1 December 2015

**Virgin unveils flagship Christmas Trains designed by children**

**Designs by 9 and 11 year olds revealed at King’s Cross Station**

Hundreds of heads were turned this morning at King’s Cross Station as Virgin Trains unveiled its two Christmas trains sporting striking blue liveries in place of the famous Virgin red. A Pendolino transformed into a *Penguilino* and a Class 91 made over as *Claus 91* appeared side by side for the first time at London’s iconic station.

The unveiling marked the end of a nationwide competition amongst primary school children for a Christmas Train design. Joint winners, nine year old Amber Maxfield and 11 year old Madeleine Deakin, were there to see their festive drawings come to life.

The competition attracted hundreds of entries and was run in partnership with the Book Trust. The judging panel, which was headed by Jill Murphy, author of the popular *Worst Witch* and *The Large Family* series, were so impressed by the entries that two winners were chosen.

Jill Murphy said: ‘‘I am honoured to have been part of this exciting project. We received so many wonderful entries and Madeleine and Amber’s designs stood out as fun designs with a real Christmas feel to them.’’

Madeleine from Copdock in Suffolk said “I’m so happy to have won and it was incredible to see my drawing on the train – it’s made me even more excited about Christmas!” and Amber from Carlisle added “When I found out I’d won I just couldn’t believe it! Seeing my drawing on a train and coming to London is a dream come true.”

Now two trains, one on the West Coast (*Penguilino)* and one on the East Coast (*Claus 91),*  boast the childrens’ very different designs but share the same midnight blue sky backdrop. Each Christmas train bears the name of its young designer.

Patrick McCall, Chairman of Virgin Trains, said: ‘‘We loved the concepts that these two young designers came up with and are proud to have their ideas transform two trains. It’s fantastic that both the East Coast and West Coast services have come together to make our customers’ journeys throughout December extra special - especially on their way home for Christmas.’’

Diana Gerald, Book Trust chief executive, said: “This project has been a great opportunity to inspire children to use their imaginations and we were really impressed with the quality of entries. We received everything from family party scenes to our most beloved Christmas characters.’’

The Christmas trains will run on the Virgin Trains network throughout December and carry passengers travelling over the festive period.

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**About Virgin Trains**

Virgin Trains is the brand name of Virgin Rail Group (VRG), which is owned by Virgin Group (51%) and Stagecoach (49%). Virgin Trains has operated the West Coast passenger train franchise since 1997, serving key UK cities including London, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool and Glasgow. In June 2014 the Department for Transport (DfT) awarded VRG a new franchise until at least April 2017.

Virgin Trains is committed to delivering a high speed, high frequency service, offering shorter journey times, more comfortable travel and excellent customer service. We provide the most frequent long-distance rail service in Europe (London - Manchester and London – Birmingham, both every 20 minutes).

Since 1997, Virgin Trains has introduced over 70 new trains at a cost of £1.5 billion. The service carries more than 34.5 million passengers a year and Virgin Trains employs approximately 3,290 staff.

Virgin Trains customers consistently rate the company as one of the top long-distance rail franchise operators in the National Passenger Survey (NPS) commissioned by industry watchdog “Passenger Focus”.

Visit the Virgin Trains Media Room - [www.virgintrains.co.uk/mediaroom](http://www.virgintrains.co.uk/mediaroom) - for the latest news, images and videos. Subscribe [here](http://www.mynewsdesk.com/follow/47939) for regular news from Virgin Trains. Press Office: 0845 000 3333. Company website: [www.virgintrains.co.uk](http://www.virgintrains.co.uk).

**About Virgin Trains East Coast**

Virgin Trains East Coast is the brand name of InterCity Railways Ltd (ICR), which is owned by Stagecoach Group (90%) and Virgin Group (10%). Virgin Trains East Coast began operating services on the East Coast Main Line on Sunday 1 March 2015, serving key UK cities including London, Peterborough, Doncaster, Leeds, York, Newcastle, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Inverness. In November 2014 the Department for Transport awarded ICR a new franchise until at least 31 March 2023.

Virgin Trains East Coast is committed to delivering a high speed, high quality service with new services, faster and more frequent journeys, more comfortable travel and excellent customer service. More than £140m is to be invested in delivering improved service and a more personalised travel experience for customers.

Visit the Virgin Trains East Coast Media Centre at: <http://www.virgintrainseastcoast.com/media-centre> for the latest news and images.

**About Book Trust**

Book Trust is Britain’s largest reading charity. We give out more than five million carefully selected books to children throughout the UK, because we know reading for pleasure has a dramatic impact on educational outcomes, well-being and social mobility. Our books are delivered via health, library, school and early years practitioners and are supported by advice and resources to encourage families to read together. It’s not a book, it’s a doorway. [www.booktrust.org.uk](http://www.booktrust.org.uk)

**About Jill Murphy**

Jill Murphy is one of Britain’s most treasured author–illustrators. She wrote and illustrated her first book, the bestselling The Worst Witch, while still only eighteen, and went on to create the award-winning Large family series, which has sold over five million copies worldwide, been translated into 19 languages and adapted for television. 2016 marks the 30th anniversary of Five Minutes’ Peace. Jill’s other characters include a small monster called Marlon who starred in the acclaimed picture books The Last Noo-noo and All for One.  Jill lives in Cornwall.