

GBRf DIESEL ELECTRIC LOCO No. 99004

In April 2022, Beacon Rail and GB Railfreight signed an agreement with Stadler Rail Valencia for the supply of 30 locomotives to replace their Class 66 locomotives. The locos represent a investment by GBRf of £150 million. The locomotives are owned by Beacon Rail, which funded the acquisition, and are leased to GBRf.

GBRf's Class 99 is a dual-mode electro-diesel having a Co-Co wheel arrangement [two 6-wheel bogies with all axles powered]. It was designed to haul freight trains on both overhead electrified [25kV] and non-electrified lines. It is based on the Euro Dual platform designed and built by Stadler, at their Valencia plant in Spain, but adapted to bring it within British loading gauge.

The thirty 75 mph locomotives have a power rating of up to roughly 8,270 hp in electric mode. This is far in excess of the diesel-powered Class 66 used widely on freight services. All have AWS and TPWS safety systems as well as OTMR and are planned to have ETCS equipment installed in due course. Unusually, they have cameras providing views of pantographs, shunting zones and the front of the locomotive. The locos are designed to raise or lower pantographs whilst on the move.

Class 99 locos have a 16-cylinder 2,400 hp Cummins QSK50 engine, which meets Stage 5 emissions standards. GBRf are expected to use HVO biofuels in service. It is reported that the Class 99 will outperform Class 66 at low speeds, despite having a less powerful diesel engine. The greater tractive effort means that the Class 99 on diesel power can deliver more power at the rail than the 66.

The less powerful diesel engine is also not expected to change its use and will be allocated on heavy haul routes and intermodal trains. On 28th November 2025, locos 99003 and 99004 were noted waiting at the Bristol Port Company's Royal Portbury Dock. This was prior to being lifted off their shipping trailers and put on the dockside rails before being towed to Leicester depot the following day.

99004 will be the first of it's class to haul passenger trains during it's visit to the Swanage Railway's Diesel Gala in 2026. Generally, however, Class 99's are likely to be used hauling intermodal trains on the West Coast and Great Eastern main lines.

In July 2025, GBRf reached agreement with Belmond to introduce Class 99 locos from 2027 to haul their luxury *Royal Scotsman* and *Britannic Explorer* land cruise trains, replacing the current Class 66 fleet to improve sustainability.

All 30 locos had been scheduled to be in service by June 2026, however this target has been deferred due to serious flooding in Valencia, in October 2024, affecting Stadler's factory. The whole Class 99 fleet, once fully operational, will be maintained by Stadler at a new facility in Leicester.

It is most fortunate for Swanage that Network Rail granted GBRf the new Class 99 locos an Interim Network Rail Statement of Compatibility (NRSC) just in time. This was an important requirement for Class 99 locos to operate across Britain's railway network.

Although an interim statement, it does mark an important step towards full certification, which GBRf and Network Rail will continue working towards. The first six Class 99s have now entered GBRf's fleet, which will allow an increase in driver training before the locos enter commercial service during this summer .

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Information collated by Peter Sykes 7th May 2026