

WESTERN PACIFIC No. 608

A SALUTE TO 50 YEARS

The Cover Story
by Kent Stephens

Western Pacific No. 608 achieved its 50th birthday in May 1990 -- a survivor in service far longer than many other diesel units. Now preserved at Portola, this historic diesel unit continues to work. The work, however, is less demanding and less frequent than operating around the clock in a railroad yard, moving heavy cuts of freight cars. Instead, the 608 hauls a light passenger train of cabooses and a vista flat. Thousands of visitors have seen No. 608; its service during the last five years has been much different than the majority of its years working in large yards. Read on. . . and you will discover that No. 608 started its service career as Union Pacific No. DS-1001 -- their second diesel switcher. Long called, "Bing" because of its sound when being started, it was later nicknamed "the magnet" while in UP service, and then in later years migrated to California to work for the Western Pacific for a decade and a half.

It was May 1938 when EMC first brought the then new 567 engine into production. At that time two new switcher designs were developed from the Winton-powered model SW's and NW-1's then in production. Originally in EMC's model designations, "S" designated 600hp and "N" was for 900hp. The "C" in "SC" and "NC" in the model designation meant it was a cast frame, while "W" in SW and NW stood for welded frame. Apparently by the time 567 engine production started, replacing the Winton engine, use of the designations had evolved into SW1 for a small switcher (600hp weighing about 100 tons) and NW2 for the large switcher (1,000hp, about 124 tons). (Early EMC and EMD model designations and use of model designations were sloppy, unlike later years.)

In spite of the smaller appearance of the SW1 when compared to the NW2, the two models are the same from the frame down. In other words, No. 501 and No. 608 are approximately the same length. EMD specs show a length of 44 feet, 5 inches between pulling faces for all SW and NW models. WP Mechanical Department drawings, however, show No. 501's length as 44 feet, 11 inches from outside edge of coupler while No. 608 is 44 feet, 5 inches from outside edge of coupler. (Are their measurements off? We will have to measure No. 501 and No. 608.) No. 501's appearance thus is rather deceptive in regard to its length!

The deceptive difference results from the

shorter length of the hood on the SW1 (21 feet, 9 inches) housing a 6-cylinder 567 prime mover against the NW2's longer hood (26 feet, 8 - 1/2 inches) necessary for the 12-cylinder 567 prime mover. The cab on NW2's are also slightly higher.

EMC production of the SW1 started in January 1939 and continued until November 1953 with a production total of 660 units. Production of NW2's started in February 1939, continuing until December 1949 with a total of 1,119 units built. (EMC became EMD in 1940. There was no production of SW1's or NW2's during 1942-45, due to the War Production Board suspending EMD switcher production.)

During 1939, EMC sent four demonstrator units -- three SW1's and one NW2 -- to western railroads. EMC gave the units a road number that was the same as the construction number on the unit. One of the first SW1's was No. 804, shipped to Southern Pacific on February 7th. By March No. 804 was working at Oakland on the Espee. EMC during March offered Western Pacific the loan of another SW1 demonstrator. If WP was satisfied, EMC told WP officials that WP could buy three SW1's for \$62,250 each, payable over eight years. WP agreed to the offer, but only if the demo unit proved to be satisfactory within a 30-day period. EMC shipped demo unit No. 906 to WP on September 8th -- on September 26th No. 906 went to work in the Elko yard as the first diesel switcher on the WP. After working a few shifts, No. 906 was moved to San Francisco, going to work there on October 3rd.

WP agreed to EMC's offer in October 1939, buying No. 906 and renumbering it No. 501. Nos. 502-503 followed as production units. Espee was similarly impressed. They bought No. 804, renumbered it No. 1000, and also added more production SW1's to its roster. Both of these pioneering SW1 demonstrators are fortunately still in existence in their 51st year, while most of the following production SW1's on both railroads were scrapped. WP No. 501 is preserved at Portola, and is apparently the oldest operating SW1 preserved in a museum. Espee No. 1000 is also an operable unit in 1990, working as Holly Sugar Co. No. 1 at Holly's Tracy plant. (WP No. 502 is SN No. 402 at the California State Railroad Museum; No. 503 was sold for scrap in 1971.)

The NW2 demonstrator was EMC No. 889 built in October 1939. Union Pacific

tried three EMC demos during 1939 -- SW1 #804, SW1 #911 and NW2 No. 889, and all three arrived in Omaha on October 22nd. UP Mechanical Department officials liked No. 889 for its greater power over the SW1's and rejected the SW1 model for purchase consideration. (No. 804 was returned to Espee and renumbered No. 1000; No. 911 was sold to Great Lakes Steel Company.) In a deal with EMC similar to Espee and WP, Union Pacific bought NW2 demo No. 889 and ordered eight production NW2's. EMC No. 889 was renumbered No. DS-1000 (DS stood for diesel switcher.) The eight production units (EMC c/n Nos. 1000-1008, May 1940) became Union Pacific Nos. DS-1001 - DS-1009. These early NW2's were delivered with very short exhaust stacks that barely extended above the hood. The stacks were extended by UP shops sometime after purchase.

No. 1001 spent much of its Union Pacific service working in the Tacoma and Seattle area. A retired Union Pacific engineer from Seattle visited Portola recently and was surprised to find the former Union Pacific No. 1001 as WP No. 608. He recalled that the crews called No. 1001 "the magnet" as No. 1001 hit cars more often than any other UP switcher in the Seattle and Tacoma yards.

The DS prefix was dropped by UP in 1953 and the diesel switchers were repainted from their original black to UP yellow. In 1966 UP sold Nos. 1000 and 1001 to the Stockton Terminal & Eastern. ST&E's traffic was becoming heavier, and car weights were increasing with the larger size of railroad cars. The short line's mini fleet of small center-cab GE's were no longer adequate to handle the switching. ST&E repainted the NW2's and kept the same numbers. Apparently the NW2's never operated on the ST&E, as the short line's mechanic couldn't get them to run. ST&E was continually leasing Alco S-1's from WP to fill in. Finally ST&E's management asked WP if they would be willing to sell two of the 660hp Alcos and take the two inoperable NW2's as a trade. WP agreed to the deal, trading Nos. 505 and 506 for ST&E Nos. 1000 and 1001 in October 1968. (It is interesting to note that we have two of the four units involved in this swap at our museum -- former ST&E Nos. 506 and 1001.)

The two NW2's were moved to WP's Sacramento shop and evaluated for rebuilding. One of the major problems with the

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prime mover turned out to be water in the cylinders. WP proceeded to rebuild the two units, upgrading them to 1,200hp. The rebuilding technically upgraded them to a model designation of NW2u (upgraded), but WP referred to them in Mechanical Department drawings as NW2 models. The rebuilding included one noticeable external change. Full length outside hand rails were installed from the front steps to the cab - standard on Alco switchers but not on EMD's. (WP's SW9's also had outside hand rails.) At the end of the rebuilding, they were repainted "pumpkin orange-II" and renumbered WP Nos. 607-608 behind the SW9's. Neither received a cab herald. No. 608 (ex No. 1001) went into service first in February 1969, followed by No. 607 (ex No. 1000) in June. No. 608 was initially sent to San Jose and within a week tangled with an automobile at a crossing. Later both Nos. 607 and 608 worked at the Stockton yard, then No. 607 was leased to Sacramento Northern for service in West Sacramento. In May 1973, No. 607 was transferred to SN ownership, retaining the same number. Both units were repainted green during the 1970's.

After the merger, Nos. 607 and 608 were retired and moved east with other WP units, with an uncertain future as sale for scrap or perhaps service on some other railroad or at an industrial plant if they were lucky. More than likely it would have been for scrap, due to their age and the glut of used diesels on the market at the time. Sales of used diesels were depressed during the early to mid-1980's as the market was flooded with many surplus diesel units; the situation has been much different during last three to four years, with the supply being tight and prices high.

Both Nos. 607 and 608 were preserved, thanks to the generosity of the Union Pacific. Norm Holmes and Kent Stephens both had a part in preserving the two units. Mr. Flannery, at that time president of Union Pacific, came to Portola during Railroad Days in 1983 to officially donate No. 921-D. After the donation ceremony, Kent talked to Mr. Flannery, and during the conversation, told him that the railroad still had a very historic diesel unit, SN No. 607, the NW2 demonstrator and UP's first diesel switcher. The suggestion to Mr. Flannery was that both Nos. 607 and 608 should be preserved in museums. Sometime afterward, Norm learned that the two units were for sale and contacted Mr. Flannery with the request for one of the units be donated to the Portola Railroad Museum. No. 608 was donated to our museum in De-

ember 1984. The unit was green when received and was repainted "pumpkin orange-II" during the next summer.

No. 607 was donated about the same time to the Heeber Creeper Scenic Railroad at Heber City, Utah. It has been repainted to its original Union Pacific paint scheme of black with silver lettering and renumbered No. DS-1000.

Thanks to the Union Pacific's generosity in preserving two historic diesel units - their first two diesel switchers - visitors at two railroad museums can enjoy them. Thousands of visitors at our museum have ridden the passenger train behind No. 608 and a number of neophyte engineers have operated it under supervision in the Locomotive Rental Program. No. 608's image is one of the illustrations of museum locomotives on coffee cups sold in the Gift Shop. And at the September 5th meeting, the Feather River Rail Society Board of Directors approved Norm's proposal to change our Portola post office box number from 8 to 608 in honor of No. 608. (plus the need for a larger box).

In the closing months of 1990, we can say "happy 51st birthday" to Union Pacific No. DS-1000 in Utah and "happy fiftieth birthday" to Western Pacific No. 608 at Portola! Thanks again, Union Pacific! And thanks again, Mr. Flannery! INFORMATION SOURCES: Thanks to Wayne Monger for information; also John Walker for historical information on the demo units. Also, WESTERN PACIFIC DIESEL YEARS, by Joseph Strapac; "All about SW's" by Don Dover, EXTRA 2200 SOUTH, Issue No. 41, July-August 1973; "Union Pacific Railroad, An all-time roster" Part 4, EXTRA 2200 SOUTH, Issue No. 70, Oct-Dec. 1979; and WESTERN PACIFIC LOCOMOTIVE DIAGRAM BOOK (1976).



Are you a reliable person who likes to work with people and oversee mechanical projects, and can you set and follow a schedule? Then consider applying for the position of FRRS Chief Mechanical Officer.

Your responsibilities would include overseeing, scheduling and performing maintenance of locomotives and other rolling stock.

Our preventive maintenance program is a regularly scheduled program for inspections of locomotives, and other rolling stock. It also includes routine maintenance operations such as changing filters, changing oil and making periodic adjustments as required.

The FRRS preventive maintenance department was formed in January of 1990 to help maintain FRRS equipment in running condition. Erv Hartung, Jr. has resigned as Chief Mechanical Officer for personal reasons.

If you think you have the "Right Stuff" for the job, then notify the Board of Directors.

If you get this in time...

Don't forget

The FRRS Southern Regional Meet
Saturday, November 10, 1990

10:30AM to 5:00PM at:

La Habra Senior Citizens Center
165 E. La Habra Blvd.

(Between Harbor & Euclid)

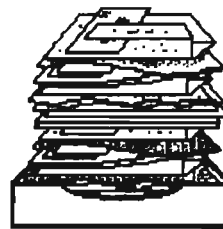
La Habra, CA 90631

After the meeting, chat with speakers:

Chris Skow, Steve Habeck,
and John Ryczkowski

and bring your own WP slides to show!

THE SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CALENDAR



COMING EVENTS IN THE LOS ANGELES AREA

November 11, 1990 10:00AM to 4:00PM

Great Pacific Coast Train Mart
Orange County Fairgrounds
Costa Mesa, CA

again on January 6, 1991 10:00AM to
4:00PM

Saturday and Sunday January 19 + 20, 1991
11:00AM - 5:00PM

Great American Train Show

Las Vegas, NV
Convention Center
3150 Paradise Rd.
Las Vegas, NV

Saturday and Sunday February 2 + 3, 1991
11:00AM - 5:00PM
Great American Train Show
LA County Fairplex
Pomona, CA