

Inside Wilmington Shops

by Robert A. La May



History in the making: Wilmington has accepted the first pair of Acela power-cars for complete rebuilding. Here, power-car No. 2008 is up on stanchions inside the shops—quite a different stance than when hurtling along at 150 m.p.h. And, it's hard to believe this power cars have been in service for nearly a dozen years now. Mark Florio

Amtrak currently operates three major back shops. Two are located in the State of Delaware at Bear and Wilmington, and the third is at Beech Grove, Ind., adjacent to Indianapolis, the state's largest city. These three locations encompass almost 300 acres and cover over one million square feet. The three

employ more than 1,200 skilled mechanical individuals, while another 3,500 people support the day-to-day mechanical maintenance operations. Through Mark Florio, an Amtrak engineer, PTJ is able to provide this brief “visit” to the Wilmington back shop.



Around the turn of the 21st Century, Amtrak converted 29 of its 50-plus AEM7 fleet with AC traction motors. AEM7 No. 915 is one of the few DC motors still being used by Amtrak and is in Wilmington for some repair work. Mark Florio

Mark Florio has worked for Amtrak for 25 years, 18 years as an engineer and another seven as an electrician. On Jan. 23, 2012, Mark had an opportunity to visit Amtrak’s Electric Locomotive Facility at Wilmington, within sight of

Amtrak's Northeast Corridor. The shop complex is located approximately two miles north of Amtrak's recently remodeled Wilmington station.



AEM7 947 is being lifted off its wheels and will be placed on a work stanchion near-by. This unit is slated for a rebuild. Mark Florio



Amtrak maintenance-of-way locomotive GP15D No. 577 sits on the pit track awaiting its regular servicing and inspection. Mark Florio

The history of Wilmington Shops dates back to 1903 when it was a Philadelphia, Baltimore & Washington facility under control of the Pennsylvania Railroad. As electrification commenced, it became the primary maintenance and overhaul facility of PRR's electric locomotive fleet. After the 1968 Penn Central merger that joined PRR and the New York Central, PC continued to perform shop functions until Amtrak came into existence on May 1, 1971. From that point on, Wilmington, as PC's principal electric locomotive, Metroliner, and other M.U. (self-propelled, multiple-unit) equipment shop complex continued to perform for the fledgling Amtrak.

Amtrak assumed ownership and total control of the facility upon its acquisition of the Northeast Corridor on April 1, 1976, when PC was merged into Conrail.



The 947's pantograph assembly will also undergo inspection. Mark Florio



AEM7 No. 921, a unit remanufactured with AC motors, is in for rebuild. Even though most of the AEM7s will be replaced by a newer electric model, a few of these compact but powerful locomotives are being kept.
Mark Florio

Wilmington still serves as Amtrak's home for overhaul and repair of its electric locomotive fleet which consists of AEM7 and HHP8 locomotives. It is also the major maintenance-of-way (MOW) base for the Northeast Corridor and as such the MOW locomotive fleet is serviced and maintained here. A new wrinkle was added recently when the first pair of Acela power units entered the shop for a complete rebuild.



The lower wheel and frame assembly of AEM7 947 sits on the shop floor awaiting its overhaul and rebuild. Mark Florio

Wilmington Shops have continued to grow in reputation and expertise in the field of electric motive power. Under Amtrak, Wilmington continues to be well-known in several arenas:

- 1 Heating, ventilation and air-conditioning (HVAC) work
- 1 Repair and maintenance of electric locomotives
- 1 Rebuilding and overhauling electric locomotives
- 1 Wreck repair work to keep locomotive down-time to a minimum
- 1 Component repair and maintenance

1 Truck repairs including having an AAR-certified wheelset fabrication shop.