

WP'S MOUNTAIN CLASS LOCOMOTIVES

Nineteen thirty six was the middle of the great depression: Western Pacific was in receivership. With the court's permission the railroad embarked on a badly needed \$37 million rehabilitation program partially financed by a \$10 million loan from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation. Rail, roadbed, locomotives and shop facilities all needed improvement. WP's passenger trains were being hauled by a fleet of 36 ten-wheelers built in 1908/1909. As trains were getting heavier and the engines were getting older, new passenger power was sorely needed.

Because of the depression, the Florida East Coast Railroad had defaulted in paying for some twenty 4-8-2 Mountain type locomotives, built by American Locomotive Co. in 1924. As the cost of new locomotives was out of the question, this equipment appeared attractive.

Carl Moll, a WP official, was sent to Florida to inspect the locomotives and reported back to the master mechanic that WP should buy all 20. Although they were in poor condition due to being out of service for some time, the \$12,500 each asking price was a bargain. The only thing he didn't like about them was the wooden cabs (sic)!

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During the rebuilding changes in appearance were made to conform to WP's style. Pilots were replaced and the headlight placed in the center of smoke box. WP's distinctive enameled numbers were placed on the cab and the WP herald was located on the tender. As they were already oil burners, no change in fuel was needed. The ten Mountains were the only second-hand steam power bought by the railroad, except for some small steamers acquired from the B&L in early years and the four six wheel switchers.

As soon as the rebuilding was completed the engines were placed in service on the Scenic Limited running between Oakland and Salt Lake City. As WW II approached troop trains were being assigned to WP, the 171 class locomotives were used in this service whenever possible. The ten Mountains were the premier passenger power until the 4-8-4 Limas arrived in 1943. They were also occasionally used in freight service until their retirement in 1952. All were scrapped. Information for this article from Guy Dunscomb's Western Pacific Steam Locomotives and from remembrances of retired WP engineer, Bud Taber. - Norman W. Holmes

