and a trigger. As is good practice the handset was turned on before the locomotive, a green LED illuminating in the cab to denote the power being turned on. In the first instance I engaged in some light shunting in the yard to get a feel for the general handling characteristics. The speed and direction are controlled using the sprung centre off handwheel, with a

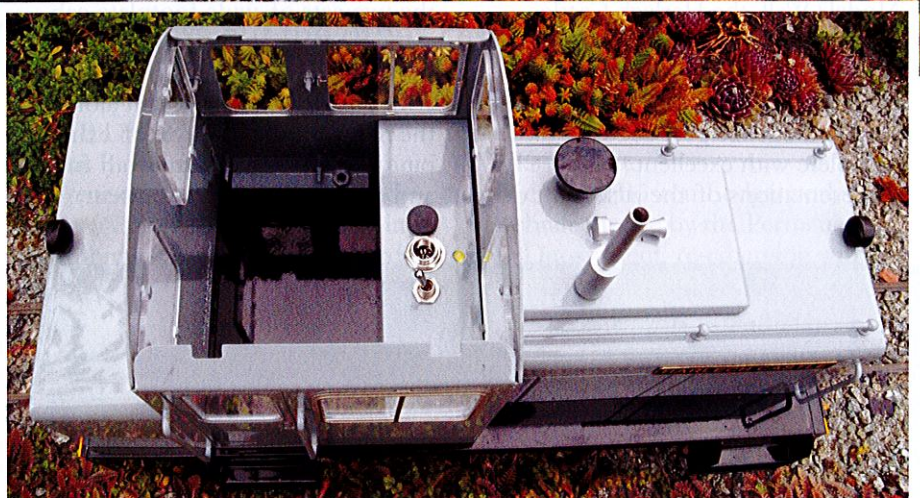
Harlech Castle poses for the official photographer after arrival on the PTLR for running trials. Of particular note is the well executed front grill and neatly applied Wasp Stripe livery.





Above: A rear three quarters view

Right: The cab roof lifts off to facilitate access to the Power Switch (Bottom) and charging jack (Middle). The green LED indicates that the power supply from the batteries is turned on.



clockwise movement providing forward travel, and anti-clockwise providing reverse. From the outset the locomotive was smooth and mechanically quiet in both directions with gentle positive and negative acceleration and a seamless 'scale' walking pace easily achieved.

I allowed the loco to make several full circuits light engine before then making up a train. Initially this consisted of my standard rake of four heavy bogie coaches, which the loco didn't even seem to notice on the long 1:72 climb. The top speed was perhaps a little faster than the Cric which I had previously driven and so was more than adequate – the prototype never much exceeding 15-20mph. Eventually the test train was made up to seven vehicles and this still didn't seem a problem, with the loco remaining a delight to drive – weighing in at the best part of 3Kg there is plenty of adhesive weight.

Having previously driven a Cric hauling a dead 'Lady Anne' and a long string of Accucraft IoM coaches, I didn't require any further convincing of the loco's capability. Also of note, for those who wish to run without needing hands on the transmitter, two rubber O-rings are provided and can be fitted behind the handwheel to introduce friction and so hold it in place.

Firing On All Cylinders

It was now time to have a look, or more specifically a 'listen' to another major feature on the model. The optional soundcard where fitted is operated using the centre off trigger

mechanism on the R/C handset. Now, sound units will always be subject to the ear of the individual and what sounds marvellous to one person may sound awful to another. However, I was personally very impressed with the sound produced by this unit. To my ear, if listened to reasonably close-up it provided a realistic engine sound with a distinct exhaust note – whilst when further away it was still easily audible but not overbearing, as I find can be the case with some other types. Taking a look at the system in detail, the horn can be sounded at any time when the loco and transmitter are switched on, by pushing the trigger to the left. To turn on the engine sound,



'Harlech Castle' looking right at home with a short engineers train

nically. The old adage is that there is a prototype for everything, and in this case it is probably right.

Pros

Excellent model of a well-known prototype, well engineered with excellent running qualities and simple to operate as well as being highly controllable. Excellent possibilities for personalisation and looks at home in any narrow gauge setting.

Cons

In my opinion –nothing.

Technical Specification

0-6-0 outside framed chassis with high quality Buhler motor and precision made steel and bronze gear set. Length 275mm, width 110mm, height 150mm, weight 2.92 kg. Full radio control for both speed and direction (and sound if fitted). Rechargeable NiMh batteries (10 on loco) for excellent running time complete with fast charger for *in-situ* charging. Gauge adjustable between 32mm and 45mm gauge. Insulated wheels as standard. Fully glazed windows and removable roof to access interior. Available with optional sound system featuring engine sound and horn. Available in any standard ROUNDHOUSE colour. Available in FR grey and yellow livery (Vinyl Transfer).

Price

R/C: £850.00

With Sound Unit Fitted: £975.00

FR Livery: Plus £40.00 ■

the trigger is pushed to the right, which initiates a full start-up sequence, from the initial turning over through to eventually firing on all cylinders. The sound unit is synced with the motor and as the speed/load increases the engine revs alter accordingly and with a great degree of sensitivity too. To cap it all off, moving the trigger to the right again, will initiate a full shut down sequence as well, which really does add an extra bit of realism to the locos operation.

In all this is a superb model, which demonstrates all of the traits one would expect from a Roundhouse loco. As well as being capable of running during the normal course of events when instant power is needed or desired, this loco would also be ideally suited for rescue duties. Should the need arise to haul an expired (free running) live steamer and

a normal sized train back on shed it would be well within its capabilities. Even though it is a model of a recognisable prototype, Baguley Drewery and Boston Lodge have built/overhauled many locomotives. It wouldn't take much imagination to create your own locomotive without fear of attack from the rivet counting department. Industrial locos all around the world have carried no end of different liveries with all manner of unusual appendages that you might care to add. Of course you might just want a good old British outline loco that is a bit different to the Criccieth Castle, and this would fit the bill



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