

TICKET TO RIDE by Roger Davis

The prices quoted below are correct as at 14 February 2016. Prices shown in brackets are those for Railcard holders.

It has been well documented that major savings can be made on journeys where Advance and Off-Peak tickets are not available at the time the journey starts. For instance, a journey from Stourbridge Junction to Nottingham to arrive at about 1030 hrs involves leaving Stourbridge Junction just after 0800 hrs before Off-Peak tickets are available and a return ticket would cost £47.90 (£31.60). However, by splitting the journey at

A Nottingham to Cardiff service passes a Cross City service at Bournville station



Burton-on-Trent, an Off-Peak ticket would be available for the second portion of the journey as the Birmingham to Nottingham service stops at Burton at 0948 hrs. In this case, a return Anytime ticket from Stourbridge Junction to Burton-on-Trent would cost £17.80 (£11.75), while a return Off-Peak ticket from Burton-on-Trent to Nottingham would cost £11.30 (£7.45). Thus the total cost for your return journey is £28.10 (£19.20), a total saving of £19.80 (£12.40).

However, what is less well-known is that savings can be made by splitting your ticket even if it is possible to buy an Off-Peak or Advance ticket for the entire journey.

As an example, let's look at a day out at Oxford this Saturday coming. If you buy an Off-Peak return from Stourbridge Junction, it will set you back £39.40 (£26.00). However, an Off-Peak return ticket from Stourbridge Junction to Worcester will cost



Oxford High Street

£7.10 (£4.70), while an Off-Peak return from Worcester to Oxford costs £17.50 (£11.55). This means that you pay £24.60 (£16.25) for the full journey, a saving of £14.80 (£9.75).

This does seem a large saving, but the through ticket from Stourbridge to Oxford offers you the choice of travelling either via Worcester or via Birmingham and Leamington Spa. However, most people would not want to exercise that choice so the question that must be asked is why a cheaper Off-Peak ticket is not available that restricts you to travel via Worcester. It happens on other services. For instance, an Off-Peak return ticket from Bristol to Brighton costs £67.60 (£44.60) for travel by any route, but £53.50 (£35.30) if you travel via Salisbury.

One might think that the above example was unfair, given that the through ticket gave you a choice of routes, and that this certainly wouldn't happen if there was only one direct route, especially if you buy an Advance ticket 12 weeks before you travel to get the cheapest possible fare. Unfortunately, this is not true.

A good example is a holiday to Devon that you have booked well in advance. As soon as Advance ticket booking is available on the CrossCountry website, you go on-line to book two Advance singles from Birmingham New Street to Newton Abbot and back. The website offers you the cheapest tickets on the 1117 outward journey and the 1304 return, both at the same price. The cost is £29.50 (£19.45) each way. This surely must be the cheapest ticket you can get. Unfortunately, it isn't. An Advance Ticket on the 1117 service from Birmingham New Street to Cheltenham Spa will cost you £7.00 (£4.60)

The 1117 service to Plymouth waits at New Street for a right time departure (at 1120)



while an Advance ticket on the 1200 service from Cheltenham Spa to Newton Abbot will cost you £15.30 (£10.10). Thus, you pay £22.30 (£14.70), a saving of £7.20 (£4.75). This saving can be repeated on your journey from Devon by booking separate tickets on the 1304 from Newton Abbot to Cheltenham Spa and on the 1511 from Cheltenham Spa to Birmingham New Street. This results in a total saving of £14.40 (£9.50) on your journey to Devon and back.

On both journeys, the tickets are for the same train but, in theory, you might be allocated two different seats for the two portions of your journey. However, you can



The 1117 service from Birmingham New Street passes Dawlish en route to Plymouth

easily get around that as one of the nice features of the CrossCountry Trains website on a Windows PC is the ability to choose your own seat. (N.B. this feature has recently been made available on the Virgin Trains website). Therefore, it is possible to select the journey from Birmingham to Newton Abbot, go to the Select Your Own Seat facility and make a note of what seats are unoccupied throughout your journey. That journey may now be

deleted from your basket and the two partial journeys booked, using the Select Your Own Seat facility to ensure that you have the same seat throughout your journey from Birmingham to Newton Abbot.

Until the rail industry comes up with a fares structure that is consistent and logical, such discrepancies will remain. The only advice is to be aware of the issues and, if possible, to use the Internet to fully investigate ways of saving money.