

Railfan's Day 1996

By Steve Habeck

The actual title for this activity-filled day at Portola was "The 11th Annual Railfan Photographer's Day, plus the Western Pacific Railroad Historical Society Convention, and Railroadiana Show and Swap Meet." Yes, that's quite a mouthful, so I'll refer to it by the working title of "Railfan's Day." With the added attractions of WPRRHS clinics and presentations, a top-notch swap meet in the shop building expertly organized by Ray Gabriel, and featured slide shows by veteran railfan photographer John E. Shaw, Jr. and others, there was plenty to do and see in addition to watching and photographing the outstanding lineup of motive power out on the balloon track. This year's theme was "A Celebration of First Generation EMD Hood Units", and the trains featured operating examples of the GP7, GP9, SD9, GP20, and GP30 models. The undisputed star of the show, of course, was EMD GP20 WP 2001, in its stunning orange and silver paint. After making its long-awaited debut on Railroad Days, 2001 made a trip to Loyalton to be on display there for Timberfest over Labor Day weekend, and got back in time for Railfan's Day. Thanks go to Marv Dunn and Ray Breedlove of the UP for helping make these moves happen on time. WP 2001 was featured on 3 of the 12 trains operated for the day; the "grand entrance," if you will, for the photographers, was a full-throttle runby of WP FP7 805-A leading WP 2001, F9Bu WP 925-C, and F7 WP 921-D, with one of the biggest and heaviest trains we have ever run on Railfan's Day. Wow! Orange and silver never looked so good. WP 2001 later led GP30 UP 849 on another train, and then made an afternoon run solo with that same train.

Of course, the late, great SP lives in Portola, too, as our SP set, SD9E 4404 and GP9E 2873, did the honors with the 3 SP beet racks and an SP bay window caboose, making two trips so each unit could lead once. Not to be outdone, the WP was well-represented by a 4-unit set of Geeps on two trains, featuring our WP GP9's, 731 and 725, on their first Railfan's Day outing, along with WP GP7's 707 and 708.

The caboose trains that got the photographers out to the balloon and back were handled by GE 44-tonner SN 146 in the morning, and ALCo S-1 WP 512 in the afternoon. Counting VIA FPA4 6776, which was idling next to the shop, a to-

tal of 12 locomotives were running throughout the day; a fine tribute to the "blackshirts," CMO Hank Stiles and his Mechanical Department personnel.

Continuing the "hood unit" theme, the night photo session featured 6 of our high-hood EMD's, set up nose-to-nose on 3 adjacent tracks. On track 2, furthest from the cameras, SP SD9E 4404 faced SP GP9E 2873; on track 3, WP GP9 731 faced WP GP9 725; and on track 4, WP GP20 2001 faced WP GP7 707. It was quite a sight, and nearly 50 photographers crowded their tripods in for a shot. A second shot of WP GP20 2001 by itself concluded the night photos.

Activities in the shop building this year included the swap meet/show & sale organized by Roy Gabriel, which featured 25 vendors; clinics presented by the WPRRHS as part of the first annual convention (the WPRRHS "Headlight" staff also manned a table in the shop building to introduce the WPRRHS); and, of course, the gift shop was open all day. Also of note was the full day put in by the Beanery crew, serving the normal burgers & hot dogs menu for lunch, then shifting gears for the first-class spaghetti dinner, for which the Beanery was full.

After dinner, everyone gathered round the presentation stage for the slide shows; the main attraction here was John Shaw's show on "Logging Railroads of Eastern Plumas County," which was well received. Several excellent shows were presented before the crowd gathered up their gear and headed outside for the night photos, and for the diehards, more slides were shown after the night photo session.

The full package of attractions and activities presented this year resulted in a record crowd for Railfan's Day; nearly 300 people were admitted to this year's events. Of course, something like this doesn't just happen; months of planning and preparation went into this event by over a dozen people, and a volunteer staff of almost 40 people worked for as much as a week prior to the event, as well as on Railfan's Day itself, to ensure its success (included in this group are all 10 of the FRRS Directors). I apologize for not having the list of dedicated people that made this day happen available for this article, but, believe me, you all have my profound thanks and admiration.



Top Photo: Standing next to Motorcar 23 is Tom Sharpsteen, who assembled the car, donated all of the running gear, built the wood frame for the body and donated the era wood "pickup" bed. Right: Movie Time. The movie crew is shown filming at the museum. Both photos by Norm Holmes.