

Pullman Goes to Sleep

by Kevin McKinney

The year 1968 would turn out to be one of the most tumultuous in American history. By the year's end, the nation had endured assassinations, civil unrest, anti-war demonstrations, and the birth of Penn Central.



Postwar Pullman sleeping accommodations in the new generation of lightweight cars were as cozy as their heavyweight predecessors, but with modern touches that travelers had come to expect. This 1949 publicity scene shows a double bedroom “made down” for the night aboard

American car & Foundry, via Joe Welsh

It would not be an easy time for The Pullman Company either. This venerable institution, which rostered almost 10,000 cars in 1930, managed a fleet of just 1,021 cars at the beginning of 1968. Even worse, Pullman had been owned by a group of railroads for some 20 years, many of which no longer provided sleeping-car service or even passenger service of any kind at all. The railroads were trying to adjust to the new reality in which most mail and express had been lost, and with it, the safety net of income that sustained many trains.



Pullman provided travelers with more than sleeping-car service, even in the 1960s. Nickel Plate Road's City of Chicago, delivered with sister car City of Cleveland by Pullman-Standard in 1950 for overnight service between their namesake cities, combined five double bedrooms with a Pullman-operated dining and lounge area served by a compact galley. The car and its sister outlived the Nickel Plate as well as Pullman, being leased to Canadian National in 1966. In the end, the car wound up in Amtrak

There were a few exceptions. That winter, Seaboard Coast Line still fielded four trains between New York and Florida carrying six or more sleepers, and two Chicago–Florida streamliners that, between them, provided daily service that was still respectable. However, it would be the final year for seasonal dome-sleepers and sleeper-lounges from the Midwest.

SCL still provided sleepers on its secondary trains over both the former Atlantic Coast Line and Seaboard Air Line routes, plus a sleeper to Augusta, Ga., and another to compete with the Southern Railway to Atlanta and Birmingham. Finally, there was the Gulf Wind, linking Jacksonville with New Orleans via the Louisville & Nashville. And, the occasional holiday special to Florida and convention specials also were still operated.

Chesapeake & Ohio, faced with a service reduction that threatened its remaining east-west train—serving the treasured resorts of the Homestead and the Greenbrier, in Virginia and West Virginia, respectively—creatively devised a network that added several special trains operating twice weekly during the peak spring and fall seasons. This worthy effort was derailed by actions of connecting carriers and did not reach the year's end intact.

In Chicago, Union and Dearborn stations would be the Pullman bastions that survived. Dearborn Station saw sleepers on two railroads; however, Grand Trunk Western no longer contracted with Pullman. Santa Fe would lose the legendary one-night-out (westbound only; two nights eastbound) Chicago–Los Angeles Chief in 1968 but assigned six sleepers, with a seventh west of Kansas City, on the Super Chief during that summer. There were other Chiefs to the Bay Area via Amarillo, as well as to other Texas points. Over at Chicago

formidable Broadway Limited. It could include ten sleepers when Navy recruits were being moved, and when Great Lakes and Four Winds tours, still Pullman-operated, were on board. Also, the alternate-days South Wind was down to three sleepers in the summer season, but these were still Pullman-operated.

Without a doubt, Burlington ruled Union Station's south end, with the iconic California Zephyr carrying a dome-sleeper-observation car. It carried at least one extra bedroom car just ahead of the observation car in summer. The beautiful Denver Zephyr carried a summer consist that included two Slumbercoaches and three first-class cars. The Blackhawk was provided with a Slumbercoach that connected at the Twin Cities with Northern Pacific's Mainstreeter.

The North Coast Limited and the Empire Builder were the flagships for Northern Pacific and Great Northern, respectively. They usually ran as a combined train between Chicago and St. Paul with cars for Seattle and Portland. They operated over different routes west of the Twin Cities but both reached Portland via the Spokane, Portland & Seattle. NP was the more innovative, with a Slumbercoach and a dome-sleeper, increasing to two in summer. In 1967, NP and Pullman replaced two under-dome single bedrooms with a buffet and added tables in six dome sleepers, with the dome area now referred to as the "Lounge-In-The-Sky." These replaced the trains' observation-lounges.

On the north side of Union Station, The Milwaukee Road still sent out one or two sleepers to the Twin Cities on the Pioneer Limited, offering an alternative to the Burlington's Slumbercoach on the Blackhawk. And, the Milwaukee still dispatched two Overland Route survivors. At 3pm, the combined City of

Platte, Neb. Three hours later, a combined City of Los Angeles and City of San Francisco left Chicago carrying one sleeper to Oakland and three to Los Angeles, adding extras in the summer season.

At Chicago's Grand Central Station, B&O still offered a 10–6 sleeper, a 5-bedroom lounge, and a Slumbercoach on its Capitol Limited, and a 10–6 sleeper on its Diplomat (westbound) and Washington Express (eastbound). To round out the Windy City's trains, Central Station hosted the Panama Limited and the alternate day trips of the City of Miami.

In 1967, a total of 1,546,300 sleeping berths were sold, along with approximately 112,000 seats (parlor, etc.) in day service. Moreover, Pullman lost over \$21 million in 1967 and posted a disheartening operating ratio of 184.9 during that year. Even worse, Pullman was owned by railroads that had been sucker-punched by the recent loss of mail and express revenues.

As 1968 dawned, there was hardly reason for optimism. The railroads' business travelers were being lost to improved commercial air service, corporate aircraft, and progress in the construction of the Interstate Highway System. Leisure travel ridership and revenue were falling prey to improved automobiles and roads. The railroads that owned Pullman had access to the corporate financial records and were looking over management's shoulder with a critical eye. As the year continued, so did Pullman's melancholy path downward. The fleet declined by 75 cars at year's end. Sleeping-car passengers totaled just under one million and day riders decreased by more than 38,000. The number of employees dropped from 4,179 to 2,945, while the operating ratio increased to 221.7, which was unacceptable and unsustainable.

cover Pullman's losses. This created an incentive to reduce car lines that were not productive.

Pullman assigned "line numbers" to cars operating between two cities from point of origin to destination based on the railroad they used. Line numbers were assigned to railroads or joint operations in blocks. These were recorded in historical records that identified changes in end points, type of car assigned, changes in frequency, and mileage by operating railroads. These were manually recorded in "Histories of Lines" which are now preserved at Chicago's Newberry Library. If six cars operated between Chicago and New York on a certain railroad, they would be assigned six different line numbers.

Traditionally, Pullman was responsible for certain functions, and operating the cars was the responsibility of the railroads. In those days, passengers purchased two tickets for each trip unless they rode coach. They purchased a first-class ticket from the railroad, and bought another ticket from Pullman that varied in price according to the size of the accommodation and amenities. For example, in June 1968, Orlando to Philadelphia one-way in coach cost \$32.01, while first-class was \$54.61, almost half again as much. Pullman charged an additional \$21.70 for a roomette, which, when added to the cost of the first-class ticket, totaled \$76.31, more than twice the coach fare. And, no meals were included.

However, SCL was one of a number of railroads that offered an economical alternative. Most notable were the 18 Slumbercoaches that were being offered by the Baltimore & Ohio, NP, and CB&Q . Burlington was offering an Omaha–Alliance, Neb., Pullman that allowed passengers to pay a coach fare and Pullman space charges rather than the higher first-class rail fare in 1968. This had been tried by others but by then most had been eliminated.



The affiliated B&O/C&O railroads maintained a high standard of passenger service until Amtrak, and continued to offer full-service sleeping accommodations in addition to Slumbercoach rooms during the 1960s. B&O 10-6 sleeper Allegheny brings up the rear of the Diplomat at Chicago in October 1966. Mike Schafer

NOW

PRIVATE ROOM

Slumbercoaches

on 2 B&O Dieseliners

**THE NATIONAL
LIMITED**

between

**BALTIMORE
WASHINGTON
CINCINNATI
ST. LOUIS**

**THE
COLUMBIAN**

between

**BALTIMORE
WASHINGTON
PITTSBURGH
CHICAGO**

Slumbercoaches

PROVIDE COMFORT AND PRIVACY

- Single and double rooms
- Soft armchairs
- Comfortable full length beds
- Private toilet facilities
- Cribs for infants
- Solid sliding door with full-view mirror

Low coach fare plus a moderate space charge



BALTIMORE & OHIO RAILROAD

Baltimore & Ohio was another operator of new Budd Slumbercoaches and promoted the cars' combination of thrifty amenities. Mike Schafer collection

many years. After 1958, B&O frequently drafted these duplex sleepers as replacements for Slumbercoaches. By 1968, they had tried several different routes but only two of the ten surviving cars were assigned. They were assigned to C&O's George Washington between Cincinnati and Washington, D.C., as "Slumber-Room" coaches. This left eight cars available for lease, and eventual sale, to SCL where they would serve on the Champion and Silver Star as "Budget Room" coaches. C&O went on to experiment with leased sleepers from Louisville & Nashville that offered sections (traditional uppers and lowers) at coach fares plus charges called "Slumber Berth Coaches." It was a noble effort, but it and B&O's Slumbercoaches were gone by the year's end and only roomettes and bedrooms were available at first-class rates. In June 1968, B&O reacquired its three dome-sleepers from Canadian National and sold them to SCL. At the same time, SCL was still acquiring a few sleepers. One assignment was Richmond–Miami on the Florida Special, a train that had just lost its observation cars. Finally, with resort traffic dying due to the actions of connecting railroads, C&O sold its five bedroom sleepers to SCL.

For good measure, B&O sold surplus sleeper-observation Nappanee to the Long Island Rail Road in exchange for a Budd RDC needed for commuter service. New York Central had once leased new Slumbercoaches and sponsored the rebuilding of ten roomette sleepers into all-room Sleepercoaches, which were always railroad-operated. These developments were evident to the general public, or at least to the observant fans. However, there was much going on behind the scenes. As the year continued, trains such as the Lark, the Golden State, and the Chief disappeared from the scene.

shops at the end of World War II. By the end of 1967, Pullman's Calumet Shops, located south of Chicago near Illinois Central's 111th Street station, was the only one remaining. This author passed through there on several trips returning to my Air Force base in Oklahoma. It was always interesting to see which cars, both heavyweight and lightweight, were in storage there.

On the one hand, it made sense for Pullman to maintain all of its cars. Thus, certain components were either standardized or limited to a few types. With the possible exception of head-end cars, there were few car types likely to turn up far from their owners' shops.

In most major passenger yards, Pullman maintained facilities to perform running repairs and store linens, bedding, and other supplies. This exclusive infrastructure came at a price. Pullman management did its best to shrink facilities to match declines in service, equipment, and employees.

General administration was handled within regional agencies and districts, formerly called zones. As a teenager, I made a number of visits to the Philadelphia Zone office in the mid-1950s. By the summer of 1968, there were 16 districts and 12 agencies remaining.

By then, Pullman's limited operations north of the border in Canada were a thing of the past, with CN and CP operating their own sleeping cars. By contrast, Mexican operations remained strong. Pullman's history in that country dated back to 1884. Administered in Mexico City and from four other agencies, it operated under some different contract provisions, such as railroads doing their own overhauls. Well-regarded, the operation actually turned a profit for the American company.

was estimating a car's usefulness to Pullman in the near future. These negotiations got testy at times. Railroads invested scarce capital on expensive new cars for which there were few other options short of an expensive rebuilding. Sometimes, Pullman would store cars on its own property without incurring lease payments, with the hope that increased ridership would justify their restoration.

You can see from our earlier descriptions that the Pullman network was a bit skeletal. Only seven railroads operated Pullman cars on three or more trains. These were: Santa Fe, Burlington, Milwaukee Road, Great Northern, Seaboard Coast Line, Southern Railway, and Union Pacific. Penn Central had already dropped Pullman by this time.

There were still flashes of Pullman's glory days in 1968, such as Mardi Gras specials, Kentucky Derby extras, trains for railroad golf associations, camp specials, railroad retiree associations, railfan-sponsored tours, the famous Four Winds Tours, and specials to sporting events. There were even several holiday specials in early 1968. On Sept. 7, 1968, one of the specials operated to the Greenbrier. The train included a number of 10-6 sleepers in lieu of fancier cars that most of these trains usually included. There were six C&O 10-6s, two C&O 11-bedroom cars, and six bedroom-lounges from SCL flanking a Pennsy Congressional twin-unit diner serving dinner between New York and Washington. However, there were deep signs of continued problems ahead.



Off-line assignment of Pullman-operated sleeping cars—under seasonal lease or for accounting purposes—was increasingly common during the Pullman Company's final years of operation. Here, a Northern Pacific dome sleeper normally assigned to that road's North Coast Limited is part of the jointly operated Pennsylvania-Louisville & Nashville-Atlantic Coast Line South Wind at Indianapolis in October 1964. richard baldwin



Sporting a starched white jacket, a Pullman porter stands watch outside his assigned car—Richmond, Fredericksburg & Potomac 10-6 sleeper Spotsylvania County—on Illinois Central's Chicago-Sioux City, Iowa, Hawkeye, pausing at Rockford, Ill., late in 1967. Mike Schafer

Pennsy had taken over the operation of its Pullman cars in 1967, and future partner New Haven was aligned with them in 1968. Unlike previous defectors,

SCL. You can imagine the reaction in the headquarters of those railroads that stood to lose access to major markets in the Northeast. One available option allowed Pullman to offer a “partial service” in which Pullman would maintain the cars and the railroads would operate them. Pullman solicited the approximately 20 railroads still providing Pullman service and a majority opted for partial service. Pullman determined that providing two different service levels would be financially impractical. As a result, it was decreed that partial service would become standard for all starting on Jan. 1, 1969.

Railroads hired a total of 833 porters ranging from three on PC to 240 on SCL, by far the most. The three PC men serviced the South Wind, which was still being operated as a through train. Santa Fe, Burlington, and its pool partners were other large takers. These changes reflected impending doom for Pullman.

This left the matter of maintaining the cars under the partial service agreement. On Jan. 1, 1969, Pullman issued a summary of its fleet. Requirements were divided into three categories, totaling 766 cars:

- 286 needed for scheduled service.
- 385 for shop margin and special service.
- 95 stored cars.

The 286 required cars, divided by their railroad assignment, were:

- Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe (37 cars)
- Baltimore & Ohio (2)
- B&O, leased to SCL (9)

Burlington (15)

- Burlington (NP) (1)
- Burlington (GN) (1)
- Milwaukee Road (4)
- Denver & Rio Grande Western (4)
- Erie Lackawanna (2)
- Great Northern (15)
- Illinois Central (20)
- Louisville & Nashville (6)
- Norfolk & Western (2)
- Northern Pacific (18)
- Penn Central (19)
- Richmond, Fredericksburg & Potomac (6)
- Seaboard Coast Line (61)
- Southern (15)
- Southern Pacific (6)
- Spokane, Portland, & Seattle (1)
- SP&S (GN) (1)

WESTERN PACIFIC (1)

These assignments were as of Jan. 1, 1969, during the winter season when SCL's Florida traffic was at its peak. In summer seasons, Western railroads would benefit instead.



With a duplex-roomette sleeper at train's end, Milwaukee Road's eastbound Pioneer Limited pauses in the small hours of the night at Portage, Wis., in the summer of 1969. By this time, the Milwaukee had taken over its sleeper operations. The following year, the Pioneer Limited made its last run. Mike Schafer



A long way from home, Louisville & Nashville sleeper Green Pine was at Ogden, Utah, on May 10, 1969, having conveyed visitors to that day's Golden Spike centennial celebrations. As more and more U.S. railroads curtailed their passenger operations, cars such as this found employment elsewhere within the Pullman Co. equipment pool, accruing mileage that offset their owners' financial obligations to Pullman.

George H. Drury

Almost immediately, Pullman decided to do away with the partial service and terminate the company operations as of Aug. 1, 1969. In the interim, an orderly shutdown took place and supplies and facilities were sold. Workers received severance packages negotiated by their unions or granted by the board. Calumet shops completed repairs and overhauls to those cars still in progress, ending with GN's Hart Pass on April 9, 1969. During the seven months of Pullman maintenance, additional cars were taken off lease so the final tally of cars was about 615. All of these were returned to their owners. Most railroads elected to maintain their own cars, but SCL contracted with Hamburg Industries of North Augusta, S.C., to maintain its cars. The Hamburg

With the demise of Pullman, the remaining few cars still owned in Calumet shops had to be disposed of. Six went to a scrap dealer in September and two were sold to private parties. The last Pullman-owned streamlined car was Cascade Basin, which had been in storage since July 20, 1967. It was sold on March 9, 1970. Pullman intended to continue servicing the Mexican operation, but the threat of a strike compelled the company to terminate its involvement there in November of that same year.



Slumbercoach Loch Sloy was owned by Amtrak by the time of this 1972 view at Milwaukee, but retained its original Northern Pacific identity and Pullman lettering. George H. Drury

Several major train movements occurred during the seven months when only Pullman still maintained cars. Presumably, the railroads negotiated cars and crews on their own. The largest movement involved five specials operated to the Greenbrier for General Motors. They included more than 80 sleepers, plus diners from several sources.

service.

Therefore, after 50 years, we offer a toast to George M. Pullman and the many who followed. They made train travel a pleasant and civilized experience over the years. What a great ride!

9 ways
to travel in
comfort

by
PULLMAN



Pullman continued to promote its services to the traveling public as competition mounted, stressing the benefits of comfort over speed. This brochure dates from 1964. Kevin J. Holland collection

Postscript

A number of fine books on the history of Pullman were written by these authors: Dubin, Wayner, Randall, and Shradly. If you're lucky, you may find some in hobby shows. More recently, one enjoyable book I read is *The Cars of Pullman* by Howes, Holland, and Welsh. Another book by Ted Shradly is titled *For Pullman Eyes Only*. *Twilight of the Great Trains* by Fred Frailey is also a good book.

I would like to thank Bill Howes, Dave Randall, and Bob Wayner for their help over the years and with this article in particular. Bill actually worked with Pullman as director of passenger services for C&O/B&O. Thank you all very much.