

Railfan Day 1995

By Steve Habeck

The 1995 version of the best show of vintage railroading in the West took place on a beautiful September 16th, at the Portola Railroad Museum. This year's show featured 16 trains operating on a tight schedule, utilizing 9 locomotives representing 4 builders, with construction dates from 1940 to 1956. The train consists and operating plan were drawn up by the usual braintrust of Directors Wayne Monger and Vic Neves, and this time the plan called for several locomotive swaps and shuffles during the course of the day, such that on several occasions, as many as 4 engine and train movements were occurring simultaneously. This challenge was competently met by the operating crews, supervisors, and dispatchers, as the schedule was followed closely all day.

Featured this year was ALCO MRS-1 244, in brilliant orange-red and yellow paint, which started the show by pulling the morning caboose train. It also did the honors on our 3-car passenger train runs, filling in for ailing ALCO FPA4 6776, and was the subject of one of the night photos, along with WP derrick 37. Also highlighted this year was GE 44-tonner Sacramento Northern (SN) 146, pulling an all-SN train consisting of covered hopper SN 5005 and caboose SN 1632. WP NW2u 608 was assigned to a short WP freight, while the day's "big" train had a 9-car consist behind WP F7A 921-D, WP F9Bu 925-C, and WP GP7 707. The power for this train was turned during lunch, so that 707 led on the afternoon train. WP ALCO S1 512 was used first on the derrick train, which also featured D&RGW cupola caboose 01414, owned by Bob Lindley. The 512 also powered the afternoon caboose train. Fairbanks-Morse (F-M) 1857 put in a spectacular performance as a fill-in for ailing Baldwin AS-616 ONW 4 on the tank car train, and SP SD9E 4404 looked right at home hauling the 3 ancient beet racks, with Vic Neves' SP cupola caboose 1060 on the rear.

About 85 railfans paid for the opportunity to view, photograph, and ride the day's trains, and many of them, along with the train crews, enjoyed the traditional spaghetti feed in the Beanery, put on by Sue and Bruce Cooper and the Beanery crew. After dinner, several slide shows were presented for entertainment prior to the night photo sessions. This year's subjects for the night photos included ALCO MRS-1 244 and WP derrick 37 out on the balloon track, as well as the freshly painted short hood end of WP GP20 2001, spotted just outside the west shop door on track 2, facing WP FP7 805-A.

Dispatching duties were handled by Vic Neves, with Gordon Wollesen providing relief while Vic was running the SD9. Trainmaster Jim Gidley, Sr. and Superintendent Gordon Wollesen supervised the day's operations, while Yardmaster Steve Habeck had his hands full with the engine changes and extra movements (thanks for your heads-up help, Phil Gosney).

Behind the scenes for this year's event, lots of preparation and many hours of work were put in to make it happen. Mechanical work in the month prior to Railfan Day focused on the ALCO and Baldwin fleets, with limited success. Bad batteries sidelined Baldwin DS-4-4-660 NVR 51; Baldwin S-12 FR&W 16 was bad-ordered with throttle control problems; and Baldwin AS-616 ONW 4 developed nasty air and electrical system problems that defied repeated repair efforts by CMO Hank Stiles. Several marathon sessions were worked in an effort to complete a cylinder liner changeout in ALCO FPA4 6776 in time for Railfan Day, but the project could not be completed in time. This effort involved the expertise of Darrel Hall, from Ely, NV, who spent many years working on Kennecott's ALCOs, as well as lots of hard work by David Dewey, Doug Morgan, Norm Holmes, and Peter Lyman. Doug and Peter spent many days fixing problems on the MRS-1, as

well.

Steve Habeck attempted to repair the freeze damage to the air compressor on WP F9Bu 925-C, but was not successful. However, Tom Graham tried a fix with some special epoxy he knew of, and the result was the "B" unit "in service" for the day. Tom also ensured that SN 146 was ready to run for Railfan Day, and was, as usual, a tremendous help in dozens of detail projects, including oiling all the journals of friction bearing equipment to be used on Railfan Day.

The Thursday and Friday before Railfan Day are the "crunch days," when all the trains are made up, motive power serviced, fueled, and tested, and all the glitches start showing up. This year, many volunteers made an extra sacrifice to be at the Museum to help out on these two days from hell. As a result, Yardmaster Steve Habeck was able to run 2 yard jobs on both days, which greatly expedited the makeup of the trains. A major effort was made this year to extend the spur track that comes off the Inside Balloon near the sewer plant crossing. Our makeshift track gang worked relentlessly on both days, and were successful in completing about six carlengths of track east of the crossing, which was enough to hold the Railfan Day trains that were scheduled to use it. Since this track parallels the South Lead and then swings away to avoid a pole for the railroad's code line, it was named Dodgepole.

Some of the many people who participated in the setup efforts on Thursday and/or Friday were (please forgive me if your name is omitted; your work is recognized and appreciated): Wayne Monger, Vic Neves, Jim Malksen, Dave & Julie Anderson, Phil Gosney, Jerry Williams, Gordon Wollesen, Jack Palmer, Kerry Cochran, Don Borden, King Felton, Tom Graham, Judy and Melissa McGrath, Hank Stiles, Dave Bergman, Doug Morgan, David Dewey, Norm Holmes, Ken Iverson, and Ken Roller. Virtually all these people hung around for Saturday's show, and were joined by Marty Anderson, Don Clark, and Trainmaster Jim Gidley, Sr. for Saturday and Sunday.

Once again, the FRRS has demonstrated the capability to operate several movements on a tight schedule, and do it safely and competently, providing a great showcase for our Museum and our equipment. My thanks to everyone for your sacrifices of time and effort. Now, for next year, . . .

Rail Acquisition Project

We are in the process of removing about one-half mile of track from Grays Flat including one switch. Years ago WP built this spur track to serve a lumber planing mill, however the mill closed and the owner is dismantling the mill and was willing to sell the rail.

When WP was constructed the main line was built with 85 lb. rail (rail is measured by weight for a three foot section). This Grays Flat spur was constructed using this rail with some pieces dated 1907-1909.

Grays Flat is located in the Feather River Canyon near Twain about 50 miles from Portola. During October, Norm Holmes, Ken Iverson, Bob Lindley, Clyde Lippincott, Jim Malksen and Hap Manitt made five trips to Grays Flat to load tie plates, angle bars, bolts and the switch parts. Most of the rail had been unbolted and removed from the ties, but had to be pulled down the grade to a loading area. Clyde brought a small tractor from Carson City to use for this work. As soon as a trucker can be obtained, the rail will be hauled to Portola and stockpiled for future use.