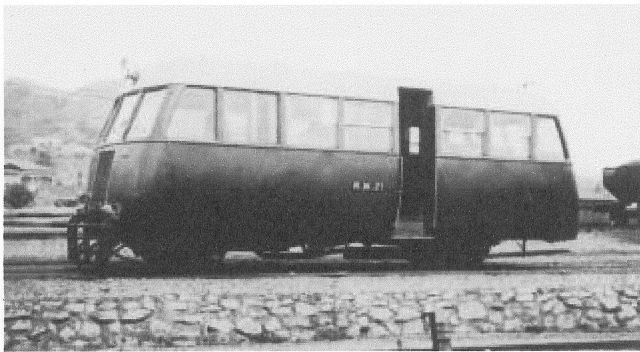


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### **RM20 and 21**

*Condensed from an article written in the New Zealand Railway Observer issue 89 of spring 1961.*

Classified "Rm" and numbered 20 and 21, they were, just a couple of little four-wheeled railcars. Nowadays no doubt, we would call them railbuses, but in August 1936, they were the first diesel-powered vehicles to go into revenue-earning service on New Zealand Railways. They were designed to facilitate rapid delivery of the Christchurch morning newspaper to the West Coast of the South Island, the service being subsidised by the newspaper company. Each railcar was built around a conventional Leyland "Tiger" bus chassis adapted for railway purposes and was powered by a Leyland 8.6-litre diesel engine developing 95 h.p. at 1950 r.p.m. The maximum speed was 50 m.p.h. Originally Rm 20 was fitted with a standard four-speed manually operated gearbox, but this was soon replaced by a fluid torque converter of the type installed in Rm 21. Seating was provided for 19 passengers, although with a full load of newspapers aboard the capacity was reduced to 13 passengers.



According to the New Zealand Railways Staff Bulletin of May-June 1955, the small 7.75 ton railcars were intended only as a temporary expedient until larger and more powerful vehicles could be made available. Accordingly, they had rather a short life, being dismantled at Addington Workshops in 1942, by which time the double-bogie Vulcan railcars were at work. The four-wheelers had been built at the Hutt Workshops in the North Island. Their overall length was 25 ft. and wheelbase was 14 ft. 6 in.

The timetable to which these railcars were to operate was dated to take effect from Monday, August 3, 1936, with departure from Christchurch at 2.20 a.m. each day except Sunday and arrival at Greymouth at 6.40 a.m. and Hokitika, 169 miles, at 7.55 a.m., shortly afterwards altered to 7.45 a.m. The return journey started in the late afternoon, leaving Hokitika at 4.25 p.m. and Greymouth at 5.42, with Christchurch arrival at 10.23 p.m. These schedules were nearly 2.5 hours. quicker than the best ordinary express train schedules at that time.

During the stopover at Hokitika, the railcar was used to make a trip north to Reefton and

back, and then an after lunch return trip to Greymouth, before returning to Canterbury. The Greymouth - Reefton part of the morning working evidently was not well supported, for it had been discontinued by August 1938. This working enabled the cars to run a total of 526 miles daily when Reefton was included, and 434 miles subsequently.

Just five weeks after the introduction of this railcar service, which was the first main-line service of its kind in New Zealand, another notable development occurred when some larger, 13.5 ton, 49-seat railcars were put to work on the Wairarapa line between Wellington, Masterton, and Palmerston North. Specially designed to negotiate the Rimutaka Incline, each of these cars was powered by a 120 h.p., 10-litre Leyland petrol engine mounted under the floor of the passenger compartment. These engines were replaced two or three years later by diesel engines, the petrol motors being used in some small "Tr" class shunting locomotives.

[HOME](#)