



'Better TRAINS follow better LOCOMOTIVES'

Electro-Motive's E-unit advertising targeted the traveling public as well as railroad decision-makers

By Greg Palumbo

Illustrations from author's collection, except as noted

The General Motors E unit passenger diesel started a romance with the locomotive industry that still stands today. It also became the palette for artistic expression that has continued for more than seven decades.

The challenge was not only to sell the railroads on the new diesel-electric locomotive, but also to sell the traveling public that a new era of transportation had arrived. In this two-pronged effort, GM used its most powerful tool available: advertising.

The mid-1930s were a period of rapid

expansion for the fledgling Electro-Motive Corp., which was founded in 1922 and under GM control since 1930. The company was building a new assembly plant in La Grange, Ill.; orders for switchers were growing; and EMC was designing a new passenger locomotive.

At the time, diesels represented a radical new way of conducting railroad operations, overturning a century of tradition. So how does one go about selling a new product to an industry that questioned change? Simple—you sell it the same way the builders sell locomotives today.

If you look at the product being offered, the new diesel-electric locomotives required new facilities for servicing, along with the training of personnel. Both of these aspects represented a substantial investment for the railroads. The railroads also questioned the product's reliability, availability, fuel economy, serviceability, cost, profitability, and finally, field support by the builder along with parts availability. All of these represented risks.

Electro-Motive had to address all of these factors, and this became the formula for advertising the product. Re-



◀ In 1940, Electro-Motive lined up the flashy E3's, E4's, and E6's of five roads at Washington, D.C., for a photo; added color to the picture; and used the image for ads in *Railway Age*, the *Locomotive Cyclopedia*, and as a display print. Note the Pennsy GG1 at far left.

▼ A cover ad on the May 29, 1937, *Railway Age* featured the new EA and EB, used on B&O's *Capitol Limited* and other trains; with its box-cabs on the *Super Chief* since 1936, EMC could claim coast-to-coast coverage. Two weeks later, EMC bought two pages in June 12's *Age* to crow about the E1's on the newly streamlined *Super*; as products of La Grange, they were "built entirely by EMC."



member that EMC's bread and butter at this time was the sale of switchers, and during the 1930s the majority of its advertisements were dedicated to this product line. For the railroads, yard switchers represented the least amount of risk, as any failures could be contained to the yard versus out on the road.

Then, in 1937, came the E unit. As the E units started accumulating road-hours, Electro-Motive and GM started dedicating additional resources to advertising the new product line.

Not only did GM appeal to the public to encourage ridership and foster the

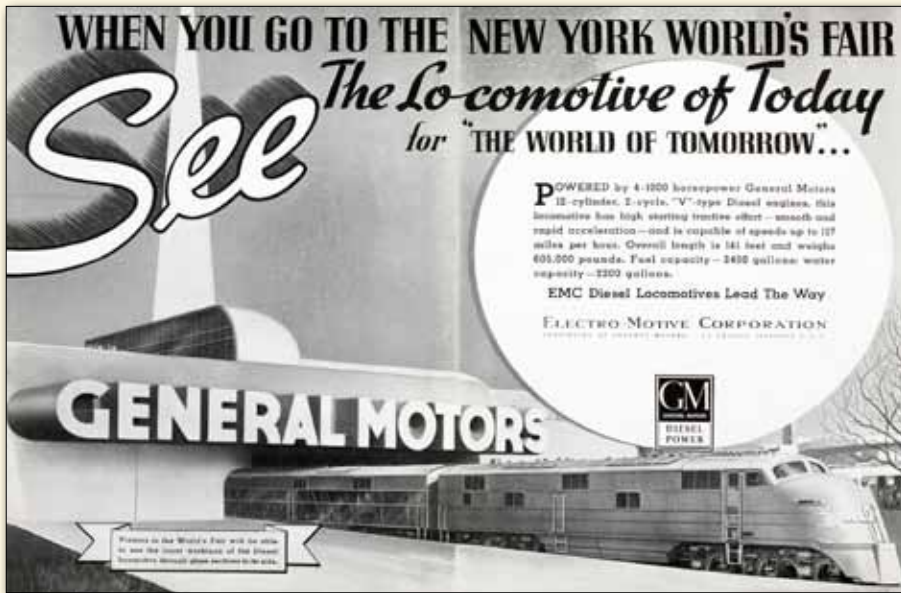
idea that modern trains were *diesel* trains, but it also appealed to the railroads, showcasing the new carbody design along with the revolutionary new paint schemes.

What better combination? General Motors, one of the world's largest companies, features your locomotive with your unique paint scheme in an advertisement that encourages travel. Transparent, yes, but it worked on all levels, truly a "win-win."

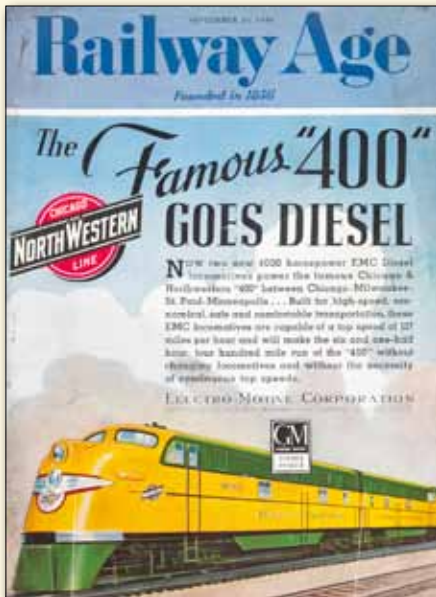
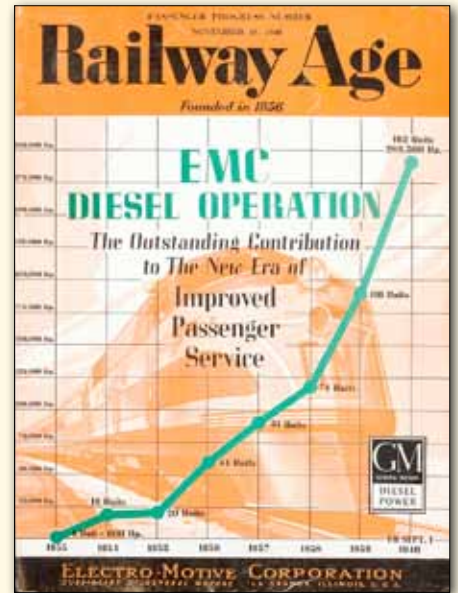
One of the earliest advertisements for E units was featured on the cover of the May 29, 1937, issue of *Railway Age* maga-

zine. EMC and GM approached this challenge head-on, purchasing the cover of the industry's leading trade journal. The ad [above left] featured a black-and-white image of two Baltimore & Ohio EA's, the first E-unit model, with the headline "EMC Diesels Span the Continent." This was simple but effective, keeping in mind that this was a very expensive piece of advertising for the day.

This was soon followed by the roll-out of Santa Fe's streamlined *Super Chief*, powered by E1 diesels, touting a Chicago to Los Angeles run of 2,228 miles in 39 hours 45 minutes [above].



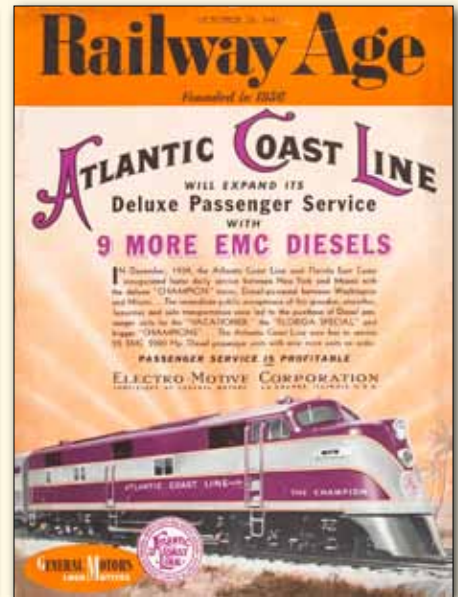
Jeff Hampton coll.



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▲▲ A two-page spread in the April 22, 1939, *Railway Age* invited readers to visit the GM pavilion at the New York World's Fair, where they could inspect a Seaboard E4 A-B set. A line graph on the November 16, 1940, cover proclaimed that Electro-Motive had 162 passenger units in service—nearly all were E's.

▲ Ads on three *Age* covers touted the installation of E units on North Western's 400 (September 23, 1939, issue), Milwaukee Road's *Hiawatha* (June 21, 1941), and Coast Line's Florida fleet (October 21, 1941).

► GM took its case to the public in mass market magazines like *The Saturday Evening Post*, whose November 1, 1941, issue had a color ad with E's in fanciful paint schemes. A black-and-white ad emphasized the company's experience in the auto industry.





▲ The 1947 GM Train of Tomorrow was a four-car domeliner packed with forward-looking features. Up front, of course, was an E7, seen here in a graphic on a page from a *ToT* booklet, along with a marketing slogan.

EMC followed up with industry-oriented ads that promoted the employee-training services available from its “traveling instruction car,” ads that touted the E units’ reliability of more than 94 percent, ads featuring the benefits of diesel over steam, and ads that detailed the cost benefits of diesels. Each ad mentioned the powerful General Motors, making certain that the railroads knew that this venture was long-term.

As the end of the 1930s approached, the railroad industry took stock of new diesels and featured pages and pages of articles on how efficiently the new locomotives ran. The product had been proven and all doubts removed. All EMC had to do now was take orders.

As Europe and the rest of the world entered yet another period of unrest, EMC started the development of the F unit. Advertisements shifted a bit, and as EMC became an official division of General Motors (Electro-Motive Division) in 1941, GM started producing full-color posters that were given out to the customers to help promote the product.

The first color poster featured E units

of five railroads lined up at Washington, D.C. [preceding pages]. This was a simple black-and-white photograph that was turned into a color lithograph, which was distributed by the EMD sales and service groups.

Following this poster, EMC produced a full-color sales brochure featured in the 1941 edition of the *Locomotive Cyclo-pedia*. GM commissioned the paintings that supported the brochure and made a corresponding brochure that featured the FT freight locomotive.

With World War II in full swing, EMD and GM launched a series of ads that showcased diesels versus steam. Two full folios were produced over a three- or four-year period, and the ads for both passenger and freight corresponded to frameable lithographs. It was no accident that Currier & Ives illustrations were selected as the basis for these lithographs, for these were a very popular collectible during this period.

As the romance continued, toy train manufacturers quickly rolled out the latest streamliner-inspired carbodies along with the newest paint schemes. To fur-

ther foster the public’s acceptance of the new trains, General Motors teamed up with Brach’s candy. Taking a cue from the ever-popular baseball cards, GM developed locomotive trading cards, wallet calendar cards, and “blotters,” all featuring artwork of the latest streamliner paint schemes. GM also distributed matching full-color posters, although on a limited basis.

General Motors used multiple strategies during the two-decade run of E units. When catering to railroad-industry decision-makers, it was all about profits. When catering to the public, it was all about the experience and comfort of diesel-powered train travel. GM relied on the Kudner Agency in New York, one of the best in the business, to get these messages across.

Railway Age was the top venue for industry advertising. Ads aimed at the general public could be found in the big

HIS COFFEE REMAINED CALM

It was almost as though the coffee had been getting along since from the time the first of coffee, before the railroad was even started.

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ELECTRO-MOTIVE DIVISION
GENERAL MOTORS
WARREN, OHIO

"ALL ABOARD" FOR TOMORROW

A new locomotive... The Electro-Motive Division... It is the most modern... It is the most modern... It is the most modern...

ELECTRO-MOTIVE DIVISION
GENERAL MOTORS
WARREN, OHIO

ELECTRO-MOTIVE DIVISION
GENERAL MOTORS
WARREN, OHIO

Jeff Hampton coll.

BETTER TRAINS FOLLOW GENERAL MOTORS LOCOMOTIVES

ELECTRO-MOTIVE DIVISION
GENERAL MOTORS
WARREN, OHIO

THE SATURDAY EVENING POST May 20, 1950

THE NEWEST GENERAL MOTORS DIESEL
—world's most modern locomotive

HERE'S a new locomotive you're going to hear a lot about, and see a lot of. It's the new General Motors ES.

Behind its gleaming stainless steel grilles are scores of improvements born of more than two-billion unit-miles of General Motors Diesel experience on the rails.

It is capable of greater sustained speed with a smooth, steady flow of 2250 horsepower from each dual-engine unit—12% more power than its predecessor.

It can haul more cars over steep grades, and reduce the need for helper service, because of improvements that make it possible to transmit more power to the wheels.

It can go longer distances without stopping for water for train-heating boilers because of its greater water-carrying capacity.

It promises even greater reliability of operation in all extremes of weather,

with ingenious new protection against cold-weather freeze-ups.

Like all General Motors locomotives, it offers maximum interchangeability of all parts and utmost simplicity of maintenance, keeping costs down.

Altogether, the new General Motors ES is the world's most modern locomotive. To the railroads it means even greater Diesel efficiency and economy. To the public it brings even higher standards of comfort, safety and dependability in rail travel.

ELECTRO-MOTIVE DIVISION
GENERAL MOTORS • WARREN, OHIO

"New! Proudly Built in General Motors' America!"

COMFORT—Inches from perfect comfort, but all the curves and soft pillows. Greater passenger-car capacity to the masses.

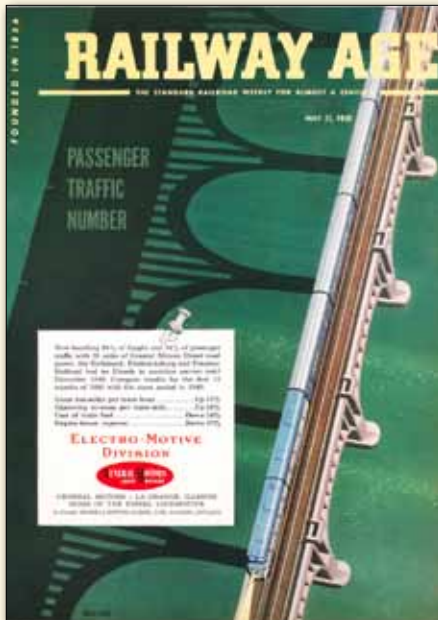
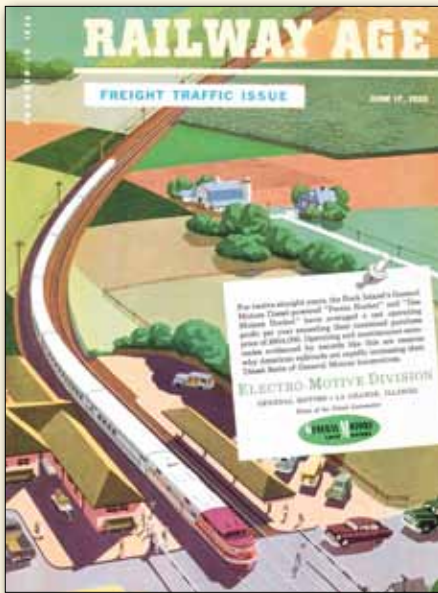
CONVENIENCE—You can relax with your feet down. No smoking and drinking here from a General Motors locomotive.

SAFETY—The new General Motors Diesel locomotive has a new safety device called the "Safety" device. It will stop the train if the engine stalls or if the train is moving too fast.

RELIABILITY—The new General Motors Diesel locomotive has a new safety device called the "Safety" device. It will stop the train if the engine stalls or if the train is moving too fast.

- ▲▲ The E7 was the star of a host of postwar ads in popular magazines. "His Coffee Remained Calm," from a 1947 issue of *Holiday*, played up the smooth train-handling made possible by diesels. The "Currier & Ives" series featured artwork in the style of the famous 19th-century illustrators; two such ads featured Union Pacific and Wabash E7's.
- ▲ By the time of this 1948 ad in *Holiday* showing GN's *Empire Builder* (on which E7's soon gave way to F units), the slogan had been amended to include "General Motors."
- ▶ The E7 era ended with the 1949 introduction of the E8, which, as a May 20, 1950, *Saturday Evening Post* ad explained, was a substantial advance over its predecessor.

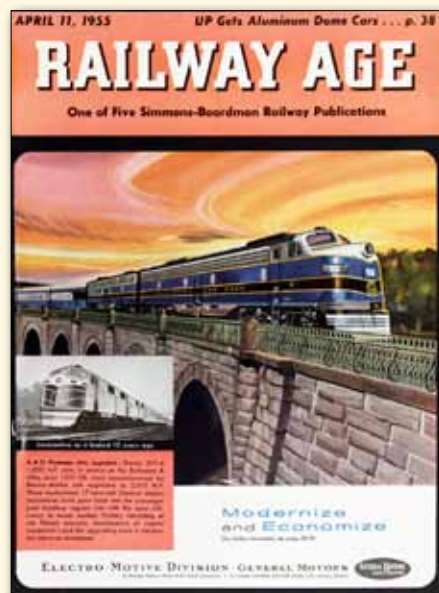
Jeff Hampton coll.



magazines of the day, such as *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Holiday*, *Gentleman's Quarterly*, and *National Geographic*.

The final ad campaign in the 1950s featured the stylized images of artist Bern Hill. Every ad created by Hill was featured exclusively on the covers of *Railway Age*. GM followed the campaign with a series of lithographs of Hill's paintings that are highly coveted by collectors today.

The success of the E units in the marketplace, while tied to the concepts developed by the General Motors Art & Colour Section, along with the strong engineering skills of Electro-Motive's founders, is still a benchmark to all who aspire to develop a successful product campaign. These ads are part of the E unit's enduring image. **1**



▲▲ During 1950–56, artist Bern Hill brought a dramatic new style to EMD's *Railway Age* cover ads. Although highly stylized, his images depicted specific models and railroads. Subjects included a Rock Island E7 (June 17, 1950, issue), Seaboard E7's (October 28, 1950), and IC E8's (February 12, 1951).

▲ Additional *Railway Age* covers by Bern Hill showed RF&P E8's crossing a bridge from above (May 21, 1951), B&M E7's under darkening skies (October 27, 1951), and Pennsy E8's near Duncannon, Pa. (August 17, 1953).

◀ Apparently by an artist other than Hill, the April 11, 1955, *Age* cover brought E-unit advertising full circle, in a way, by focusing on the rebuilding of B&O's EA/EB's into E8M's.

Jeff Hampton coll.