

STREAMLINED PASSENGER TRAINS IN CALIFORNIA

By Paul T. Hobbs

Passenger trains in California provided adequate schedules in several markets, much of it unglamorous and utilitarian. The carriers maintained a good quality of train service. There was little competition in the local operations, each represented in a distinct market segment. Transcontinental traffic was another matter, with three railroads competing for a share of both the Chicago to Los Angeles, and Chicago to San Francisco business.

The innovations demonstrated in 1934 with the M-10000 on Union Pacific and Pioneer Zephyr on the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy not only proved the viability of the diesel and distillate engines in high-speed service, but also modern lightweight construction techniques.

By 1937 the Union Pacific, Southern Pacific and Santa Fe all introduced streamlined trains into service to California.

■ UP	City of Los Angeles	May 15, 1936	(1 consist)
■ UP	City of San Francisco	June 14, 1936	(1 consist)
■ SP	Daylight	March 21, 1937	(2 consists)
■ ATSF	Super Chief	May 18, 1937	(1 consist)

The *Daylight*, with two consists, provided daily service between Los Angeles and San Francisco along the Coast Line. Santa Fe and Union Pacific offered one “sailing” per week, on fast schedules, in addition to the existing heavyweight trains.

Within another year several new trains were inaugurated, many of them streamlined. The Santa Fe *Chief* became the first daily transcontinental streamliner, replacing a heavyweight train of the same name. Both the Union Pacific and Santa Fe introduced classy economy transcontinental trains. The Santa Fe *El Capitan* was all streamlined. The Union Pacific *Challengers* featured upgraded heavyweight coach and Tourist Sleepers; streamlined coaches and diners quickly replaced and augmented older equipment on these popular trains.

The Santa Fe also introduced streamlined trains to San Diego and the new twice-daily *Golden Gate* between Bakersfield and Richmond – with dedicated bus connection to Los Angeles.

An additional consist each for the City of Los Angeles and Super Chief increased frequency to twice-weekly.

■ UP	Forty Niner	June 1937	(1 consist)
■ UP	SFO Challenger	September 1937	(5 consists)
■ UP	Challenger	November 1937	(5 consists)
■ UP	City of Los Angeles	December 18, 1937	(1 more)
■ ATSF	Chief	February 1938	(6 consists)
■ ATSF	Super Chief	February 1938	(1 more)
■ ATSF	El Capitan	February 1938	(2 consists)
■ ATSF	San Diegan	March 1938	(1 consist)
■ ATSF	Golden Gate	July 1938	(2 consists)

In 1940 and 1941 Southern Pacific completed their intra-state streamlined schedules with a *Noon Daylight* on the Coast Line between San Francisco and Los Angeles, and the all-sleeper *Lark* overnight. And then the *San Joaquin Daylight* between Los Angeles and Oakland through the valley.

■ SP	Noon Daylight	March 30, 1940	(2 consists)
■ SP	San Joaquin Daylight	July 4, 1941	(2 consists)

■ **SP Lark February - July 1941 (2 consists)**

World War II

Except for the 1942 delivery into Pullman service of a large group of streamlined sleeping cars, replacing heavyweights on several Transcontinental trains, there was no change in equipment during the war years 1942–1945. Traffic reached all-time highs, stretching the entire infrastructure of the railroad network.

Numerous restrictions were placed on civilian travel during the war, particularly the removal of sleeping cars and lounges from many trains. There were incredible numbers of troop trains and other special movements. By the time the majority of the troops came home in early 1946 the fleet was worn out.

Renewed civilian manufacturing quickly amounted to more than 3000 passenger car orders backlogged at the car builders.

Post World War II

The Union Pacific stripped the *Challenger* trains of their equipment and distributed the cars among newly ordered cars to create sufficient consists for the City fleet to become daily operations.

In 1949 the Western Pacific and its partners Denver & Rio Grande Western and Chicago, Burlington & Quincy introduced the *California Zephyr*, replacing the popular Exposition Flyer. The CZ was scheduled to provide daylight scenic views in both the Rockies and the Feather River Canyon. It was never the fast train between Chicago and Oakland. It was the leisure train, introducing dome cars (5 of them) to the West.

Southern Pacific streamlined its services to Portland with the *Shasta Daylight* and the *Cascade*; to Chicago with the *Golden State*; and to New Orleans with the Budd-built *Sunset Limited*.

■ UP	City of St. Louis	June 2, 1946	(3 consists)
■ SP	Golden State	January 4, 1948	(5 consists)
■ WP	California Zephyr	March 20, 1949	(6 consists)
■ SP	Shasta Daylight	July 10, 1949	(2 consists)
■ SP	Cascade	August 13, 1950	(2 consists)
■ SP	Sunset Limited	August 20, 1950	(6 consists)
■ ATSF	Super Chief	July 1951 re-equip	(6 consists)
■ ATSF	El Capitan	July 1956 re-equip	(6 consists)
■ UP	City of Las Vegas	December 18, 1956	(Aerotrains)
■ UP	City of Las Vegas	September 15, 1957	(Standard)

In 1951 the Santa Fe completely reequipped the *Super Chief*, featuring the glamorous Pleasure Dome car with the Turquoise Lounge; and in 1956 reequipped the El Capitan with unique high-level cars. The Union Pacific tried an Aerotrains on the new *City of Las Vegas* in 1956. The service proved popular, but the equipment was hard riding. Within the year the Aerotrains was replaced with standard coach equipment.

The Railroads

Each railroad operated a unique combination of locomotives, cars and paint schemes.

Western Pacific operated EMD F units, cars were all stainless steel and all manufactured by Budd.

The Santa Fe tried locomotives from several builders. The large fleet of Alco PAs were generally used on heavy trains like the *Grand Canyon* and *San Francisco Chief*, while EMD F units served on the faster schedules. Cars were mostly stainless steel with ribbed sides, and from all the manufacturers.

Union Pacific preferred EMD E units, with small numbers of other types. They preferred American Car & Foundry to build their generally smooth-sided yellow and gray painted cars.

Southern Pacific operated the largest fleet of Alco PA units, also featuring both E and F units from EMD, along with some passenger equipped hood units. The powerful Fairbanks Morse Trainmaster did exceptional work on the San Francisco to San Jose commute line. Bi-level commute cars were introduced from 1955. Railroad commuting was rare in California as most cities featured extensive streetcar and interurban systems.

Southern Pacific passenger cars varied from train to train as to both equipment style and paint scheme. *Daylight* trains were painted in the attractive orange and red scheme. The *Lark* and *Cascade* were two-tone gray. The *Golden State* was orange and gray. The *Sunset* was stainless steel with a red letterboard. And the City of San Francisco, initially all UP yellow, became a rainbow of UP and SP colors. From 1959 the SP standardized their color scheme on the Sunset silver with red letterboard.

Sleeping Cars

From the listings for an average night in March 1952, published in "Night Trains" by Peter T. Maiken 46 trains were carrying 234 sleeping cars (more than 5,000 beds) among 32 city pairs. With more than 60% of the trains and sleepers, Southern Pacific out-performed all others combined. SP operated the all-sleeper *Lark*, accommodating about 270 passengers aboard 12 sleeping cars.

Coast-to-Coast sleeping cars ran through from New York and Washington, D.C. on several trains. The Pennsylvania usually provided a car in the western road colors, New York Central participated with their own two-tone gray cars. Through cars were discontinued in 1957.

Nearly 25% of the cars in service was of the popular 10-6 (10 roomette, 6 double-bedroom) floor plan.

Dome Cars

Dome cars came to California in 1949 aboard the California Zephyr. Santa Fe followed with the Pleasure Dome car on the Super Chief of 1951. They purchased full-length dome cars in 1954 and assigned them to the *El Capitan* and *San Francisco Chief*. When the *El Capitan* was re-equipped with high level cars in 1956 the dome cars were reassigned to the *Chief*. The Southern Pacific rebuilt seven existing cars into $\frac{3}{4}$ length dome cars in 1954 and 1955. They were assigned to the *San Joaquin Daylight*, *Shasta Daylight* and Overland Route (to Ogden). Union Pacific introduced dome coaches, diners and lounges on the *City of Los Angeles* and *City of St. Louis* in 1955. Except for the CZ (up to 5) and City trains (up to 3) there was one dome car per train. Several designs were featured, ACF, Budd and Pullman short dome styles, SP and Budd full-length. From 1955 another variant, the Pullman-built Milwaukee Super-dome, appeared occasionally on Union Pacific trains to Los Angeles.

RDCs

Just 5 RDC cars operated in California. The first to arrive were RDC-2s 375 and 376 on the Western Pacific. They provided Sunday, Wednesday, Friday service between Salt Lake City and Oakland, taking nearly 24-hours for the 921 miles. Trains 1-2 stopped at Portola and Elko for meals, arriving Elko at the same time in both directions. The operation was mostly for company service, with about 70 flag stops in the schedule. It was discontinued in October 1960.

Santa Fe bought RDC-1 cars 191 and 192 in 1952 and put them on Los Angeles to San Diego schedules. They usually ran together. On January 22, 1956 Train 82 was wrecked at Redondo Junction. The 192 was extensively damaged. In time the cars were repaired at Topeka and reassigned to Kansas.

Southern Pacific RDC-1 No. 10 was purchased in 1953 for Oakland to Sacramento service. The car was later leased to the Northwestern Pacific, where it operated between Eureka and Willits, there connecting with buses to San Rafael and ferries to San Francisco. The service was discontinued with Amtrak's first schedules.

Equalization

Equalization is a process by which pro-rata ownership of cars on the route of through trains minimized the rental charges for equipment operating on foreign railroads. The best example is the *California Zephyr*, where the CB&Q owned three consists, Rio Grande one, and the WP two, representing the average time per day of the trains on each road. The *Golden State* was operated with two consists

owned by the Rock Island and two by the Southern Pacific. The SP, UP and C&NW owned appropriate proportions of Overland Route trains.

Decline of the business

No sooner had the railroads made the investment in new equipment than the passenger railroad business began to dwindle. California was a leader in developing excellent highways. It was home to major builders in the aircraft industry, and several very savvy airlines. The Interstate highway and the jet airliner both arrived in the late 1950s.

As the railroads reduced frequencies, secondary trains were eliminated. Excess streamlined cars bumped remaining heavyweight equipment to the MOW department. Coach travel held up rather well. Surplus sleeping cars were converted to coaches. Expensive to operate diners were replaced with automat vending cars. Lounge and observation cars gradually went away.

By the mid 1960s certain trains were combined to reduce costs. The *El Capitan* was combined with the *Super Chief* on the Santa Fe outside of peak seasons. The *Golden State* and *Sunset Limited* were a single train west of El Paso on the Southern Pacific. The Union Pacific, famous for its intricate connective network, merged several trains into what was nicknamed the *City of Everywhere* across the spine of its system, to split into the usual trains for Los Angeles, San Francisco and Portland.

In the last few years before Amtrak commenced service on May 1, 1971 the Western Pacific discontinued the *California Zephyr* (the Rio Grande and CB&Q continuing their segments of the train to connect with SP); SP eliminated the *Golden State*, *Shasta Daylight*, *Morning Daylight*; Santa Fe removed the *Golden Gate* and reduced frequencies on the *San Diegan*; UP eliminated the *Las Vegas Holiday Special*.

Renaissance

At start-up Amtrak continued with the spine of the former network serving California. In the nearly four decades since, the growth of passenger railroading in California has been nothing short of spectacular. Interstate trains have become daily on former Cascade, Overland, Santa Fe and Sunset routes. Intra-state, trains have been restored to former routes, and frequencies increased beyond earlier schedules. Commuter lines have been added where none existed previously. And light rail has been installed, often on former street car routes.

Modeling

Opportunities for modelling California's passenger trains are endless. Accurate cars are available in all scales. Sample train consists are published in several books by Robert J. Wayner, and in articles and books about individual railroads. Join the historical society for your favorite railroad. A little reading plus inspection of appropriate photos and you can achieve a very credible result. Trains operate in a very specific order of cars, with the cars oriented with a definite forward end. Both elements may change from time to time. The research can be as much fun as the modeling.

Resources used:

Car Names Numbers and Consists, Robert J. Wayner, New York 1972

Passenger Train Consists 1923-1973, Robert J. Wayner, New York

Night Trains, Peter T. Maiken, Lakme Press, Chicago 1989

Official Guide of the Railways, National Railway Publication Co., New York, issues for May 1951, July 1965

Selected Railroad Timetables