



A Decade of D&H Alco PAs

OTTO M. VONDRAK/PHOTOS AS NOTED

THE MAIN LINE of the Delaware & Hudson Railway stretched from Scranton, Pa., north through Binghamton, N.Y., skirting the western edge of the Catskill Mountains to Albany, and then north through the Champlain Valley to Montreal. While the foundation of the D&H was built on anthracite traffic, the railroad later developed its reputation as a bridge line hauler, connecting Canada and New England with New York and Pennsylvania.

Frederick "Buck" Dumaine became president of D&H in 1967. With the Expo67 World's Fair in Montreal quickly approaching, D&H decided to upgrade its modest passenger service between Albany and Montreal. At the time, the daytime *Laurentian* and the overnight *Montreal Limited* were equipped with

a mix of older heavyweight and lightweight cars hauled by Alco road switchers. Dumaine sent Chief Mechanical Officer Walter Travis west to Denver to inspect some Pullman-Standard streamlined equipment that Denver & Rio Grande Western had made available with its discontinuance of the *Prospector* and *Royal Gorge*.

In October 1967, a deal was struck for five coaches, two diner-lounges, a buffet-lounge, three baggage cars, and a baggage-mail car. Cycled through the D&H shops at Colonie, N.Y., the cars quickly emerged in a beautiful Champlain Blue with yellow stripes. While they were striking paired with the similarly attired Alco RS-2s, Dumaine wanted something better for his pocket streamliner.

In December 1967, D&H purchased

four Alco PA-1s from Santa Fe. A fifth unit was purchased from New Haven to use as a parts source. Wasting no time, the first PA out of the paint shop was D&H 18 (ex-Santa Fe 62), which made its debut the day after Christmas. D&H 19 (ex-AT&SF 66) was the second unit to enter service, at the end of December. The streamliner era had finally arrived on the D&H — about 30 years after it started for other railroads!

The Albany-Montreal route was not included in the initial Amtrak system, and so the *Laurentian* and *Montreal Limited* made their last runs in April 1971, and the PAs were stored. By this time, D&H and Erie Lackawanna were under common ownership of Dereco, a Norfolk & Western holding company. A set of PAs was sent to EL in Hoboken to test out in



TOP: Delaware & Hudson PA-4 18 awaits its next assignment at Colonie, N.Y., on April 4, 1976. Originally built as Santa Fe PA-1 67L in 1948, it was acquired by Delaware & Hudson in 1967, and rebuilt by Morrison-Knudsen to PA-4 specs in August 1975. Acquired by Doyle McCormack in 2000 and transformed into a replica of Nickel Plate Road 190, this unit was purchased by Genesee Valley Transportation in 2023. WRP COLLECTION

ABOVE: Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority leased the four D&H Alco PAs in 1977 to cope with a motive power shortage. D&H 19 prepares to depart Boston South Station with a Framingham Line train on October 19, 1977. JIM BOYD PHOTO, WRP COLLECTION

RIGHT: Leased D&H 18 leads a morning commuter run out of Boston South Station on October 18, 1977. JIM BOYD PHOTO, WRP COLLECTION



commuter service, but the set made only one trip before being returned to Colonie. Excursion operator Steam Tours Inc. of Akron, Ohio, leased 16 and 18, while 17 and 19 were sent to General Electric in Erie, Pa., to be used as trade-in credits on the next order of road diesels.

During the era of Dereco control, D&H and EL shared joint management. Following the devastation of Hurricane Agnes in June 1972, control of the railroad returned to Albany and general counsel Carl Bruce Sterzing Jr. was sent to be president in July. A month after his arrival, all four Alco PAs were recalled to Colonie. With the company's 150th anniversary coming up in 1973, Sterzing was prepared to operate a series of public excursions to tour the system and promote goodwill. Following the success of the *Susquehanna Valley Special*, more trips

followed with the PAs leading the way. These runs quickly became a source of pride among employees.

It was around this time the New York State Department of Transportation approached Amtrak about reactivating passenger service between Albany and Montreal. Amtrak was willing, but the new railroad was struggling to find enough equipment just to maintain basic service. NYSDOT turned to the

D&H, and found an enthusiastic partner in Bruce Sterzing. He agreed on the condition that all equipment provided would retain D&H paint and markings, to which Amtrak reluctantly agreed. The state would pay to upgrade the tracks and rebuild the equipment, while D&H would provide crews. Looking to all the world like a Delaware & Hudson train, the new *Adirondack* made its debut on August 5, 1974, with Sterzing



RIGHT: The debut of Amtrak's *Adirondack* on August 5, 1974, using D&H equipment drew crowds to the station at Albany-Rensselaer, N.Y. JOHN BARTLEY PHOTO, WRP COLLECTION

BELOW: The railroad ran a series of public trips to celebrate its 150th anniversary in 1973. D&H 19 leads a trio of Alco PAs on an excursion on October 17, 1973. WRP COLLECTION



TOP: Delaware & Hudson 19 rests at Boston South Station on October 19, 1977, preparing for the evening rush hour. The leased Alco PAs were used for a year on MBTA's Framingham Line trains. JIM BOYD PHOTO, WRP COLLECTION

ABOVE: As part of the deal to revive passenger service on the Albany-Montreal route, New York State paid for the rebuild of the four Alco PAs. D&H 17 was found at Binghamton, N.Y., on its way west to Morrison-Knudsen in Boise, Idaho, on June 15, 1975. General Electric U23B 314 was painted in a flashy Bicentennial scheme and renumbered 1776.

JOHN BARTLEY PHOTO, WRP COLLECTION



at the throttle. Alco PAs 16 and 19 were shipped west to Morrison-Knudsen in Boise, Idaho, for rebuilding in June 1974. By November 1975, all four had returned from rebuilding, with 2,400-hp 12-cylinder Alco 251 prime movers and carrying the new designation "PA-4." The 16 was named *M.A. Davis*, in honor of D&H's general road foreman of engines, while the 18 was named *George W. Hockaday*, honoring the senior mechanical engineer at Colonie Shops who kept the PAs reliably on the road.



LEFT: Delaware & Hudson 16 leads an MBTA commuter train at Framingham, Mass., on the evening of October 16, 1977. This service operated on the former New York Central Boston & Albany route. JIM BOYD PHOTO, WRP COLLECTION



BELOW: Delaware & Hudson 16 looks right at home leading Amtrak's Adirondack from Canadian Pacific's Windsor Station in Montreal, Que., in October 1975. G. BOOTHBY PHOTO, WRP COLLECTION

BOTTOM: D&H 18 and 19 were found at Whitehall, N.Y., on July 16, 1977. President Bruce Sterzing would resign from his post by the end of the month, the Alco PAs would be placed in storage, and public excursions would come to an end with new management in place. MICHAEL P. MCILLWAIN PHOTO, WRP COLLECTION



While D&H reveled in its role, Amtrak did not appreciate being pushed out of control of its own train. As soon as Rohr Turboliners became available in 1977, the D&H equipment was removed from service, making its last run on March 1. The passenger cars were reassigned to commuter service in New York and the PAs were left without a train to pull them. They were tried briefly in freight service, but were not up to the job.

By 1976, Delaware & Hudson found itself suddenly surrounded by Conrail, the federal government's answer to the mass bankruptcy of the Northeast's railroads. Competitive trackage rights agreements doubled the size of D&H overnight, but the expanded operation was causing the railroad to hemorrhage cash. New management was installed, and Sterzing left D&H for Rock Island in August 1977. The Alco PAs were quickly placed into storage. Without a champion, their fate was uncertain.

In desperate need of passenger power, Boston's Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority leased all four units for commuter service starting in September 1977. At the end of their one-year assignment hauling trains on the Framingham Line, D&H enacted a new policy against future public excursions and sold all four Alco PAs to Ferrocarriles Nacionales de Mexico (NdeM) that October. A unique era had come to a close, with nearly a decade of streamlined Alco operation on Delaware & Hudson.

Postscript

Preservationist Doyle McCormack had already pulled off the impossible by leading the rapid restoration of Southern Pacific G5-4 4-8-4 4449 to lead the western portion of the *American Freedom Train* in 1976. In 2000, he seemingly made the impossible happen again by working with the Smithsonian to negotiate the return of two wrecked Alco PA bodies from

Mexico. D&H 18 was moved to Portland, Ore., where Doyle would begin its slow transformation into a replica of Nickel Plate Road 190. D&H 16 was stored in Portland until 2011, when it found a new home with the Museum of the American Railroad (now located in Frisco, Texas). Work is progressing steadily to restore D&H 16 as Santa Fe 59.

On March 1, Genesee Valley Transportation announced its acquisition of the historic Alco, with the intention to return it to home rails (see RAILNEWS, page 15). Home will be the new Von Storch Diesel Shop, located along the former D&H Carbondale Branch, in the Green Ridge neighborhood of Scranton, Pa. Management intends to complete the rebuilding of NKP 190, with an eye toward future operation on GVT rails. For units that were so respected among railfans — earning the title “honorary steam locomotives” at one point — the final chapter for the Alco PA has yet to be written. ■

