

# MEDIA RELEASE



## UP TO THE TASKER

### Puffing Billy volunteer, Chris Tasker, prepares to put Thomas on the tracks

In terms of childhood bragging rights, nothing quite matches up to having a dad that drives Thomas the Tank Engine!

That is the reality for two year old, Sam, and four year old, Archie, as their father and Puffing Billy volunteer, Chris Tasker, prepares to drive the world's most famous train at the Railway's Day Out With Thomas events in February and March.

Sam and Archie were bound to have a love of trains. Their grandfather, Geoff Tasker, had been volunteering at Puffing Billy since 1956, and as a young boy Chris would regularly 'help' his dad with his guard and signalman duties. After completing high school in 2000, Chris took on more official duties at Puffing Billy and went on to become one of the youngest qualified drivers of the Railway at age 29.

This year's Day Out With Thomas event is even more special as 2020 marks the 75th anniversary of Thomas the Tank Engine. In 1945, Rev Wilbert Awdry's first book of *The Railway Series* was published, which inspired the popular television show we now know as Thomas and Friends.

To celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first book and Thomas' birthday, Puffing Billy Railway is giving eight lucky Day Out With Thomas guests a chance to win the ultimate 'money can't buy' Thomas the Tank Engine experience.

Everyone who purchases a ticket to an upcoming Autumn session of Day Out With Thomas at Puffing Billy will go into the draw to win one of two daily prizes. The first prize will give the winner a once in a lifetime experience to hop onboard Thomas, meet the driver, have their photo taken, and then enjoy a Thomas themed tea menu surrounded by everyone's favourite tank engine and his friends (valid for two adults and two children). Second prize is a special Thomas and Friends prize pack valued at \$75.

While Chris has volunteered at many Day Out With Thomas events, he said the job of driving Thomas has taken on a whole new meaning since having his own boys.

"I have always loved the Day Out With Thomas and the excitement of the children when they see all their favourite characters at the station, but my enjoyment of the day has really gone through the roof since having my own children," Chris said.

"My boys come down nearly every day that I'm driving and they get such a thrill knowing that their dad gets to drive Thomas. I love passing on some of my railway knowledge to them, and also sharing the day with my parents, nieces and nephews. It really is a family affair for us!"

"Like many young children, my boys can never have too much Thomas. They love watching the TV show and we have a huge wooden Thomas set that they love playing with. It would rival the Island of Sodor!"

Day Out With Thomas takes place at Puffing Billy's Gembrook Station on 22, 23 and 29 February, and 1, 14, 15, 21 and 22 March 2020.

Guests will enjoy a 35-minute train ride with Thomas and his friends, as well a range of other activities, including:

- The Imagination Station - play & create with Thomas and his friends,
- Meet the Fat Controller
- Watch the engines shunting through the yards

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- Jumping castles
- Animal nursery
- Face painting
- Photos with the Bulgy Bus and
- Photo opportunities with Thomas and his friends

Puffing Billy Railway Event Manager, Matt Collopy, said the Day Out With Thomas is one of the most popular events on Puffing Billy's calendar.

"Families can take advantage of a range of free activities before boarding the train for a 35-minute ride through the beautiful Dandenong Ranges," Matt said.

"Whether it is your child's first visit to Puffing Billy, or they are returning for this event, the magic of our historic railway and this year's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary makes A Day Out With Thomas even more special. We hope everyone can come and join us for a fun family day out to share the excitement and celebrate Thomas and his friends at Puffing Billy Railway," he said.

Adult tickets are the same price as a child (aged 4 years and over) – with these all-inclusive tickets only \$42.00 per person, \$25.00 for toddlers (aged 1-3 years) and free for children under 1 year.

Bookings are essential and must be made online at [www.puffingbilly.com.au](http://www.puffingbilly.com.au)

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