

FRRS Buys Two Western Pacific GP9's

By Kent Stephens

The FRRS has filled a gap in our collection of preserved Western Pacific diesel units when former Western Pacific GP9's Nos. 725 and 731 were purchased in November 1995 from Helm Leasing. The GP's were saved for preservation only one month before Helm planned to sell them for scrap if another buyer didn't come along. Only three Western Pacific GP9's exist from an original roster of eight units and two of them will be at Portola.

A Bit of History

The GP7 and GP9 models designed by Dick Dillworth represented a big success story for EMD. From its introduction in October, 1949, through the end of production in May, 1954, EMD built 2,610 GP7's for U.S. railroads plus an additional 112 for Canadian roads. Five GP7B booster units without cabs were also built during 1953.

The GP9 was introduced in January, 1954, as a 1,750 horsepower replacement model for the 1,500 hp GP7. The GP9 was even more popular. EMD built 3,436 units in the five year production run from January 1954, through December 1959 for U. S. railroads, and an additional 646 for Canadian roads. EMD also cataloged a cabless version of the GP9's. The model was designated a GP9B and was a booster or "calf" version. A total of 165 booster GP9B's were built for three customers (ATSF, PRR, UP).

Western Pacific bought both GP7's and GP9's. The GP7's were numbered 701-713 and were built in two orders. Nos. 701-709 came in October, 1952, and Nos. 710-713 were built during March-April, 1953. The GP7's were built with high short hoods, 16 cylinder 2 cycle 567B, 1,500 hp diesel engines with a starting tractive effort of 61,900 lbs. The units weighed (fully loaded) 251,700 lbs. The GP7's were WP road class 701, Symbol RS-62. The GP7's were originally equipped with Pyle-National "barrel" style headlights, which were replaced by twin sealed-beam lights during the late 1970's. WP opted for EMD to equip them with dual control stands, making the units very flexible for either locals or mainline freights. The GP7's ended steam power on the WP, completing dieselization and resulting in WP being the first large railroad in the west to be completely dieselized. Nos. 711 and 712 were sold to the Sacramento Northern in 1971 for use on the Chico local. SN retained the WP numbers.

Out of the more than 3,000 GP9's built by EMD, Western Pacific bought only eight, built in September 1955. They were also numbered in the 700 series, WP skipping up to 725 to start the series, with the units numbered 725 through 732. The GP9's were equipped with a 16 cylinder 2 cycle 567C diesel engine producing 1,750 hp, with a starting effort of 62,100 lbs. They weighed 247,600 pounds fully loaded. WP designated their GP9's as road class RS-62. Like the GP7's the GP9's were also equipped with dual control stands and the large Pyle-National "barrel" type headlights. One spotting difference between the GP7 and GP9 is the latter has louvers on the long hood. This difference resulted in the GP9's being lettered Western Pacific in two staggered lines on the long hood instead of the single line of the GP7's.

Six of the eight GP9's were still rostered by WP when the Union Pacific acquired the carrier in 1982. No. 730 had been wrecked at Beowawe, Nevada during 1963. It was so badly damaged that WP traded it to EMD for an order for GP35's. Then in May 1970, No. 726 was damaged in a wreck at Keddle when No. 3513 ran into it on the siding with excessive force, punching in the GP9's short hood. WP elected not to repair the damage and traded the 726 to EMD on the GP40

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The Acquisition of the WP GP9's

By Kent Stephens and Norman Holmes

Our collection of preserved diesel units at Portola includes a number of former Western Pacific diesel units. Among the represented models are two of EMD's GP7's Nos. 707 and 708, and GP20 No. 2001, the first GP20 built.

The GP9 model is represented in our collection by Southern Pacific GP9E No. 2873, but the 2873 is an ex SP unit and not a former WP locomotive. There were several discussions at Portola during the last several years, with other volunteers, that it would be nice to have a Western Pacific GP9. Well, sometimes in our conversation it was so simple; the museum didn't really need two WP GP7's. Could we approach and work out a deal with the City of Elko to trade the inoperable GP7 No. 708 for Elko's GP9 No. 727? It sounded so simple, if only the City of Elko would agree to trade their GP9 for our GP7 then we could fill a the gap in our collection with an operable WP GP9. Then a reality check would set in at the end of the conversation. A GP9 only weighs 124 tons - ONLY 124 tons. But those 124 tons would be a big problem in swapping out that GP9 at Elko, moving a large heavy diesel locomotive on an extended low-boy trailer through city streets, with both weight and overhead wires to worry about, to the nearest Union Pacific spur. At the spur, 727 would be off-loaded and 708 on-loaded to the low-boy for a trip back through city streets to the display site in the park. In reality obtaining 727 would be a major project and an expensive one at that. Besides, it's nice to have two Western Pacific GP7's, especially two numbered in sequence. And one of these days 708 might just be an operable locomotive. After all, the museum has a 567C engine block setting on blocks that wasn't needed after all for 805A.

In our conversations during the last couple of years about how nice it would be to have Elko's GP9, we completely forgot about those four ex-WP GP9's running on the Iowa Interstate. They were actually a simple proposition to acquire when compared to Elko's diesel, at least the ones on the Iowa Interstate were on live rail. However, IAIS was still running the WP units up to a year ago.

On the regular Saturday night slide show at Gridley October 21, 1995, a slide taken by John Black from a recent trip to Omaha jogged Kent's memory. The slide showed two of the lonely ex Western Pacific Geep 9's, Nos. 300 and 306, stored on a spur near the shop and for sale. Kent's reaction to his comment about the two GP9's being for sale was "Bingo," here's our opportunity to buy an ex Western Pacific GP9 for the museum if they don't want an excessively high price for the unit. We can just forget about the stuffed and mounted GP9 at Elko. The next evening Kent called Norm Holmes to advise him about the GP9's, telling him that Nos. 300 and 306 were stored at Council Bluffs and for sale. He was interested and said he would follow-up with a call to the Iowa Interstate.

When Norm called the Iowa Interstate, he learned that the 300 and 306 were stored in operable condition and for sale but they didn't belong to the railroad. He was advised to call Helm Financial in San Francisco, which is a locomotive leasing company. A phone call to Helm followed. Yes, the GP9's were for sale and Helm was planning to sell both for scrap, along with other stored units, at the end of 1995, if a buyer wasn't found in the meantime.

Helm was asking \$40,000 for each unit, Norm said this was more than we could afford. Helm called back and said since we were a non-profit museum they would sell us the units for scrap price which was \$30,000 each and would like

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Conclusion of WP GP9 History

order in 1971.

Two GP9's were retired by Union Pacific without being renumbered. No. 727 was retired during 1984, but is a fortunate survivor. It was repainted in full Western Pacific orange and silver and donated to the city of Elko, Nevada where it was placed on display, "stuffed and mounted" with caboose 437 in a small park across from the police station. This equipment was given to the City of Elko as a remembrance of the time when the city was bisected by both the Western Pacific and Southern Pacific rail lines. The unfortunate GP9 was No. 728, retired during 1984 and sold for scrap.

The remaining four GP9's were renumbered and repainted for Union Pacific: 725 to UP 300, 729 to UP 304, 731 to UP 306 and 732 to UP 308. They were the second GP9's to have these numbers on the Union Pacific, the railroad had retired their own GP9's earlier. The four GP9's were returned to former WP territory and went back to work. Included in their runs were the Fremont and Milpitas locals and the Sacramento Northern's Chico local, where 300 and 306 at various times worked the runs. (By this time SN 711 had been retired and 712 was in work train service in the Feather River Canyon.) The GP9's lasted little more than one year, however, when an edict from Union Pacific motive power officials in Omaha ordered all Geeps with 567 diesel engines to be retired. The division superintendent at Stockton protested but it went unheeded by Omaha. He complained to Omaha that the GP9's were needed for assignments on light rail branchlines, such as SN's line to Chico with its 60 lb. rail. The replacements were ex Mopac GP38's that stayed for a few months until they were moved to the Salt Lake City shop to have their cabs rebuilt to experimental crew cabs. Railfan observers could hardly believe the replacement power for the Chico local - former WP GP35's and GP40's. Despite predictions of derailments, the "big" GP35's and GP40's managed to stay on SN's light rail without incident until the Chico local made its last run during the closing days of 1985.

In the meantime, Union Pacific sold the four GP9's to dealer Precision National Corp. of Mt. Vernon, Illinois. Not long after their sale all four units went to work on the Iowa Interstate Railroad in 1986. They were among the first diesel units acquired by this regional carrier after it took over a stretch of Rock Island mainline. Their western terminus at Council Bluffs, Iowa connects with Union Pacific.

Iowa Interstate did not repaint the units from their UP paint scheme, but merely being lettered for IAIS. At this point it is not clear, however, who owned them: PNC, Iowa Interstate or Helm Leasing. The Iowa Interstate roster in TRAINS (June 1989) that accompanied an article on the railroad does not indicate if the regional owned the four GP9's or was leasing them. The text of the article isn't any help either. They had several additional GP9's which they gave odd numbers to in the 300 series that mingled them with the even numbered former WP/UP Geeps.

GP9 Fund

As of the year's end (1995) a total of \$3,275 has been donated. This is still a long way from the \$70,000 needed to pay for these very important additions to our collection. The following people have made contributions to this fund:

Tom Abbott, Don Borden, Roy Bruington, *Bob Carr, *Stephen Colley, Charles Davis, Ed DeLozier, James Duncan, Erik Frodsham, Robert Gordon, *Jack Hathaway, Don Hunter, *Robert Hurney, *Dick Hussey, *Fred Klyver, *Michel Knight, Don Koors, Tom Lawler, Charley Lix, *Tom Mounovan for John Hungerford's collection, George Nolan, Randy Peck, *Andy Peterson, *Allan Ratcliff, Gary Richardson, *Kenneth Ritz, *Charlotte Rodgers, Chris Skow, J. Wheaton Smith, John Stein, Don Struken, Dave Tateosian, Michael Tolich, Eugene Vicknair, Eric Wright.

(*) indicates a donation of \$100 or more. Your help is greatly appreciated.

Conclusion of Acquisition of WP GP9's

us to take both units. Norm advised that he would take the proposal to the Board.

The proposed purchase was discussed at the October Board of Directors meeting and it was decided to send our CMO Hank Stiles to Council Bluffs to do a mechanical inspection. Since Norm was leaving for the TRAIN convention in Louisville, KY, Steve Habeck called Helm and Iowa Interstate to make arrangements for Hank to inspect the units. Hank flew to Omaha and through a great deal of cooperation from Iowa Interstate was able not only to inspect the units, but both were put into service so their operation could be evaluated. Hank determined that both units were in good condition as had been stated by Iowa Interstate and Helm. Regular maintenance was carried out by Iowa Interstate, one unit was in exceptionally good condition with new power assemblies installed only two years ago. The only problem found on either unit is that one unit has one wheel set with relatively thin flanges. We wish to thank IAIS CMO Fred Cheny and shop supervisor Wayne McClain and crew for their superb cooperation in helping us evaluate these units.

During the October Board meeting, it had been pretty well decided to buy both units if Hank's report was favorable, as buying one would undoubtedly result in the other unit being sold for scrap. Since time was running out to purchase the units, a decision had to be made before the next Board meeting. FRRS President Steve Habeck polled the Directors and it was agreed to purchase both units. With the help of Helm Leasing the transportation cost for moving the units from Omaha to Portola was reduced, but would still be a little over \$10,000 for the two units.

Iowa Interstate agreed to prepare the units for shipment, removing the horns and bells and doing a general inspection. The horns and bells will be shipped separately to prevent loss! As of this writing, December 29, 1995, the two units are awaiting a Union Pacific inspection in South Omaha. Pending approval, the units will probably be in Portola by the time you read this story.

It is planned to restore both GP9's to Western Pacific colors. No. 300 is ex WP 725 (c/n 20696); No. 306 is ex WP 731 (c/n 20754), both built in September, 1955. Elko's No. 727 is the only other surviving WP GP9.

The Board of Directors has discussed the possibility of leasing one or both of these GP9's (and possibly our SP GP9) to a short line railroad for a short period of time to help defray the acquisition cost, however we would not want these historic units wrecked or completely worn out. A final decision on this has not been determined. In the meantime, the purchase and the payment for transportation has seriously depleted FRRS funds. We have spent in excess of \$70,000 for the units and donations are sorely needed to help defray the cost of adding these two historically important former Western Pacific units to our collection. (Remember that the donations are tax-deductible.)



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