**Rugby Team helps kick off Virgin Trains’ Manchester Pride celebrations**

* *Manchester Village Spartans RUFC welcomed Virgin’s Pride Train into Manchester for the city’s Pride festivities*
* *Manchester is last stop on Virgin’s west coast route to celebrate #RideWithPride season this summer*

Virgin Trains kicked off its Manchester Pride celebrations with one of the world’s first gay rugby clubs, Manchester Village Spartans, at Manchester Piccadilly station as the Pride festivities get underway this Bank Holiday weekend.

The gay and inclusive Rugby Team, which is celebrating its 20th year, joined Virgin Trains to welcome Virgin’s Ride with Pride Train, which is wrapped with the Pride colours, as it rode into Manchester for the LGBT+ festival – the last stop on the train operator’s #RideWithPride season.

Kitted out in their club’s Pride colours, the Manchester Village Spartans waved Pride flags as part of the party atmosphere to greet people onto the platform, before being presented with a rainbow birthday cake by Virgin Trains to mark their 20th Anniversary.

Revellers heading to Manchester Pride were entertained with karaoke, a quiz and colourful face paint and enjoyed tasters of rainbow biscuits and Pride cupcakes onboard the Pride train.

Over the weekend, Virgin Trains will be treating customers travelling to and from Manchester to brightly coloured Blackpool Rock and Pride cupcakes at the station.

People travelling to Pride are encouraged to share their journey using the hashtag #RideWithPride.

Victoria Whitehouse, Inclusion Lead at Virgin Trains, said: “We’re really proud of our diverse workforce at Virgin Trains and we’ve had a fabulous time celebrating with our staff and customers throughout our Ride with Pride season across our west coast route this summer. Partying on the Pride Train to Manchester has been great fun and it was a treat to be greeted by Manchester Village Spartans to mark their 20th birthday and to kick off Pride weekend.”

Christian Davis, Sponsorship and Fundraising Manager, Manchester Village Spartans Rugby Team, said: “We had a great time joining Virgin Trains for the Pride festivities and would like to thank them for the birthday cake and their support, as we mark our 20th year. We’ll be celebrating our 20th Anniversary with a fabulous Gala to say thank you to all of the players, supporters, rugby talent and allies from Manchester, LGBT and rugby communities, who have given so much to the club and helped grow Inclusive Rugby and LGBT participation in sport. We hope to raise money for the club to continue its success and provide an ever-growing safe and secure space for people to enjoy rugby regardless of age, body type, gender, religion or sexuality.”

ENDS

**About Manchester Village Spartans**

The Manchester Village Spartans are the world’s second gay and inclusive rugby team outside of London. We started back in 1999 where a small group of gay men decided to start a union rugby team where there was no judgement or expectation just a safe place for gay men to express their love of rugby. Apart from the Kings Cross Stealers in London there was no other gay team to they played local teams. 20 years on and we are 140 members strong with three teams consisting of a first team who play in the north west league consisting of gay, bisexual and straight men and a second team who play in the newly formed international gay league where they play other gay teams up and down the country. We also have a touch rugby team which is open to everyone whether you’re male, female, transgender.

Thanks to the success of the UK gay and inclusive teams there are now over 100 gay rugby teams all around the world and we expect this to double in the next 20 years.

The Manchester Village Spartans celebrated their 20th Anniversary with a fabulous Gala at the Midland Hotel on 23rd August 2019, in Manchester, with over 300 guests from all LGBT+ backgrounds including special guests, Nick Heath and Chris Robshaw from the England Rugby Team.

**About Virgin Trains**

Stagecoach and Virgin are working in partnership to operate the West Coast inter-city route under the Virgin Trains brand, revolutionising travel on one of the UK’s key rail arteries.

The network connects some of the nation’s most iconic destinations including Glasgow, Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester and London.

Virgin Trains is committed to delivering a high speed, high frequency service, offering shorter journey times, more comfortable travel and excellent customer service. Customers consistently rate Virgin Trains ahead of other long-distance rail franchise operators in the National Rail Passenger Survey (NRPS) commissioned by industry watchdog, Transport Focus.

Virgin Trains has a proud record of challenging the status quo - from introducing tilting Pendolino trains, to a pioneering automated delay repay scheme, introducing the industry-leading onboard entertainment streaming service, BEAM, and becoming the first franchised rail operator to offer m-Tickets for all ticket types.

Virgin Trains operated the East Coast route between March 1, 2015 and June 24, 2018. In that time, we invested £75m to create a more personalised travel experience, including over £40m in the existing fleet. Customers have benefitted from 48 additional services between Edinburgh and London every week, and an extra 22 Saturday services between Leeds and London – a total of 1.74 million additional seats since May 2015.

Working together, the partnership railway of the public and private sectors has published a long-term plan, called *In Partnership for Britain’s Prosperity,* to change and improve Britain’s railway. The plan will secure almost £85bn of additional economic benefits to the country whilst enabling further investment and improvement, and contains four commitments which will see rail companies: strengthen our economic contribution to the country; improve customers’ satisfaction; boost the communities we serve; and, create more and better jobs in rail. For more information go to [Britain Runs on Rail](http://www.britainrunsonrail.co.uk/?gclid=CjwKCAiAr_TQBRB5EiwAC_QCq9OA-y_Al1Voo4ZvYjMvSBs86kuvjZLD8MfFvnOUU9UeVZ1T5CObLRoCasIQAvD_BwE).

Visit the Virgin Trains Media Room - [virgintrains.co.uk/about/media-room](http://mediaroom.virgintrains.co.uk/) - 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.

the next stop on Virgin’s #RideWithPride seasons

Over the weekend, Virgin’s Ride with Pride Train, which is wrapped with the Pride colours, rode into Birmingham for the LGBT+ festival – the next stop on Virgin’s #RideWithPride season/train operator’s Pride celebrations.

Virgin’s #RideWithPride season continues as

A key destination on its west coast route

The Virgin Trains Team

Celebrations, including the Manchester Village Spartans RUFC 20th Anniversary Gala

Manchester Village Spartans Rugby Team

Virgin’s Ride with Pride Train, which is wrapped with the Pride colours rode into Manchester for the LGBT+ festival – the latest stop on the train operator’s #RideWithPride season.

The gay and inclusive Rugby Team, which is celebrating its 20th year, joined Virgin Trains to welcome hundreds of people heading to Manchester Pride