

FRRS Given Chance to Save Rare CZ Sleeper

By Eugene John Vicnair

In late January, the FRRS received a special offer from a private passenger car owner. Recently, the owner had come into possession of the California Zephyr sleeper car "Silver Thrush" and is seeking to have the car preserved in a museum. We have been given an exclusive right to purchase the car for the next few months. After that, the car will be placed on the open market and probably modified for lease service.

The "Silver Thrush" represents a unique chapter in the history of both the CZ and the Budd Company. In 1952, a series of six 6 double bedroom/5 compartment sleepers were built for the CZ to meet high ridership demands. There were other CZ cars built in 1952, all duplicates of existing car types and all delivered to the CBQ, but the 6/5 sleepers were unique to the 1952 order and were delivered to all three partners.

All previous CZ sleepers were Budd standard 10/6 and 16 section configurations. However, the CZ partners wanted larger rooms and asked Budd to specially build an 11 bedroom configuration, a type more commonly associated with the Pullman Company. Budd would build only eight 11-bedroom cars ever: the six CZ 6/5 cars and two near duplicates for the Denver Zephyr. This makes the 6/5 type one of the rarest of all Budd passenger cars.

The six 6/5 cars built were the WP 851 "Silver Crane", WP 852 "Silver Swallow", CB&Q 450 "Silver Dove", CB&Q 451 "Silver Quail", CB&Q 452 "Silver Thrush", and D&RGW 1135 "Silver Gull". All but the "Quail" and "Thrush" eventually ended up in Mexico, the WP and D&RGW cars right after the end of the CZ and the "Dove" in the early 1990s. All are reported scrapped. Of the two survivors, only the "Silver Thrush" retains its full as-built configuration. The only major modifications have been the addition of HEP, the conversion of one bathroom to a shower (a configuration Budd originally proposed for the CZ), and the installation of 4 escape windows. None of these changes have affected the original bedroom layout. In addition, many of the CZ era details survive within the car, including door handles and bathroom fittings.

Very few CZ sleepers of any type survive, and nearly none from the WP or DRGW. The 6/5s in particular are unique in their history and rarity, and were popular with travelers for their (for a sleeping car) spacious rooms. With only two remaining, and the other having been modified, this will likely be the only chance the museum has to acquire a 6/5 in anything approaching original condition and at such a price. If the "Quail" is ever sold, it will certainly be more expensive. If the "Thrush" is purchased for private car service, there is a strong chance it will be modified and future resale will be at a higher price.

From a restoration perspective, the car requires

only removal of the carpet placed on its walls, new interior paint, new underframe skirts (which we are currently having made for the "Silver Hostel"), removal of Amtrak stripes, replacement of window glass (the car currently has MarGuard windows, some of which are clouding up), and other minor items to return it to its CZ glory. All beds and many day chairs are present, as well as such details as its original climate controls, room numbers, and shoe shine boxes. The current owner has agreed to do several minor repairs discovered after he took possession. Mechanically, the car is in excellent condition.

The price, however, at \$102,000, is high. The owner is not selling the car for any more than what it has cost him, however saving it from being converted to a modified private car has already totaled over \$100,000.

Several members of the FRRS are already looking at options for purchasing this rare and historic car without taking money away from the General Fund or current projects. There is also the possibility of trading some equipment not in our permanent collection to offset the cost. But we need the support of the membership to guide the museum in this task. If you want to save the "Silver Thrush", we need your voice. This is a major undertaking, especially in light of the ambitious Zephyr Project now in progress, but such opportunities are scarce and need to be examined.

If you want the "Silver Thrush" to be saved, please contact Director Eugene Vicknair via e-mail at TSRY@aol.com; by post mail at Zephyr Project, PO Box 608, Portola, CA, 96122; or by phone at 408.248.4039 and show your support. If you would like to donate money, please send care of the Zephyr Project to the museum address above and mark the check "Silver Thrush". Any money not used for the purchase, should it be successful, will be used for restoration of the Museum's CZ equipment.

Funding Department

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planned to have 3-5 members with one serving as Department Head. The FRRS Chief Financial Officer and a Board of Directors Liaison will provide assistance to the members. Most of the department members will be chiefly concerned with the identification and cultivation of funding sources. Much of the departments business will be able to be conducted via e-mail and will not require direct meetings.

Anyone interested in applying to join the Funding Department are asked to contact Director Eugene Vicknair via e-mail at TSRY@aol.com or Director Doug Morgan by phone at 530.832.1657 or via e-mail at dbmorgan@jps.net. Any questions should be directed to Director Vicknair.