



# Survival Instinct

Rescued within days of being scrapped ten years ago, 37800 is back in the news after becoming the first Class 37 to be outshopped in Rail Operations Group's distinctive blue livery, giving the locomotive – which turns 60 in May – a contemporary modern look. **Andy Coward** spoke to Glenn Edwards from Europhoenix about the locomotive's remarkable survival.

**ABOVE:** 37800 emerges from Loram UK's Derby facility following completion of its rebranding into Rail Operations Group blue livery on November 10, 2022. The Europhoenix-owned locomotive has lost its former Cassiopeia nameplates and is due to be renamed over the next few weeks. Courtesy Europhoenix

**N**ewly repainted into Rail Operations Group's distinctive blue livery, 37800 is set to become even more popular with lineside photographers than it already has been.

The locomotive, which is owned by Europhoenix and on long-term hire to ROG, is a regular performer on the main line, particularly in use on stock transfers, but the fact that it is still performing on the main line almost 60 years after it first entered service with British Rail is something of a miracle in itself.

37800 is a true survivor that has dodged an appointment with the scrapman on more than one occasion.

## A brief history

Originally numbered D6843, the English Electric Type 3 locomotive emerged from Vulcan Foundry at Newton-le-Willows at the end of May 1963. 309 of the design were built at either Vulcan Foundry, or at Robert Stephenson and Hawthorns.

The locomotive's first near miss came in January 1975 when 37143 (as it was by then numbered under the British Rail TOPS renumbering scheme) ran through a set of catch points, riding through a stop-block

and it ended up lying at the bottom of an embankment alongside the River Ebbw. The precarious position the locomotive ended up in meant that recovery proved to be quite difficult, with it not being recovered from its resting place for just over six months. Thankfully it was repaired, despite suffering serious damage in the accident.

37143 was converted to a Class 37/7 'Heavyweight' at Crewe Works in 1986, emerging renumbered as 37800 in September 1986. Following privatisation 37800 was transferred to English Welsh and Scottish Railway and was subsequently chosen to work ballast services on a contract in France which took place between August 1999 and July 2000, before returning to UK after the contract was completed.

However, the locomotive's foreign exploits were not quite finished, as it was chosen to be exported to Spain in August 2001 for working infrastructure trains in connection with the construction of a new railway line being built between Madrid and Barcelona in the country.

For this work, the locomotives involved in the contract were painted into GIF livery, which was similar in design to the

then-standard EWS livery, but with the maroon colour on the EWS scheme replaced with a light blue and the gold mid-bodyside stripe replaced with a darker blue stripe, with large GIF lettering on the bodywork in place of the EWS moniker. It worked services for GIF in Spain alongside a number of Class 37s, including 37884 with which it has been linked ever since. Eight EWS Class 58s were also used on the Spanish contract, also painted into the GIF blue livery.

While working in Spain 37800 was renumbered L33 and it remained in Spain until it and five of its classmates were returned to the UK in 2007. With no work for the locomotives, 37800 remained in store until it was withdrawn and offered for disposal by its owner.

## A near miss

The six former GIF Class 37 were eventually put up for sale by EWS, with four bought by Direct Rail Services, while 37800 was acquired by European Metal Recycling at Kingsbury, along with 37884, for scrapping. The two locomotives were delivered to Kingsbury in late 2012 and placed straight into the scrap line, ready to be dismantled by the scrap merchant almost immediately.



**LEFT:** Covered in graffiti from its time in store, 37800 is hauled through Alfreton station by 56303 and 56104 on March 15, 2016, en-route from Barrow Hill to Leicester for its overhaul to begin. Ironically, the Class 37 has outlived both of the Class 56s hauling it, with 56104 now part of GB Railfreight's Class 69 conversion programme and 56303 in store awaiting a decision on its future. Rob Reedman

Europhoenix had previously enjoyed a lot of success in reactivating redundant electric locomotives for exporting to Bulgaria and Hungary, but managing director Glenn Edwards had been keeping an eye on the UK spot hire market and had noticed a gap in the market for a fleet of spot hire type three locomotives that could be utilised for stock moves and transfers. The Class 37 design is ideal for this type of work, as the locomotives have wide route availability and the engine and mechanical components are still relatively common.

Glenn went to Kingsbury to inspect the two locomotives which were covered in graffiti from their time in storage. They were both in fairly poor condition, although 37884 looked slightly better and more complete than its classmate, but Glenn was not phased with rebuilding them and believed that his business could benefit from having a fleet of Class 37s for main line spot hire work.

After a deal was done to buy the locomotives from EMR on January 4, 2013, Glenn initially had the pair moved to Boden Rail Engineering Ltd's former base at Washwood Heath, where work was started on the reactivation of 37884.

However, work on 37800 would not be carried out at Washwood Heath, with the locomotive subsequently moving to Barrow Hill for continued storage when the site at Washwood Heath was closed in advance of the start of HS2 construction works. Another move to UK Rail Leasing's Leicester facility saw work on returning it to main line use finally begin during 2015.

### The revival begins

Europhoenix has invested significant six-figure sums in the overhaul of each of their locomotives, with 37800 being no exception. However, Glenn says that the revival of the locomotive was almost stopped midway

through its overhaul, with serious consideration given to stripping it of components and scrapping the remainder, due to the poor condition it was found to be in.

Glenn explained: "It came close to being scrapped, as when we started stripping it down for overhaul we realised that it was in even worse condition than we had originally thought. We knew it needed a lot of work, but it was far worse than 37884 had been. However, after careful consideration we decided to continue with it and the investment in overhauling it at the time has proved its worth."

"During its rebuild 37800 received newly overhauled bogies, the power unit was completely rebuilt and the locomotive had a lot of electrical and mechanical repairs carried out as part of the overhaul. Additionally, the cabs which were both in really bad condition required completely re-fitting."

"Due to the time since it had last worked on the UK main line, it also needed all of

the mandatory safety equipment, such as TPWS (Train Protection and Warning System), OTMR (On-Train Monitoring Recorders) and GSM-R (Global System for Mobile Communications-Railway) required for operating over Network Rail, as well as extensive bodywork repairs and a repaint into our Europhoenix grey and red livery."

Following completion of works, 37800 finally returned to main line use in May 2016, almost three-and-a-half years after it had been saved from scrapping by Europhoenix and having once again narrowly avoided the scrapman when its overhaul was almost cancelled at the midway point.

### Fleet Expansion

Europhoenix subsequently also bought 37510, 37601/608/611 from Direct Rail Services for reactivation to main line use with the locomotives all now on long term hire to ROG alongside 37800 and 37884.

**BELOW:** Shortly after completion of its rebuilding, 37800 sparkles in its recently-applied Europhoenix livery – complete with Rail Operations Group branding on the bodyside – at Derby while working a unit move from Ramsgate to Derby Litchurch Lane on July 9, 2016. Rob Reedman



**RIGHT:** A side-on profile of 37800 at Derby on November 10, 2022, following its unveiling in Rail Operations Group distinctive blue livery, applied at Loram UK in Derby. The locomotive has been fully repainted, with the graphics on the bodyside applied with a vinyl wrap. Courtesy Europhoenix

Former preserved locomotives 37146/188, 37207 and 37901 were bought from Colas Rail Freight after their proposed main line overhauls were cancelled and they were offered for disposal. The company also bought former DB Schenker liveried 37670 as a spares' donor locomotive, before scrapping the remains.

Europhoenix eventually also stripped 37146 and 37188 for reusable components before they too were scrapped, while the company sold 37207 in autumn 2021 for conversion into a battery-powered locomotive.

The company has recently returned Mirrlees-engine fitted 37901 to main line use after an extensive overhaul and although the locomotive has suffered from a number of niggling faults since returning to action, Glenn says that they are getting more confident in operating it and he is hopeful that it will soon be as reliable as the other 37s owned by his company.

Both 37800 and 37884 are fitted with tightlock-couplers, which means they are particularly useful for hauling redundant EMUs to scrap and Glenn said that it is rather ironic that the two locomotives that came perilously close to being scrapped themselves are now mainly employed taking other items of rolling stock for an appointment with the scrapman. In line with Europhoenix's policy of naming its locomotives after star constellations, 37800 became Cassiopeia on January 23, 2018, receiving the nameplates that had once been carried by Electric Traction Ltd's 86702 (which has since been exported to Bulgaria).

Glenn explained that the new-look 37800 has had its nameplates removed, as it is due to receive a new name over the coming weeks, although he remained tight lipped as to what its new name would be.

### Continual investment

Since returning to main line use in 2016, 37800 has proved to be a generally reliable locomotive, although Glenn said that Europhoenix has a policy of continual investment in its fleet and over the intervening years 37800 has received another overhauled power unit (recovered from 37503) after its original engine suffered crankcase damage, it has also



had its bogies re-tired twice. The engine has recently had two replacement overhauled cylinders fitted as part of scheduled maintenance carried out by Loram UK while the locomotive has been stopped at Derby for repainting.

Glenn explained that Loram now carries out all scheduled maintenance work on the Europhoenix/ROG fleet at their Derby base, but heavy Level 5 type overhauls are still being done at Leicester.

The reason 37800 was selected for receiving a new livery was simply because it was in need of repainting, as Glenn says: "It was the next in line for repainting, as its paintwork was in fairly poor condition. All of our other locomotives are painted into Europhoenix livery but with Rail Operations Group branding on the bodywork (with the exception of 37901 Mirrlees Pioneer, which carries Europhoenix branding), but ROG asked about the possibility of painting one of our locomotives into their livery and we were happy to agree.

"The work has been done by our partners at Loram UK in Derby, with the main bodyside livery applied using a vinyl wrap, although the rest of the locomotive has also been fully repainted.

"I knew that the ROG livery looked good on the Class 47s and 57s that carried it previously, but I think it actually suits the body profile of the Class 37 even more than it did

on the other locomotives. At the moment, none of our other locomotives need repainting and I don't know at this stage if any others will follow 37800 in carrying ROG colours, or whether it will remain unique carrying the livery."

The new-look 37800 worked its first train in its new livery on a test run from Derby to Bicester on November 11 and it is sure to attract a lot of attention from lineside photographers and enthusiasts. Europhoenix has no immediate plans to dispense with its Class 37 fleet and it seems that 37800's medium-term future with the operator is assured.

Glenn says: "They won't last forever, but providing the locomotive doesn't suffer a catastrophic failure, then it will remain in use with ROG for at least four more years and probably longer. Being fitted with tightlock-couplings also means that it is particularly useful for stock moves and as a company we invested over £100,000 in equipping it with the tightlock couplers and associated translator kit."

For a locomotive that has come close to scrapping on a number of occasions, it seems that 37800 will continue to ply the rail network for a long time to come. [RI](#)

→ *Railways Illustrated* is grateful to Glenn Edwards from Europhoenix for his assistance with this feature.

**BELOW:** 37800's first trip following its repaint and engine repairs was a test run from Derby to Bicester, appropriately alongside classmate 37884, with the pair passing through Derby station on the morning of November 11, 2022. Steve Donald

