

Thirteen dead in rail tragedy



Police are investigating the cause of the crash

A freak road accident is being blamed for a train crash which claimed the lives of 13 people and injured many more.

The collision happened between a high-speed passenger train and a freight train at Great Heck near Selby, North Yorkshire, at about 0620 GMT.

It was caused when a Land Rover pulling a car on a trailer came off the M62 motorway where it crosses the East Coast main line, and slid down an embankment onto the tracks.

The southbound 0445 Newcastle to London train travelling at 125mph, hit the vehicles and derailed, skidding onto the northbound track.

Moments later, a freight train heading north loaded with 1,000 tonnes of coal, ploughed into the train at 60mph, crushing several carriages and throwing one into a field.

Another carriage landed on top of the freight wagons.

Survivors have expressed their relief that the none of the carriages appears to have caught fire - a factor in the high casualty rate of the 1999 Paddington crash, in which 31 people died. It has also emerged that the engine on the passenger train was the same as the one involved in the Hatfield derailment in October last year.

A GNER spokesman confirmed that engine 91023 had pulled both trains although he stressed that this had "no material effect on the accident".

Police have said the driver of the vehicle pulling the trailer was a 36-year-old man from Lincolnshire who was delivering the blue Renault car to Manchester.

He lost control and the vehicles careered off the motorway and down the embankment.

The driver managed to jump clear and was frantically telephoning emergency services when the train hit the vehicles.

The chief executive of GNER said the driver of the passenger train - who died in the accident - appears to have applied his brakes but could not stop in time.

Christopher Garnett said: "This is devastating, it is ghastly. We have people injured and people killed and our thoughts are with them and their families".

"The question has to be asked how is it possible for a vehicle to come off the motorway and on to the railway."

Railway expert Christian Wolmar said the tragedy was "essentially a road accident" which had unfortunately resulted in deaths of rail passengers.