



IT'S a pay cheque at the end of the month that gets most people out of bed in the morning, but not so for the volunteers at Swanage Railway.

They rise at the crack of dawn to make sure this slice of British history runs like clockwork and, before I arrive blurry-eyed at the station, at 7am on this weekday, they've already put in an hour's work.

If ever you want an example of people doing something for the love and not the money, look no further than here.

As the sun rises and takes the chill out the air, train driver, Ian McDavid, explains what he and fireman, Mick Hatton, have been doing this morning.

"The steam engine is basically like a giant kettle," he says.

"We lit the fire earlier so it's up to temperature for the first service at 9.50am."

I step off the platform and onto the foot plate of this magnificent locomotive. Peering into the firebox, I'm stunned by the volume of it – the opening might be the size of your average hearth but the actual chamber is as cavernous as a single bedroom.

Inside a fire roars, in places it is too bright to look at.

Directly behind me is the coal bunker, which is filled with nearly two tonnes of coal.

"We'll use most of this today," explains Micky, who will shovel the coal into the firebox throughout the day.

Although indisputably a great piece of engineering, steam engines are terribly inefficient.

As this "giant kettle" heats up, another smaller kettle boils – and not for the last time today.

Sipping my tea, I pace around the locomotive – imposing, impressive and grand on every scale, it is hard not to be in awe of the machine.

However, perhaps more impressive is the manpower behind the day-to-day running of the railway and while the visitors see the driver, fireman, guards and ticket collectors, they don't see the mechanics, cleaners and signalmen, who are also volunteers.

"If it wasn't for them we couldn't go and play," says Ian, as we leave the siding and pick up the carriages at Swanage station.

With the passengers onboard, the guard gives his signal and we set off for the first

