



FIRST FEATS OF INNOVATION

LNER
LONDON NORTH EASTERN RAILWAY



The first Azuma trains go into service

Azuma means 'east' in Japanese – the perfect name for LNER's latest fleet of trains, continuing the LNER tradition of setting new, higher standards in comfort, reliability and customer experience. On 15 May 2019, the first bi-mode Azuma train entered service, with the inaugural journey departing London King's Cross at 11:03 and arriving at Leeds at 13:16. Subsequent Azuma services were launched in LNER destinations including Edinburgh, York, Newcastle, Harrogate, Lincoln, Aberdeen and Inverness..

Since they were introduced, Azuma trains have carried more than 4 million customers, travelled more than 5 million miles and use 35% less CO2 than diesel-only high-speed trains

LNER's first ever goose webcam

A goose that made her nest and laid her eggs on the York Station platform captured the public's heart. Amid the quieter times of the pandemic, she turned a flower box by the station's entrance into a cosy nursery.

LNER responded by setting up a camera feed titled 'Goosecam' to share the goose's progress with eager fans on social media.

They also invited Twitter users to help name their new feathered friend and her future goslings, much to the public's delight. The goose even made an appearance on BBC Springwatch, capturing the hearts of the nation.

Surprise start to the day, for a driver taking the Azuma South for the first time

In July 2019, 62-year-old Alan Steedman made history for LNER as he drove the first Azuma train out of Scotland. The role came as a pleasant surprise as he didn't know he would be driving the train until he checked his shift at the last minute.

He arrived at work to drive the 05:40 service to Newcastle from Edinburgh Waverley and was met by a flurry of news reporters and LNER's senior team.

They presented him with a tartan tie and a sprig of heather for his lapel, making Alan feel like he was going to a wedding. Alan navigated the Azuma's journey, even arriving two minutes ahead of schedule.

He played a huge part in LNER's history, and will cherish this memory for years to come.

The first family-friendly lounge

As anyone with young children knows, sometimes a long journey can be stressful. In a UK rail first, LNER opened a Family Lounge at London King's Cross station in 2022. Specially designed, it's a dedicated area where those with children can relax before their journey.

The lounge includes beach huts with tabletop games, a slide and a soft play area, so the little ones can let off some steam before their journey, and the parents can grab half an hour's 'me time'. There's also a special LNER Azuma model train set to entertain and inspire a new generation of budding train drivers.

The first glimpse of an iconic poster campaign

British railway posters are now highly collectable, with their bright and breezy depictions of days out and holiday destinations. The LNER East Coast Joys poster series, illustrated by Tom Purvis, is a classic example. Displayed to the public for the first time in 1931, it soon became the most famous advertising campaign in LNER's history. Purvis, who had previously designed posters for the Olympics, was highly prolific during his time at the LNER, producing more than 100 posters over all.

LNER's advertising department employed several other artists, but it was this campaign that caught the public's imagination – perhaps because of his depiction of long-legged women in bathing suits, which was considered rather shocking at the time.

Hairdressing on Flying Scotsman

1 May 1928, marked the beginning of an exciting new addition to train travel – a hairdressing salon on Flying Scotsman.

A journalist from the Evening Despatch was one of the first to trial the luxury offering. Booking an appointment for a midday haircut, he joined Flying Scotsman at Darlington.

Monsieur Albert, the skilled barber onboard, used an open razor with precision, which was easy thanks to his specially arranged chair that minimised jolting.

Nicknamed the 'Sweeney Todd of the rails' and the 'mile-a-minute barber,' he swiftly proved his talent as he skillfully cut the journalist's hair.

He loved his new trim.

Carolyn Sheard's poem for the first Azuma leaving Leeds

Carolyn Sheard was a key member of the LNER team when the first Azuma train left Leeds station back in 2019.

Carolyn, a customer experience leader for the company, wrote a poem to commemorate the launch, and was invited to take centre stage at a glittering launch event, which was attended by staff and customers.

Titled 'Our LNER', it went a little something like this:

Today's the day,
it's finally here.
So wave your flag
and give a big cheer!
Shiny new paint,
branded LNER.
Plush seating throughout,
each and every car.
Auto announcements,
and sockets for all,
more legroom in standard,
that's welcome, if you're tall.
The tech spec is awesome,
from WiFi to cloud.
Our bi-mode Azumas,
make us feel proud.
History in the making,
at the station in Leeds.
The launch of Azuma,
it's what our East Coast needs.
There's a buzz in the air,
and quite rightly so –
a while we've been waiting,
now Azuma is go!

Green 'CityTree' takes root at Newcastle Central Station

A breath of fresh air was brought to Newcastle-upon-Tyne after a green 'CityTree' was installed at Central Station.

Combining the natural ability of living moss – to bind fine dust and remove it from the air – with cutting edge technology, the CityTree has been designed to clean, cool and humidify 3,500 m³ of air each hour. That is equivalent to the breathing volume of 7,000 people.

It made Newcastle Central the first train station in the world to benefit from having a CityTree inside.

Unlike conventional air filters, the various species of moss inside the eye-catching three metre structure are never full, as the fine dust is converted to natural biomass and digested by the moss. This means it can absorb and metabolise up to 82 per cent of the fine dust in the air and in doing so, produce oxygen.

Blue Peter comes to Doncaster to mark the first steam train journey between Edinburgh and London King's Cross in 30 years

Launched in 1948 and designed by Arthur H. Peppercorn of LNER, train 532 regularly travelled the East Coast Main Line before being stored away in 1966. Revived by the Blue Peter Locomotive Society, it was reintroduced in Doncaster to an eager crowd of 60,000.

After Peter Purvis unveiled the train, Valerie Singleton smashed a bottle of champagne against it.

In a landmark journey in April 1998, the 532 travelled from Waverley to London's King's Cross – the first steam train to do so in thirty years. On arrival, they were greeted by famous presenters John and Val along with the full Blue Peter team who had arranged a special broadcast for the occasion.

Shildon coal drops were a world first

Opened in 1847, Shildon "coal drops" in County Durham represent the world's first attempt at mechanising the refuelling of locomotives, according to Historic England.

These three wooden hoppers, suspended above stone bays by the Stockton and Darlington Railway, used gravity to deliver coal directly to a locomotive, replacing the laborious process of manual shovelling. Coal would fall from specially designed wagons into the hoppers and then into the waiting engines, significantly reducing refuelling times.

The Grade II-listed structure was in use until 1935.

Durham County Council now owns the drops and they form part of the Locomotion Museum in Shildon.

Broadcasting live from the first ever radio train

On Friday, 21 November 1930, the press were invited to a special trial run on the Hereford train to be one of the first people to experience rail travel with a radio.

The Daily News's correspondent eagerly participated in the test. While the broadcast quality could have been better, the railway company was determined to enhance and refine the experience for its customers.

The 10:10 train from London King's Cross to Leeds on 24 November made history as the first regular service equipped with a radio.

The dining carriages were wired and fitted with sockets, allowing customers to plug in headsets for a mere shilling rental.

As they settled in, customers enjoyed a four-hour continuous broadcast program played out.

The trial demonstrated the boundless possibilities of technology.

HST's arrive on the East Coast Main Line

On 8 May 1978, British Rail (BR) ushered in the era of the high-speed train (HST) with the introduction of the InterCity 125 on the East Coast Main Line. The following year, a full HST timetable was implemented, marking a new era in rail travel.

A BR press advert proclaimed, "Now more 125s to London! InterCity125 is the Journey Shrinker. It can cruise at 125 mph, dramatically shrinking journey times!"

In March 1978, David Anderson, writing for the Newcastle Evening Chronicle, vividly described his experience on what appeared to be a test run of the innovative InterCity 125. "It was the first time I had 'flown' from London to Tyneside – on a train. I travelled on British Rail's latest whizz-kid – the InterCity125 – on its first public 'flight' on the East Coast Main Line. As it zoomed along on its air-cushioned suspension system, you were literally rising on air... The ultra-quiet, smooth ride was thanks to air-conditioning, double glazing, and automatic doors worked by tread mats... And as a delightful bonus, the 125 became the first InterCity passenger train to serve draught beer and lager."

Going TikTok viral for the first time

For most customers, passing another train on the East Coast Main Line is an everyday occurrence, hardly worth a second thought. However, a creative content creator seized the opportunity to capture this moment in a video that quickly amassed millions of views on TikTok.

As the two trains glided past each other, the video showed commuters, families, couples and even a stag party. The video shone a light on the many different people who travel by rail everyday.

Many hailed the video as a masterpiece, and it caught the attention of global news organisations.

Christmas present wrapping service onboard for the first time

Research by LNER found that one in four people have been criticised for ugly gift packaging in the past. So, in December 2021, LNER treated Christmas shoppers to a professional gift wrapping service on trains along the East Coast Main Line.

Customers simply had to scan a QR code, and a specially trained gift wrapper would beautifully wrap their present, ready to surprise loved ones.

A very special limited-edition 'Azuma' design wrapping paper was on offer, showcasing LNER's cutting edge at seat ordering technology.

Carbon capturing introduced to stations

Born out of LNER's innovation accelerator programme, FutureLabs has launched the first ever algae-growing farm within the UK rail industry, situated at Berwick-Upon-Tweed station.

In its experimental phase, this audacious initiative holds the potential to transform LNER into the UK's pioneering rail company, spearheading carbon capture efforts at key stations to combat CO2 emissions.

BSL rolls out at stations

Breaking new ground in the quest for inclusivity within the deaf community, LNER has embarked on an initiative to integrate British Sign Language (BSL) directly onto the Customer Information Screens, providing equal access to vital information for the first time.

Following a successful trial at Doncaster station earlier this year, LNER is committed to expanding this feature across all its managed stations.

Let's Eat at Your Seat app launches

In 2020 LNER launched its 'Let's Eat At Your Seat' app, allowing customers to order refreshments using a QR code and have them delivered directly to their seat. LNER was the first UK train operator to offer such a service.

Introduced during the pandemic, while social distancing was in place, customers welcomed its arrival as it meant they could enjoy a range of locally sourced food and drink during their journey without having to leave their seat.

The app's popularity continues today. It was shortlisted for The Caterer's Foodservice Cateys Awards in 2022 in the Best Use of Technology category.

Dictaphones offered to business customers for the first time

In February 1934, the 08:15 Newcastle to London King's Cross and 17:30 return service introduced dictaphones for business customers.

These machines allowed for recording and transcribing messages, offering a convenient service along the journey. By October 1934, the team had covered 127,000 miles and typed 1 million words.

The service catered to travellers, including Cabinet Ministers, footballers, authors, lawyers, and fashion buyers.

While the exact end date is unclear, the service ceased at some point after June 1936.

The dictaphone era left a mark on railway innovation and convenience.

Music is in the air on LNER

In November 1931, LNER introduced an innovative new policy, permitting small gramophones and portable wireless sets as personal luggage onboard trains.

On 14 November the same year, an LNER official declared that there would be no restrictions on enjoying wireless music or playing gramophones as long as fellow customers in the carriage didn't object. This revolutionary move aimed to brighten people's long train journeys.

However, by December 1931, the company's Chief General Manager received complaints from some customers, expressing irritation over this new policy. Despite the occasional grumbles, it was concluded that such cases were of little consequence.