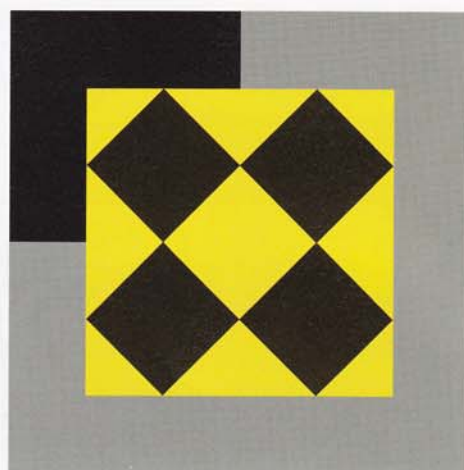


Railfreight General



Railfreight Petroleum



Railfreight Coal

# Railfreight: The maki

Railway observers were startled by the bold new image that BR Railfreight introduced 20 years ago. To celebrate the anniversary of this iconic piece of railway design, **Philip Sutton** digs through the archives to trace the identity's inception and comes up with some fascinating new information. There's also the chance to see and own some of the fantastic publicity shots taken at the time.

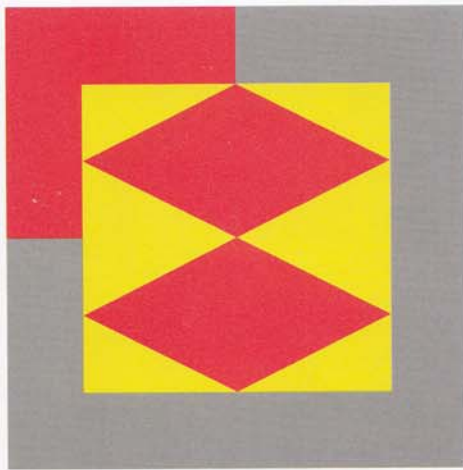
THE RAILWAY IS BIG on nostalgia, happy to celebrate the anniversaries of its famous Victorian engineers and the opening of their lines and stations. However, there is little available for those with an interest in modern history, hence the popularity of our 'Time Traveller' column. Ask about October 1987 and most people will pause before recalling the Great Storm that wrecked havoc across southern England. Ask a fresh-faced



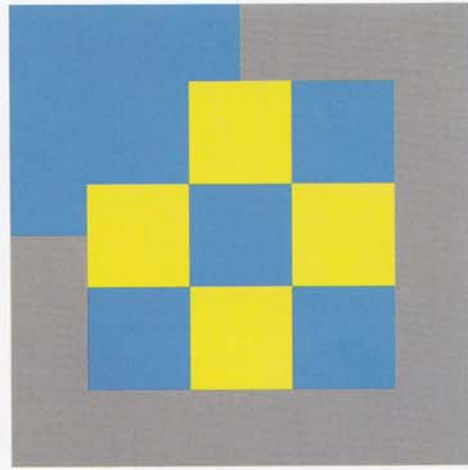




Railfreight Metals



Railfreight Distribution



Railfreight Construction

# ing of a design classic

railway fan and you are likely to be told of the launch of BR Railfreight's revolutionary sub-sector identities.

The new image, unveiled during a special event at Ripple Lane depot in East London just hours before the winds struck, was bright, bold and exciting, catching everyone's imagination and dramatically raising the profile of the business. Of course, this is exactly what it was intended to do. The Railfreight sector of BR

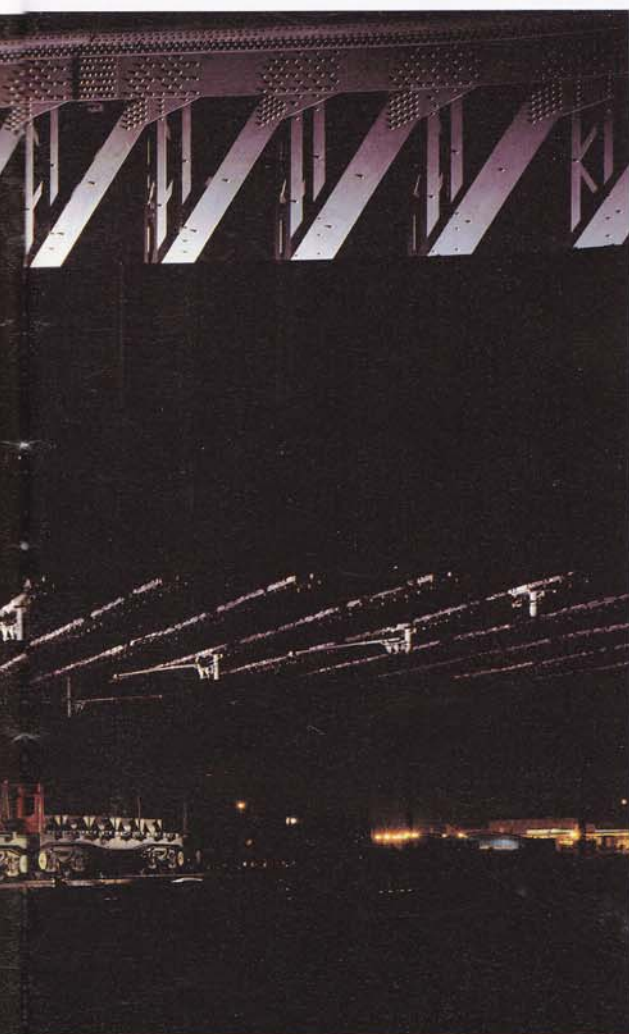
*"Market research in 1987 revealed that Railfreight's image was very poor, with a lingering public perception of dirt and decay, not helped by a motive power fleet carrying a mix of liveries."*

was on the up – it had successfully implemented a big management restructuring, adopted the policy of traffic-specific dedicated manpower and resources and, in just three years, transformed a £264 million trading loss into a £44 million profit without the help of any Government subsidies. Investment also had to keep pace with this turnaround, the biggest single capital expenditure being the ordering of a brand new fleet of 100 Class 60 locomotives at a cost of £1.5 million each. Despite all this good work, research revealed that Railfreight's image was poor, with a lingering public perception of dirt and decay, not helped by a motive power fleet carrying a real mix of colour schemes with many still in grubby Rail Blue dating from the 1960s. The time had come for the company to display its new-found confidence: the time had come for a bold new corporate identity!

## Evolution of a livery

Roundel Design was tasked with coming up with a fresh look for Railfreight early in 1987, having been brought in by the industrial design consultancy, Jones Garrard who were acting as advisors to Jane Priestman, BR's Director of Architecture, Design & Environment. The brief was demanding. The new identity had to be clearly defined and have immediate impact as well as being easily identifiable at speed and from a distance, even when dirty. All this, and it had to flatter the exterior styling of the new Class 60 which was still on the drawing board. The designers also realised that any new symbol had to work at different scales from the side of a locomotive right down to a letterhead or business card. Other considerations included the ability to work alongside the BR 'family' double arrow and Rail Alphabet typography, which was to be retained because of its timelessness and superb legibility, as well as the new depot mascots starting to emerge out of the locomotive dedication policy.

The now familiar elements of the identity – the livery, the depot mascot plaques and the symbol – all evolved separately but were to come together to prove the old saying 'the whole is greater than the sum of the parts'. Roundel was already working on a number of other railway projects with Jones Garrard. It was from



Railfreight Metals-dedicated Class 37/5 No. 37514, complete with Thornaby Kingfisher depot plaques and white rimmed tyres, presents an impressive sight under Holgate bridge, York, with a rake of BAA steel carriers in tow. The new triple-grey livery was in the process of being created for a small batch of these locos before it became the basis for the entire Railfreight project. This was one of several photographs staged especially for publicity material and the fondly remembered calendars.

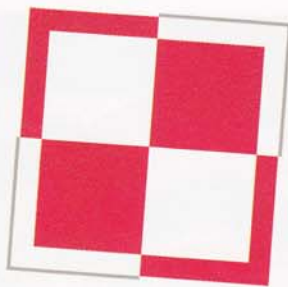
Chris Ridley/Roundel Design



# Railfreight

## A design classic

this source that a request, apparently a local initiative by the Metals business, was passed on for a locomotive livery. The requirement was based around a revised colour scheme intended for the fleet of Class 37/5s that were dedicated to British Steel flows. A triple-grey base livery was being devised for this purpose when it was overtaken by the Railfreight project (although it didn't stop Thornaby painting a locomotive in British Steel's own house colour of light blue). The style of the depot plaques also originated in a similar vein when Carlisle Currock wagon depot got its 'running fox' mascot



The Polish air force insignia which helped trigger the creative process involved in devising the six sub-sector symbols.

Depot mascots were adopted in the form of cast alloy plaques applied to locomotive cabsides.

long before the Railfreight identity had been devised.

The design process involved analysis of the existing liveries that were variously described as 'cheap', 'utilitarian' and 'drab'. It was also thought that some of these schemes were defeatist, being designed to disguise the effects of weathering and dirt. Roundel turned this on its head. The neutral light grey livery would provide contrast to any branding thus aiding visibility but would also encourage and reward cleaning. The symbol was, initially, problematic but obviously it had to be simple and bright which was likely to require the use of primary colours. It became clear to the designers that the demands were similar to those for military aircraft markings: simplicity of shape to ensure instant recognition in all conditions, several levels of identification and the need to project a tough and confident image. The aircraft analogy even encompassed the idea of 'squadrons' of locos and







dedicated home bases. With these thoughts in mind, the Roundel team started to research and formulate ideas, making great use of scale models.

The Polish air force insignia proved inspirational and led, through a series of development sketches, to the black diamonds of the coal symbol. Over the course of a productive weekend, the five sub-sector and parent symbols slowly evolved and were refined. How much of the description was present initially, or has been interpreted subsequently, is lost in the midst of time but official contemporary material describes both the 'hidden 'F' for freight' and 'optimistic upward arrow shape' in the top left hand corner of each mark. What is not in doubt is the effectiveness of the horizontal body shapes that do a good job of characterising the commodity (e.g. wavy liquid petrol, sheets of steel, pieces of coal and building blocks). Less well known – by the virtue of the fact it was rarely used on anything other than marketing material and stationary – is the 'general user' red and yellow rectangles symbol which was intended to be used when more than one sector was involved in a project. So powerful was the imagery and family likeness that no additional lettering or brand name was felt necessary.

Roundel's Mike Denny remembers the first major presentation to Railfreight Director, Colin Driver and his high-level management team: "We were having kittens running up to the meeting and I can even recall waking up in the night having had a dream where all the senior management were screaming 'what rubbish' and laughing hysterically at our proposal". He needn't of worried. The Railfreight bosses bought into the idea immediately and the feedback from both staff and the general public was incredibly favourable. Most of those

**Could you imagine any of today's railway companies going to the extent of organising a publicity photograph as good as this? Freshly overhauled Class 56s Nos. 56012 Maltby Colliery and 56091 Castle Donnington Power Station are recorded at Gascoigne Wood with immaculate rakes of merry-go-round hoppers. The coal sub-sector symbol was the first to be created, and applied on these Type 5s, superbly complements the diamond-shaped depot plaques. The HAA wagons, with yellow framework and unpainted galvanised bodywork, display smaller scale branding after the much bigger original logos got chewed up by the unloading equipment.**

Chris Ridley/Roundel Design

*"Most people quickly understood the imagery and family relationship. There was no problem in indentifying each symbol with the appropriate industry."*

surveyed understood the imagery and had no problem at all in aligning the symbols with the appropriate industry. It was never intended for rail customers to come in contact with more than one sub-sector symbol but those that encountered others recognised them straight away as one of the family, which helpfully served to draw attention to Railfreight's breadth of services. Later, Railfreight bosses were to be even more impressed when, at a high-profile launch of a new InterCity service... the story goes... a passing block freight train with an ex-works loco at the head drew everyone's attention as it rumbled slowly by!

## Make your mark

At the time of Railfreight's re-birth, dedication was the buzzword of the day. The national business managers, later sub-sector directors, enjoyed the two-fold effect it had on operations. As well as giving them direct responsibility for the costs of assets (which reversed the culture of keeping locos in reserve or waiting repair), it also dramatically improved staff morale. The depots now had 'ownership' of their machines. Both metaphorically and physically, individual maintenance facilities had stamped their mark on their machines by the fitting of sub-sector markings and depot mascot plaques.

Roundel's adoption of depot mascots was a masterstroke. Emblems were not new and many depots and areas had adopted their own unofficial marks such as Glasgow Eastfield's West Highland Terrier, Thornaby's Kingfisher and Cornish Railways' Lizard. Here was the chance to legitimise and harmonise the 'sweet but un-businesslike' mascots that had been appearing in ever increasing size and quantity by redesigning





# Railfreight

## A design classic

them as corporate plaques that would be fitted to the cabsides of locos. The mascots gave the opportunity for vehicles to be individualised and emphasised the teamwork involved in running and servicing rolling stock. The initial designs were developed from existing emblems or staff suggestions and were so popular that their use was soon extended to lapel badges, uniforms and even football kits. Before long, nearly every location had its own badge, not all of which were officially approved!

The depot plaques, whilst successful, were not without their problems. As was to be expected, a few locations were not entirely happy with their design and several changes were needed. Most awkward amongst these was Stratford, which was of particular concern since this site was responsible for most of the early development work and locomotive painting. The original Stratford mascot of an accurately-drawn sparrow perched on a branch was dismissed as being too boring so the cartoonist Frank Dickens (best known for his strip 'Bristow' in the *Evening Standard*) was brought in to effect a 'humorous' redesign. This went too far the other way and was again dismissed by the staff to be superseded by the waist-coated cockney sparrow used on the depot's own unofficial stickers.



The new identity had to work in all sizes, from the eight foot tall sides of locomotives right down to lapel badges and stationary. Mark Bentley's business card carries the General symbol as he was responsible for working with all the sub-sectors.

Some amazing images were shot for the Railfreight calendars. This is Class 90 No. 90046 on Manningtree Viaduct with a Freightliner.

Chris Ridley/Roundel Design

## Countdown to launch

As the official launch date approached, there were numerous snags to overcome, mostly concerned with how the new livery should be applied to the different loco classes, each of which had unique dimensions. Keeping the link with the original Metals project, a newly refurbished Class 37/5, No. 37673, was chosen as the guinea pig. Painted at Crewe Works in July 1987 with Railfreight General symbols added at Stratford, it made one return daylight run to Watford for the benefit of Railfreight HQ staff based there. Designer, Harold Batten expressed shock when he first saw the full size machine, having up until that date worked on scale drawings and models: "We could not believe the correct paint had been used when we saw the Class 37 for the first time. It was immediately apparent that the greys were far too light. Eventually we realised that we had not factored in how colours change dramatically in shade in relation to size." This machine carried yellow-backed Railfreight nameplates and bright chrome-plated nose side grilles – a feature that was also intended to appear on all refurbished machines and the new Class 60. The paint specifications were duly changed and just before the Ripple Lane event, locos Nos. 37673 and 47079 were rolled out wearing Distribution and Metals vinyls respectively. Running numbers on the fronts of locos were also applied to aid identification but an earlier proposal for a small repeater symbol to be displayed here as well was dropped. Instead, repeater flashes were applied near







the cab doors at the opposite end to the main symbol.

Key Railfreight customers were invited to join a special train from Fenchurch Street to a dull and damp Ripple Lane on October 15th, hauled by Class 47/4 No. 47609, in order to be first to see the new identity. Fireworks and silver ticker tape went up as an echelon of newly painted locomotives emerged from the servicing shed in front of the assembled crowds. The locomotives involved were Nos. 37893 (Petroleum), 47079 (Metals), 56001 (Construction) and 58050 (Coal). Also present were Nos. 08834 (Distribution), 37673 (Distribution) and 37892 (Petroleum) as well as a selection of wagons – comprising a VDA van, HAA coal hopper and FBA container flat – plus a wooden mock-up of the new Class 60 front end.

Railfreight's M&EE department and Stratford had already made their mark on the event with the Class 58 featuring unapproved cast Railfreight plates on the cab fronts and the 0-6-0 pilot having a cockney



Launch day dawned dull and wet but spirits were high at Ripple Lane on October 15th, 1987. The Class 58, described as the most difficult to livery correctly, was a bit of an embarrassment on the day and No. 58050 *Toton Traction Depot* had to be shoved out by the Class 37 behind it! Nevertheless, the locos looked good and the livery was well received by all that were present. Class 08 No. 08834 was used on a demonstration freight train but had gained unofficial cockney sparrow stickers in retaliation for the fitting of the 'cartoon character' depot plaques. The new corporate identity even stretched to include the after dinner mints (see below). Philip Sutton

sparrow sticker prominent on the engine room doors! After a sit-down lunch (including 'After Freight' mints), railway quiz and a powerful speech from Colin Driver, guests made their way back to London with No. 37892 providing the traction. The storms hit hard that night, blowing away the marquees, but the public open day on Saturday still went ahead thanks to the efforts of the local staff and was more memorable for it.

## Behind the camera

In the short period between the launch of the 'new' Railfreight and its break up in the early-1990s in the run-up to privatisation, the PR department went into overdrive – the fresh image and fleet of new locomotives were a marketing man's dream: Can you remember the Railfreight General hot air balloon?

The most obvious, and probably the best-remembered, promotions were the three lavish wall calendars that featured some stunning rail photography. Roundel took charge of the concept and commissioned Christopher Ridley to undertake the photography (who says his 15 minutes of fame came in 1963 when he assisted on the Christine Keeler 'chair shot'). More used to recording pop stars and actors, the ex-NME photographer recalls that it was a logistical nightmare to capture the O Winston Link inspired images. "Roundel wanted to do something new and different. The shoe-string budget meant that we couldn't use expensive film industry lighting and we had to lash up our own Heath Robinson-style arrangements using every hired generator we could lay our hands on, numerous connectors and miles of cables. The rippled bodysides of the locomotives caused all sorts of problems with unwanted reflections so we decided the only way of lighting the scenes was to use directional flash from the ground upwards, using a team of up to 12 assistants in walkie-talkie communication. Often, there was a 'golden period' of just a few minutes at twilight or dawn where we could use the backlighting of the natural sky to avoid pitch black backgrounds. This was all undertaken in the days before computer manipulation, so to produce a speed blur I just asked the driver to move the train backwards during the exposures which could be anything from 30 seconds to five minutes."

The photo shoots involved tremendous planning, with whole sections of main line closed so that the train could be exactly positioned – most memorably on the Forth and Newcastle High Level bridges, the latter with the road also closed to avoid vibrations. It is unlikely that this would ever be repeated today, with the disruption that it would cause, but it gives a good idea of the importance BR attached to publicity.



*"The calendar photographic shoots involved tremendous planning, with whole sections of the main line closed so that the trains could be exactly positioned."*





# Railfreight

## A design classic

The weather was often inclement and it was hard to keep the modified 5 x 4 inch Sinar camera still during the timed exposures when fitted with a long lens.

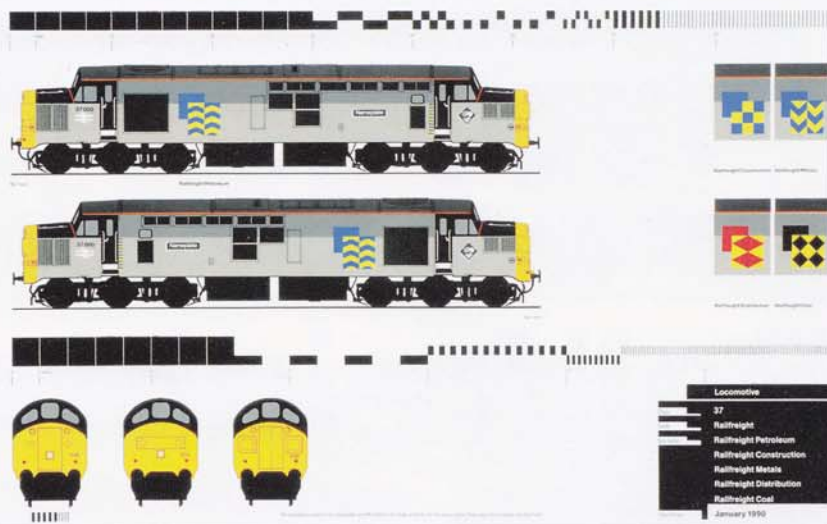
There were a few close calls, Chris Ridley remembers, with service trains queuing up behind the shoots, but he always got at least one good picture although he didn't know it until the films were processed!

### Attention to detail

Looking back through the archives, it is surprising how often the importance of applying the livery accurately is stressed. Once the designers were satisfied with the launch fleet, they set about producing a detailed design guide, supported by information sheets, for the workshops as well as more general literature and posters. Roundel was convinced that attention to detail and consistency in application would set the identity apart and impart a feeling of quality. Each locomotive class had specific rules for the application of the seven separate elements including different sizes of symbol, arrows and depot plaques. The polished, cast aluminium BR arrows were fixed with jo-bolts and even had special flush fitting caps to cover the fixing holes.

The Class 58 was notoriously difficult to get correct with many carrying names on the cabsides and the flanks full of hinged engine room doors to disrupt the application of the vinyl symbols. Even with the launch locomotives, it took several attempts to get the livery correct and inevitably, in such a large organisation, it was difficult to police. Of course, there were numerous mistakes, which the railway magazines of the day were quick to pick up on and illustrate, but eventually the works began turning out reliveried locomotives like well-oiled machines. There were occasional in-service changes like the loss of the large coal symbol on the side of the HAA hoppers – these were simply torn off by the automatic rubber wheels at the unloading points. Roundel remains hugely respectful of the staff that took on board the rebranding and who could have easily rejected the advice of the 'know-all outside designers'.

It is also important to remember that the depots



*"Each locomotive class had very specific rules for the application of the seven separate elements of the livery including different sizes of symbol, arrows and depot plaques."*

**Construction dedicated and Leicester out-based (hence the Panther plaques) Class 56 No. 56054 was the star of this 1991 calendar picture. Today, motion blur can be added to a digital image in a few computer keystrokes but in this instance the heavy Redland aggregates train was actually shuffled during the long camera exposure to create this dramatic effect!**

Chris Ridley/Roundel Design

themselves got new signage, often with illuminated symbols, but only after they had been upgraded, cleaned and painted. New rolling stock washing equipment was also installed and those around at the time to see the changes first hand were convinced that the cleaning regime certainly improved as a direct result of this and the new colour scheme. This was vitally important to the business as it was competing with the road haulage industry that had a professional attitude to vehicle condition.

### Give me a little more time

Mike Denny, the boss of Roundel, draws little comfort from the fact that – 20 years on – preservationists are now painting locos back into this identity. The project won numerous prestigious awards in the design and media world but he feels they "never really cracked it". The work was never-ending and it soon became obvious what a massive task they had taken on. "More monitoring and a couple more years and we would have been there", he says rhetorically. "There was fun, such as when the Railfreight Christmas card, featuring a pine tree symbol, prompted the Director to threaten the creation of a new sub-sector. The completion of the Class 60 fleet, that played such an important role in the original concept, was also a joyous time but there really wasn't enough time to savour this achievement before the break up of the railway began." RAIL EXPRESS readers will likely disagree. ■

