

End Of The Line

Words & Music: Pat Drummond

For Ron Bennet, The Last Stationmaster at Cooma Railway Station

Dateline: Cooma 5/9/89

I wrote this song in the cab of a 44 Class Diesel, the last train that ever went down the Queanbeyan- Bombala railway line. It's a tribute to the men and women who, in developing Australia's railways, overcame much of the 'tyranny of distance' that opposed the development of our far flung colonies into a single nation. Far from shutting them down, as has been the recent trend, I strongly believe our railways should be developed and made more efficient. Given the vast distances this country has to overcome, our inefficient transport infrastructure is one of the greatest stumbling blocks we face in becoming internationally competitive. Railways, which are political hot potatoes at the moment, are more fuel efficient, more environmentally friendly and a great deal safer than the large scale movement of freight by our vastly inadequate road systems.

Well the train rolled to a halt just out of Bredbo,
where the old Chakola bridge is undermined.

There's no way to make the railhead in Bombala,
as we used to in my grandfather's time.

For the years of long neglect have left their mark here
but we'll fire up the diesel one more time,
while the ghosts of the engineers and the guards of bygone years,
travel with us to the end of the line.

Chorus: I remember when the rail rolled on forever;
bands of polished steel that bound this land together.
Men and women, stock and mail rode the ribbon of the rail.
Oh, it's hard to watch them fail and fall behind.
All aboard for the end of the line.

Now Kenny, the conductor in the club car,
through the palest eyes of grey I'd ever seen,
is looking back down damn near twenty years of service
and thinking 'bout the changes there had been.

**And Dave is damn near frozen in the brake van
for the battery's failed and the lights are fading fast;
and this may be the final time that they ever ride this line.
You can hear the wheels of history rolling past.**

Chorus:

**So, driver as you look off of this highway
at the lights of the level crossings all struck blind;
spare a thought for all those men who forged this railway;
hardwood sleepers, polished steel and spikes of iron.
You bureaucrats that count the cash in Sydney,
as you calculate the reason and the rhyme;
mark my word, you're on the brink,
a damn sight closer than you think
and getting closer to the end of the line.**

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