

Emily's New Coaches

Written by Jan Page

And so we finally get introduced to Sodor's #12 engine (though she wouldn't wear it for another 17 years), Emily. Sixteen years since I first saw it on VHS, I still love the simplicity of it all; Emily takes Annie and Clarabel and unintentionally upsets Thomas over it, but she makes up for it by saving him and Oliver from a nasty accident. Also, I love Emily's series seven theme; it's probably the most underrated theme from Mike O'Donnell and Junior Campbell. I just love how gentle it sounds. It's almost like music you'd listen to while taking a walk by the meadow.

Rating: Excellent (10/10)

Percy Gets It Right

Written by Paul Larson

It's a pretty simple story about listening to others when there's potential danger on the line. It's not a hugely flawed story, but it's not that great either. I haven't got much else to talk about here.

Rating: Okay (6/10)

Bill, Ben and Fergus

Written by Brian Trueman

I don't like Fergus at all. While his design was unique for the show at the time (before Theo came around, and had bags more charm and character), Fergus' personality just felt more like Duck's, only it was more in your face and doesn't have a catalyst behind it other than wanting to be really useful, which is literally something any engine would want to be. At least Duck has Great Western heritage to feel proud of and to excuse his mentality. Fergus is one character I don't want to see in CGI as he'd add literally nothing to the show. As for his (apparent) debut story, they could've replaced him with Toby, who thinks he could manage engines like Bill and Ben (ignoring Edward and - if he was featured back then - BoCo's warnings) only to end up on the receiving end of their tricks, and he becomes wary about working with them in the near future. That would've been more interesting, I feel, than Fergus constantly bossing Bill and Ben around telling them to do things right.

Rating: Bad (3/10)

The Old (Iron) Bridge

Written by Paul Larson

A lot of people bring this episode down for one reason; Skarloey being afraid of crossing a bridge after nearly falling off. I can defend it with what I've said about *Toby and the Flood*; it's understandable as to why Skarloey refused to cross the bridge. He nearly fell into the river himself, and that can happen to anyone, regardless of age or experience. That being said, I think it'd be even better if it was a flashback story; Skarloey and Rheneas are the only engines to appear (not counting Duncan's cameo) and speak in this episode. There's just something about this episode that screams flashback story, especially since we know little about their past between the events of *Very Old Engines* and *Four Little Engines*.

Rating: Good (7/10)

Edward's Brass Band

Written by Robyn Charteris

I like that this episode does something with Edward other than having him constantly prove his worth to the bigger engines. It's actually surprising to see him derail for a change... though the story overall feels very mandated and that nothing was done to make it feel like it could've fit Edward. If the story had gone to Thomas or Duck, I imagine that nothing would change. Yes, it'd be nice to give Edward more starring roles, but only if they were to fit his character and not come off as interchangeable with literally every other character. This is why I believe he works best as a major supporting character; it's difficult to write stories that actually fit his character and don't come off as retreading old ground.

Rating: Okay (4/10)

What's the Matter with Henry?

Written by George Tarry

Speaking of mandated stories... I'm not going to delve too much into Henry feeling sick - besides, they never really explained why Henry was having problems to begin with - but like *Edward's Brass Band*, this episode feels like it was written just to give Henry a starring role. This is a problem with writing Henry as a main character; if he's not a tree-hugger, a constant worrier, or an outright grump, then he's suffering from health problems, and that would get to the point that they bring back his special coal in the Barlow era. I think it may have had something to do with Awdry not bothering with the character after 1951; Henry's been practically a problem child since the franchise literally began. I would say Emily's role being the big sister figure was great, but A) that should be the default setting, not a freak occurrence, and B) replace her with Edward, and the plot doesn't change at all. She had four lines in this episode that could've also been easily given to Edward, and that would come back to bite Emily hard since Edward left the Steam Team. She's practically been put in the box that Edward was taken out of. I'm not saying they should outright revert her to how she was in series 8-10 (more on those later), but they need to find the right balance so that Emily doesn't come off as a female Edward. This episode as a whole is just weak and the conflict of Henry being sick comes off as forced.

Rating: Bad (2/10)

James and the Queen of Sodor

Written by Paul Larson

It is a fairly typical episode about James wanting to look his best and avoid getting dirty, but this was a really good episode and it suited him very well. It's nice seeing Gordon have limits about how far he can tolerate James' boasting, especially when the latter takes the mayor at the start, though it may come off as Gordon being hypocritical, depending on how you see it. The message about not keeping clean all the time was good, though it may come off as inappropriate during a pandemic when your health matters most and you have to wash your hands thoroughly to stay healthy.

Rating: Good (8/10)

The Refreshment Lady's Tea Shop/Stand

Written by James Mason

Another great episode, and it feels a bit like a sequel to the original Refreshment Lady episode from series four. The moral about thinking outside of the box when it comes to solutions to problems was great, especially with the coach being converted into a mobile tea shop. The Tallylyn Railway had one of their own at some point, so it's nice to see the series take a bit of influence from the railway that inspired the Skarloey line.

Rating: Excellent (9/10)

(The) Spotless Record

Written by Paul Larson

I like Arthur; his design is great and the livery he was given was fantastic. It's a shame that his character hasn't been expanded upon since this series, nor was he considered for CGI, as I think he'd fit right in. Arthur's introductory episode was really good, though at that point, it feels like Thomas was being given roles just because. It might've worked better for James since he'd feel threatened about Arthur being another red engine, and maybe show jealousy at the fact that he's better at handling trucks than he is, prompting James to try and trick Arthur into ruining his spotless record. The episode was still good though, and the message about maintaining a record or reputation isn't always everything.

Rating: Good (8/10)

Toby's Windmill/Toby and the Windmill

Story by David Mitton

Written by Jan Page

A pretty simple episode about helping others in need. And unlike *Edward's Brass Band* and *What's the Matter with Henry?*, this episode worked well with Toby's character. Not much else to talk about here.

Rating: Good (7/10)

Bad Day at Castle Loch

Written by Jenny McDade

We see Donald and Douglas argue whether or not the Loch Ness Monster exists, but it doesn't really go anywhere except serve as a lead-in to them being stuck at night and waiting for Harvey to help them out. They don't really show any character here, and it feels like they were just featured because the Scottish Castle appears. What if Donald and Douglas wanted to challenge each other to see who's the braver engine if they ever came across the Loch Ness Monster, only to realize that little contests like that are pointless? Again, this episode shows why some characters are best suited to being major supporting characters.

Rating: Okay (4/10)

Rheneas and the Roller Coaster

Written by James Mason

Originally, Peter Sam was meant to be given the lead role, but it ended up going to Rheneas since he was the only narrow gauge engine (who had a large scale model, of course) without an episode this series. I'd say it was another case of a mandated lead role, and they probably should've stuck with Peter Sam, even if it means leaving Rheneas out altogether. Or, if he had a large scale model at the time, give it to Sir Handel instead? Either would've worked fine than forcing this episode upon Rheneas. Or, if he had to have the lead role, rework the episode to better fit Rheneas' character. Not to mention how ridiculous the roller coaster ride was. Honestly, episodes like this may be why the Skarloey engines don't get very many lead roles in the CGI series; I know fans aren't happy about this, but I'd much rather they had one or two episodes and be written in character than six or seven episodes and have the roles come of as forced. Quality over quantity, after all.

Rating: Bad (3/10)

Salty's Stormy Tale

Written by Polly Churchill

Not a bad episode, though they could've focused more on the fact that imitating others can hurt, even if you're not being malicious on purpose. What if Thomas and Percy had been told that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, and they end up hurting Salty's feelings intending to? That probably would've worked fine.

Rating: Okay (5/10)

(Oliver the) Snow Engine

Written by Jenny McDade

Oliver's last starring role to date, but it's a nice episode giving a bit more depth to his character regarding snow. Even though it could've gone to any character (probably not Thomas), it was still nice regardless. Just a shame that despite being in CGI, he hasn't been given a lead role since this episode. He deserves to have a bit more spotlight every now and again.

Rating: Good (7/10)

Something Fishy

Written by Paul Larson

I like that it serves as a bit of a sequel to *The Spotless Record* and developed Arthur a bit. He understands that a spotless record isn't everything, and he was properly rewarded with running the fishing line after helping Thomas after the latter's accident. Given that the fishing village is now in CGI, it'd be a perfect opportunity to bring Arthur into the CGI series to have him run it. It seemed strange Thomas was sent to run that line since he already has a branch line himself, but then again, it was kind of expected after a while to have Thomas appear away from his branch line. I do like seeing Arthur taking an interest in the smell of fish; it's a nice little bit of expansion to his character.

Rating: Good (8/10)

The Runaway Elephant

Written by George Tarry

It's really ironic that this episode emphasizes the importance of brake vans, and yet for several series afterward, with a few exceptions, brake vans were a non-entity. Still doesn't take away the fact that the message is a good one; better to be safe than sorry.

Rating: Good (8/10)

Peace and Quiet

Written by Paul Larson

I like Murdoch, and much like Arthur, he'd make a great addition to the CGI series, especially when it came to expanding the mainline fleet a little. Maybe have him sleep at Vicarstown sheds with Henry and Rosie? I can also relate to Murdoch by being a bit of a gentle giant myself and can get easily annoyed by loud noises, mostly those outside my house like fireworks being set off. I like how it shows that despite being annoyed by Salty and Harvey's chattering, Murdoch understands that there are worse noises out there like baaing sheep. One of series seven's best episodes in my opinion.

Rating: Excellent (9/10)

Fergus Breaks the Rules/Thomas and the Search for Fergus

Written by Jan Page

What rules did Fergus break? I never understood that at all. Diesel tricks Fergus into going to the smelters, and Fergus is frightened by its appearance and runs away because of it. Also, I feel Diesel got off too lightly with tricking Fergus into going there. This episode is just *Bill, Ben and Fergus* but with Diesel in Bill and Ben's place. I'm honestly glad that Fergus hasn't appeared in the show after this - broken flywheel notwithstanding - because out of series seven's newbies, he had the worst personality and I don't want him to return to CGI. If they wanted to bring his prototype back into the show, just use Theo instead.

Rating: Bad (3/10)

Bulgy Rides Again

Written by Brian Trueman

With hindsight, most likely because of *Unscheduled Stops* and *Free the Roads*, as well as a few speaking bits in series 24, this episode feels very out of place when it comes to Bulgy's character. Instead of coming across as a railway-hating jerk, which is far more entertaining to see, especially with how many antics you could come up with, Bulgy simply comes off as a bit generic, taking away what made him a great foil to Duck in his sole appearance in the Railway Series (and series three). The antics with the hens were great though, especially when the incident results in Bulgy temporarily becoming a mobile vegetable stand. I think this episode could've been better with Bulgy vowing to take revenge on the railways for his "defeat", especially if he were to believe they were "responsible" for him ending up in the hens' field.

Rating: Okay (5/10)

Harold and the Flying Horse

Written by Robin Kingsland

How often is it these days that we get episodes focusing on Harold? It's nice seeing him want to partake in a celebration, but because he's on duty, he's unable to partake, giving him a bit of depth. Harold does get his wish in the end, however, when he's sent to rescue Pegasus the horse. It was also funny seeing Percy get confused about flying horses.

Rating: Good (8/10)

The Grand Opening

Written by James Mason

Another pretty good episode overall that sometimes, running late isn't always a bad thing. It was really funny seeing Sir Topham and Lady Hatt interact when it comes to travelling on the red balloon; we do not get enough interactions between Sir Topham and his wife in the series these days. I can imagine what they could do with them in CGI!

Rating: Excellent (9/10)

Best Dressed Engine

Written by Polly Churchill

Those decorations on the engines looked lovely; out of them, I like Murdoch's the best. The blue flags go really well with his orange paint. It's also got a really good message that dressing up can be fun, especially for cosplay. There's not much else to talk about here.

Rating: Good (8/10)

Gordon and Spencer

Written by Lee Pressman

Best episode of series seven, hands down. Everything about this episode just works. Gordon feels threatened by someone who's just like him, only Spencer is younger and a lot worse when it comes to his boasting. But in the end, it's Gordon who has the last laugh when Spencer runs out of water, but Gordon is still willing to help him out to get the Duke and Duchess of Boxford to Maron on time. It's also nicer that they've kept Spencer in the CGI series, although he has very much gone from being Gordon's rival who occasionally visits Sodor to just being... there. It'd be nice to see a bit more depth to Spencer's character than just being Gordon's rival.

Rating: Excellent (10/10)

Not So Hasty Puddings/Cakes/Thomas and the Avalanche

Written by Robyn Charteris

Confusing titles aside, it's nice seeing an expansion of Thomas and Elizabeth's rivalry from the last series and showing that despite this, they're willing to help each other out when the time comes. There's not much else for me to talk about here.

Rating: Good (8/10)

Trusty Rusty

Written by James Mason

Honestly, Duncan's insult to Rusty just makes the yellow engine come off as petty; he could've simply said that he's crossed the bridge plenty of times and had no problems before. Sure, it drives Duncan running out of coal meaning he can't move off of the bridge, but it's kind of laughable for two reasons. One, he still had coal in his bunker, though that's more a fault of the model makers than the writers, and two, an engine running out of coal making them unable to move just feels stupid. If Duncan had run out of water instead, that would've worked a lot better. The message about listening to orders was good, but the execution is a bit half-baked.

Rating: Okay (5/10)

Three Cheers/Hooray for Thomas

Written by Jan Page

Here it is; the final episode of the classic series, and making it a sequel to one of the best episodes of series one, *Thomas and Bertie*, was a good move with the two friends finally having their rematch after nineteen years. Time has also been kind to the characters, especially with Thomas putting the race aside to help the children getting their medals, showing a bit of character development from the first series. This episode is an ideal bookend to the classic series; it started with a Thomas-centric episode, and it ends with a Thomas-centric episode. While it may not be as strong as *Thomas and Bertie*, it's still a great episode nonetheless.

Rating: Excellent (10/10)

Episode Rankings

1. Gordon and Spencer - Excellent (10)
2. Emily's New Coaches - Excellent (10)
3. Three Cheers for Thomas - Excellent (10)
4. The Refreshment Lady's Tea Shop - Excellent (9)
5. Peace and Quiet - Excellent (9)
6. The Grand Opening - Excellent (9)
7. Something Fishy - Good (8)
8. Best Dressed Engine - Good (8)
9. The Runaway Elephant - Good (8)
10. The Spotless Record - Good (8)
11. Harold and the Flying Horse - Good (8)
12. Not So Hasty Puddings - Good (8)
13. James and the Queen of Sodor - Good (8)
14. Snow Engine - Good (7)
15. The Old Bridge - Good (7)
16. Toby's Windmill - Good (7)
17. Percy Gets it Right - Okay (6)
18. Bulgy Rides Again - Okay (5)

19. Salty's Stormy Tale - Okay (5)
20. Trusty Rusty - Okay (5)
21. Bad Day at Castle Loch - Okay (4)
22. Edward's Brass Band - Okay (4)
23. Bill, Ben and Fergus - Bad (3)
24. Fergus Breaks the Rules - Bad (3)
25. Rheneas and the Roller Coaster - Bad (3)
26. What's the Matter with Henry? - Bad (2)

Final Series Rating: 174/260 (6.7/10)

Series Rankings So Far

1. Series 2 (Excellent; 233/260 - 8.9/10)
2. Series 3 (Good; 211/260 - 8.1/10)
3. Series 1 (Good; 208/260 - 8/10)
4. Series 7 (Good; 174/260 - 6.7/10)
5. Series 6 (Good; 170/260 - 6.5/10)
6. Series 5 (Okay; 165/260 - 6.3/10)
7. Series 4 (Okay; 159/260 - 6.1/10)