

BRITISH RAILWAYS KEEP 'EM ROLLING:

Britain had a railway network before anyone else, and we're a very densely populated island - so it's not surprising that British Railways have a lot of bridges to worry about. Getting rid of ones they don't want without holding up the service is quite a problem. To widen the permanent way, this one at Rainham in Kent, is to be blown up - and cleared out of the way in a few hours. Everything is ready when the last evening train passes.

Baulks of timber are laid between the lines to protect the rails when the masonry comes down, demolition charges are placed and the detonators wired up.

Everyone clear -

And now the real work begins - for several tons of rubble lie on the track, which must be cleared in time for the first morning train - and there's a temporary footbridge to be built as well. The demolition squad gets to work, racing against the clock. Whatever happens, that morning train has to get through on time.

There she is - with a few sleepy passengers wondering where the bridge has gone! But there's more to bridges than blowing them up - existing ones have to be maintained, and British Railways have just introduced the strange new device to make the job easier. It's known as the Viaduct Inspection Unit - and it might well be nicknamed the Oeslum Crane. You'll see why in a minute.

This is Knaresborough, Viaduct, and the Inspection Unit has been brought here to check the condition of the underside of the arches. It's the first equipment of its kind in the world, and it can lower an inspection squad 29 feet below rail level or 15 in under the arch.

This ingenious device cuts to a fraction the time needed to inspect all those bridges on which our safety depends - and it's typical of the way British Railways are keeping abreast of the times. They see no reason why the oldest railway system in the world shouldn't also be the most up-to-date....