Press Release

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Train driver set to take cancer survivor daughter on special journey to London Marathon

- *Avanti West Coast driver, Dan Ashwell, to take controls of train carrying his teenage daughter, Grace, to the London Marathon*
- *Grace is taking on 26.2 mile challenge four years after Stage 4 Hodgkin's Lymphoma diagnosis*
- *She is fundraising for charity that supported her during cancer treatment*

An Avanti West Coast employee is set to drive a Pendolino on a very special journey, carrying his daughter – a cancer survivor – on her way to run the London Marathon.

Train driver, Dan Ashwell, will take the controls of the 15:45 service from Wolverhampton to London Euston on Friday 24 April when his daughter, Grace Ashwell, travels to the capital ahead of undertaking the 26.2 mile route on Sunday.

Grace, 19, was diagnosed with Stage 4 Hodgkin's Lymphoma on 26 April 2022 and is taking part in the London Marathon 2026 exactly four years to the day after her diagnosis. She is running to raise funds for Molly Ollys – a charity that provide support to children suffering from life-threatening illnesses and their families in the UK.

After learning the family's story, Avanti West Coast helped Grace's dad, Dan – who is based at Wolverhampton – to plan the special journey and share this moment with his daughter.

Grace's diagnosis came while she was being treated for what was initially thought to be a sports injury. She underwent six months of intensive chemotherapy and, although now in recovery, continues to attend regular follow-up appointments as part of her ongoing survivorship care.

Molly Ollys, which provides emotional support as well as helping grant wishes to aid recovery, supported Grace through her cancer treatment.

It contributed towards Grace's driving lessons to help restore some independence she had lost because of her treatment and recovery.

Through her fundraising efforts, Grace hopes to help the charity grant more wishes for young people with cancer.

Dan, who has been a train driver for eight years, said: "Having the opportunity to drive Grace to London onboard my train is something I'll remember forever, and Avanti West Coast have been extremely supportive to make this moment happen.

"Grace running the London Marathon feels like the icing on the cake after a long four-year journey. I am incredibly proud of what she's achieved, especially after everything she has been through. I can't wait to stand alongside the marathon course cheering Grace on as her proud dad."

Speaking about her dad's role in the journey to London, Grace said: "It means so much to me, as my dad was always there when I was ill. We went through a lot together, and as a family, so it makes it extra special that he will be driving my train down to London.

"I entered the event's ballot for the prospect of the challenge, and it will be amazing to run on behalf of Molly Ollys Wishes who supported me so much during my treatment. Running the marathon after a tough four years feels like a full circle moment for our family – and not many people get to say their dad drove them there on a train!"

Rachel Ollerenshaw, Co-Founder and CEO of Molly Ollys, said:" It is a very poignant moment, and we know that Grace has come out of her comfort zone to take on this challenge. We feel hugely privileged that she has chosen to run for Molly Ollys."

"Our team will be there to cheer her on and love that her Dad will be ensuring she arrives safely in London ready for the race. Grace and all her family know how much it means to have help and support when you are seriously unwell. The awareness and funds she is raising will enable Molly Ollys to help more children with life threatening illnesses. Go Grace!!"

ENDS

To support Grace's fundraising efforts for Molly Ollys donate here.

About Avanti West Coast

Avanti West Coast, operator of intercity rail services on the West Coast Main Line, is a joint venture between FirstGroup and Trenitalia, delivering a cleaner, greener railway that drives the West Coast forward. Avanti West Coast serves key UK cities, including London, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow as well as North Wales.

We're on a mission to be the transport of choice – connecting customers and communities along the West Coast. Our award-winning Pendolino refurbishment programme transformed the UK's hardest working fleet with all 56 of the iconic trains providing best-in-class comfort.

Our Evero fleet, which offers more seats, improved comfort, and a substantial cut to carbon emissions, was introduced in June 2024 and is the result of a £350m investment in sustainable travel. Built by Hitachi, the 23-strong fleet, consisting of 10 seven-carriage electric trains and 13

five-carriage bi-modes, serves routes from London to the Midlands, Chester, North Wales and the North West.

We want to make a positive difference to the people and places we serve – helping to drive economic growth, green travel, and break down barriers. Our efforts to contribute to society and enable people to benefit from the opportunities rail offers through purpose-led initiatives including Feel Good Field Trips and award-winning female driver recruitment campaign has seen us create over £1billion in social value impact.

We're tackling climate change wherever we can, from reducing energy and water use to training drivers in eco-driving techniques and sourcing food and drink from local suppliers. Our goal is to be net zero carbon by 2031. We're on track.

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