MRS-1

by Norman Holmes

During the Korean War period the U. S. Army decided it needed new locomotives, some that would be suitable for overseas duty in case the cold war heated up. Specifications were submitted to both EMD and Alco in November, 1951, to produce a locomotive that would be capable of being easily changed to any track gauge between standard 4' 8 - 1/2" to a maximum of 5'6". Couplers were to be adjustable to various heights and the underframes were arranged to mount any type of coupler. Mounting plates for installation of buffers were located on each end plate. Clearance restrictions required the units to be no taller than thirteen feet.

EMD was first to produce a unit, designated MRS-1, in March 1952. They built only thirteen units which were numbered USA 1808 thru 1820. Ultimately one EMD unit was assigned to Vandenberg AFB, CA, others elsewhere. Four were tried at Hawthorne Navy Ammunition Depot, NV, but were unsatisfactory at that base. In 1977 five units were sent to Alaska, but were never used by the Alaska Railroad. They were scrapped in 1983. Two units were acquired by the Pacific Southwest Museum Assn. for operation at their San Diego Railroad Museum. The six remaining EMD MRS-1 units were in service at the Military Ocean Terminal, Sunny Point, NC as of May, 1990.

Alco produced their first MRS-1 unit, designated RSX-4 by Alco, in March, 1953 and completed an order for 83 by October, 1953. They carry both Alco and GE builders plates and serial numbers because of a joint contract basis. Fifty units were equipped with steam generators and carried a prefix letter "B" before the road number. B2041 thru B2090 were steam equipped, 2091 thru 2123 were not. All units were equipped with insulated fuel pump, filters, fuel tank and lines. A heater system using diesel fuel could heat the fuel tank, crankcase oil and battery box. A second heater could heat the coolant. The units were designed to operate from -40 degrees to +125 degrees F.

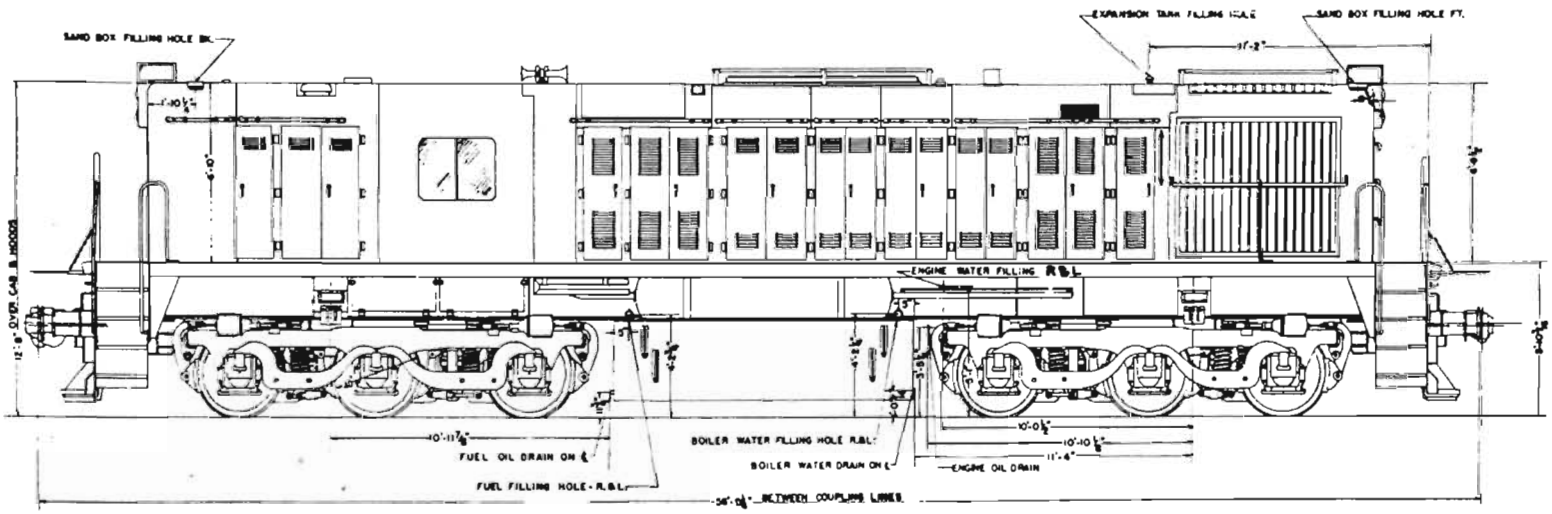
The cold war never really heated up to include the use of the MRS-1 units. The majority of the units were in storage most of their life. Thirteen Alco's were transferred to the Alaska Railroad in 1974-75 and were used in switching service until 1983-84, when they were scrapped. Because of their age and the government's desire to standardize on fewer locomotive models, the 38 year old Alco's are being sold. Costing the government $500,000 each because of custom design and cost plus contracting, the units are now bringing only a small fraction of their original cost. (An EMD GP-7 bought in 1953 cost about $170,000.) Concord Naval Weapons Station, CA, was using Alco MRS-1 units until a few years ago. Two have been acquired by the State Park system in Jamestown, two are going to the Railroad Museum in Sacramento, four were sold to Norman Holmes, two going to a scrap yard and two going to the Portola Railroad Museum. Four are awaiting disposition. Hill AFB near Ogden, Utah, has six units awaiting disposition. One unit was acquired by the San Diego Railroad Museum from Vandenberg AFB and the Bluegrass Railroad in Kentucky operates one unit in tourist service.

The 12 cylinder 244 engine produces 1600 hp. The unit weighs 120 tons and rides on three axle Alco Tri-mount trucks. All axles are powered with GE 731 traction motors. Axle weight is only 20 tons per axle and they will operate on up to 30 degree curves. They operate long hood forward. (Our SP SD9E weighs 180 tons (30 tons per axle) and has a minimum radius of 22 degrees.)

Units at Portola

USN 65-00541, ex USA 2119, Alco # 80352 6-53
USN 65-00544, ex USA 2122, Alco # 80355 6-53

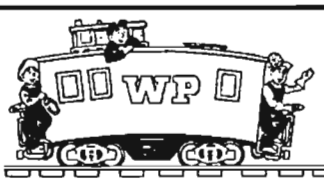
Above data gleaned from "The Diesel Builders Vol. II" by John Kirkland, "The Short Line" published by Garreth M. McDonald, and "Rail Classics" July 1976.



FRRS member Don Olsen

of Catenary Productions, is in need of color slides of WP steam and early WP diesels for the cover and for promotion of his new WP video. Contact him directly at:

Don Olsen
795 Burnett Avenue, #2
San Francisco, CA 94131-1419
415-285-5865



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will not appear in this issue. Look for it again in future issues.