



An outbound Kentucky Derby special waits to leave Union Station on May 1, 1965. Other Louisville roads favored E units for Derby trains, and Monon used F3's, but L&N offered E's, F's, and Geeps; GP9 521 is one of eight on L&N with steam generators, and 504 is one of 17 such GP7's.

Those delightful **DERBY DAYS**

In the 1960s, special trains to Louisville's "Run for the Roses" each May were still in full swing

By **Frank Tatnall** • Photos by the author



On Derby Day 1967, May 6, private cars (above) crowd L&N's Maple Street yard, whose bumping posts were right at Broadway's sidewalks. The tail signs on the two L&N round-end sleeper-lounge-observations (Pullman, 1950) are for Atlantic Coast Line's New York–Miami *Florida Special*.

When the Pennsylvania Railroad transferred me from Kansas City to Louisville, Ky., in early 1964, I expected fewer opportunities to photograph trains than I had enjoyed in K.C. [Winter 2011 CLASSIC TRAINS]. But I soon discovered that Louisville was itself a hot spot both for

passenger and freight operations. Eight line-haul railroads and one busy terminal carrier converged at this key gateway between the Midwest and the rapidly industrializing South. In the immediate pre-Amtrak years, four of the Class 1 railroads still operated passenger service into and out of Louisville's Romanesque-

style Union Station, opened by the Louisville & Nashville in 1891. Sharing it with L&N were Chesapeake & Ohio, PRR, and Monon. (Illinois Central's Central Station, a half mile to the north on the Ohio riverfront, had also hosted C&O and Baltimore & Ohio trains, but by 1964 it was closed and C&O's trains



A 14-car PRR special races through Sellersburg, Ind., on Derby Day morning, May 2, 1964, trailed by Central Indiana's ancient wooden car *Duchess*, with CI boss Ike Duffey on board [see Spring 2013 CLASSIC TRAINS].

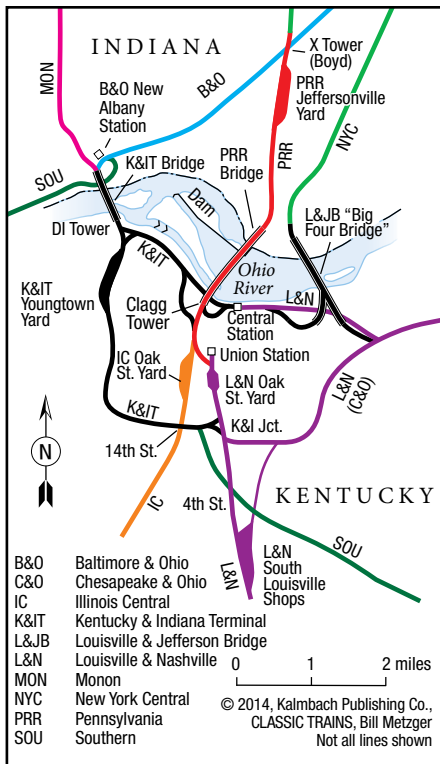


used Union Station. Southern also had used Central, but toward the end in 1953, had its own little depot; New York Central's Big Four route into Louisville (on B&O rights from North Vernon, Ind.), was freight-only after the mid-'40s.

Louisville's biggest annual event was then, and still is, of course, the Kentucky Derby, which draws some 100,000 horse-racing fans to historic Churchill Downs on the first Saturday of May. The Derby matches the nation's best three-year-old thoroughbreds in the first leg of the



Also on Derby Day '64, an IC switcher tows a special from New Orleans past PRR's Clagg Tower onto the Ohio River bridge before shoving it down onto the riverfront track to dormant Central Station for unloading. IC's last Louisville passenger train, still steam-powered, quit in 1957.



For the '64 Derby week, L&N displayed restored Civil War 4-4-0 *General No. 3* and "Jim Crow" car 665 between Union Station (left) and L&N's offices. Two C&O business cars are at right.

sport's legendary "Triple Crown." Louisville—just west of Kentucky's Bluegrass horse-breeding country—has been the site of the internationally known "Run for the Roses" since it began in 1875. The city's strong southern heritage is reflected not only in local customs and traditions but also in the Derby itself, which is introduced with the crowd belting out Stephen Foster's famed minstrel song, "My Old Kentucky Home."

Another tradition of the Derby dating from the 19th century was the railroads'

role in moving thousands of racing fans each year to and from Louisville. While the annual migration of people bound for Churchill Downs by rail has precipitously declined in recent decades to just a handful of railroad office-car specials these days, the spectacle of extra cars and Derby specials to Louisville still was in full swing in the mid-1960s when I was there to witness it all.

L&N was the biggest operator of special trains, but all the Class 1s except B&O and NYC, which sent cars down

from Cincinnati in L&N trains, ran their own Derby specials.

Louisville & Nashville, of course, was the city's No. 1 railroad; its large home office building stood just east of Union Station. (Both structures survive, facing Broadway on each side of 10th Street.) L&N entered the city from three directions: east, south, and west. My employer, the PRR, was the second-largest Derby railroad in terms of passenger volume. Its single-track line from Indianapolis hosted the alternate-day Chicago-Florida



In midday before the 1964 Derby, Pennsylvania's Portland Avenue freight yard displays its one-day mode as a coachyard. Sections of three trains have been turned, separated, and backed into the yard ready for loading and departure. Business car 7510 *Pittsburgher* is in center.



Two F3's mosey down 15th Street in New Albany, Ind., with Monon's Derby special from Chicago for the 1965 race on May 1. The train—all private cars save for a rider coach behind the F's—will cross K&IT's river bridge, wye, and park on tracks north of K&IT's engine terminal.



An L&N special from Atlanta, with an FP7-GP7-FP7 "power sandwich," backs into Union Station on the morning of Derby Day 1964. The heavyweight Pullman sleeper behind the units was in use as a coach. At the right is a pair of Monon F3's for the *Thoroughbred* to Chicago.

South Wind and the overnight *Kentuckian* from the Windy City. Pennsy accessed the city on a massive bridge over the Ohio River from Jeffersonville, Ind., used today by regional owner Louisville & Indiana and a little bit by CSX.

Three other "north side" carriers—B&O, Monon, and Southern—reached Louisville over the Kentucky & Indiana Terminal's joint rail-highway Ohio River bridge from New Albany, Ind., just downstream. It remains today, in rail use

only, by Norfolk Southern (which absorbed K&IT) and CSX. NYC crossed the Ohio east of downtown on its own "Big Four bridge," which also still stands but hosts only pedestrian and bicycle traffic. Illinois Central's line, now the



The Pennsylvania's special from Philadelphia has pulled cautiously off the Ohio River bridge and into a Portland Avenue Yard lead on Friday, April 30, 1965, as the conductor and a PRR police officer discuss the next move (top). The E units will be cut off, and FM H20-44 9304 (above) will break up the consist and shove it into the yard for

unloading, as seen with sleeper *Connoquenessing Creek* (middle), one of Pennsy's two dozen 1949 Pullman-Standard 12-duplex-single room/4-double-bedroom cars, in the foreground. Bringing up the rear was office car 7507 *Quaker City* (above). After the train is unloaded, 9304 will turn it and arrange the cars for departure the next evening.



Illinois Central's Derby special arrives on April 30, 1965, the day before the race, behind an A-B-A set of E units, E9 4043 in the lead. L&N public relations man Charles B. "Charlie" Castner, in his May 1966 *TRAINS* article, called this IC entry "easily the finest looking" of all the trains for the 1965 event.

Paducah & Louisville, entered the city from the southwest, while C&O trains came in from the east, using L&N track-age rights west of Lexington, Ky.

PICKING AND CHOOSING

My exposure to Derby specials began on Friday morning, May 2, 1964, when I found it necessary to pick and choose among trains arriving on L&N, Pennsy, Monon, and IC. As a sales representative I was able to absent myself from the office for a good part of the day, but I managed to photograph only six specials: PRR trains originating in Pittsburgh (two) and Chicago; an L&N train from Atlanta; Monon's annual run from Chicago; and an IC train from New Orleans. Pennsy could be counted on to assign E units to its trains, as did IC, Southern, and Chesapeake & Ohio to theirs. Monon's special rated two of its passenger-service F3A's. L&N's four specials, on the other hand, usually showed up with a mixed bag of E's, FP7's, and Geeps.

The Southern's special was notable, consisting entirely of dark green office cars with the president's luxurious pair, *Virginia* and *Carolina*, always on the tail



Southern Railway's 1965 Derby special was, as usual, all elegant dark green office cars, two of which (top) wait near K&IT's Youngtown Yard's engine terminal for their passengers to return. Nameless No. 2 is closest to us; the car behind it is *Virginia* (above), half of President D. W. Brosnan's "*Virginia-Carolina*." This duo—at the time Nos. 16 and 17—was reserved for the road's top official. Today, Norfolk Southern lists bedroom car *Carolina* as No. 2.

end. Southern's regular passenger service to Louisville was a decade gone by 1964 [see "Mr. Brosnan 'Makes' History," pages 66-69].

As some of the accompanying photos show, I did photograph some trains in the annual Derby train extravaganza during three more Mays, through 1967, but the number of dedicated trains was tapering off as most celebrities and Wall Street tycoons quit riding private railroad cars in favor of jet airplanes.

L&N and C&O Derby trains arrived and departed Union Station, while the Pennsy utilized its small Portland Avenue freight yard at the south end of its Ohio River bridge, a mile northwest of Union Station. Every year, Portland had to undergo a weeklong cleanup that included the spreading of white gravel to transform it from a weedgrown freight yard into an open-air passenger terminal that reflected favorably on the railroad. IC unloaded its train at Central Station, while Southern and Monon parked their specials at K&IT's Youngtown Yard in the west end of the city just south of the Ohio River bridge. Chartered city buses carried passengers to and from Churchill Downs—about 3 miles due south of the PRR yard—although it is probable that some of the railroads' guests were transported in more elegant vehicles.

Railroad office cars, as well as privately owned sleepers, lounges, and business-type cars, all were featured on many of the specials, and in addition, a number of private cars moved on the rear of regularly scheduled trains. Upon arrival, several of the private cars would be



Offering a contrast in looks on May 1, 1965, are L&N E6's 756, in what's left of its original color scheme, and 750, sporting the latest livery, parked on service tracks south of Union Station.

parked in L&N's Maple Street yard just west of Union Station, their open rear platforms lined up side by side and extending virtually to the sidewalk on Broadway, thus readily available to photographers. Other cars were spotted in or near the station's cavernous trainshed.

As one might expect, it is known that at least some of the Pennsylvania's guests, representing major freight customers, never actually attended the race, instead preferring to remain on board the train all day Saturday to dine, drink, and play poker with their railroad hosts. On one occasion, another sales rep and I were assigned to wait at our adjacent Portland Avenue freight office in the event that our officials, or the guests on the cars, called for additional "supplies." Louisville was, you must remember, the

center of the distillery industry producing fine bourbon whiskey!

DEPARTURE "RUSH HOUR"

After all the frantic activity during Friday and on Saturday morning, many railroad crew members could relax for a few hours as special agents enforced security around the Derby cars. Then there would occur another spate of hurried switching and assembling of trains for the outbound surge.

The crowds of passengers would stream back from Churchill Downs late Saturday afternoon to be loaded aboard, and by midnight most of the special trains had left town. By Sunday morning, only a few private cars remained in and around Union Station, and they soon were switched out to be added to



Top executives of both Pennsy and New York Central, whose merger was nine months ahead, sent their office cars to the '67 Derby. PRR 120—today in private-car use by Bennett Levin—and NYC 1 bring up the rear of an L&N special nearing Louisville from Cincinnati on Friday, May 5.



On Derby Day 1966, May 7, several heavyweight Pullmans, *Donizetti* closest to us (top), are among cars from one L&N special parked at Union Station, while another L&N special, led by GP9 No. 518, has

backed into the depot. The next morning (above), C&O train 22, the Louisville section of the *George Washington*, is ready to leave Union Station with two extra E8's up front and some Derby cars on the rear.



Among L&N switchers busy on Derby Day 1966 is GP7 No. 490, ex-Nashville, Chattanooga & St. Louis 700, built in 1950 and riding on Type B trucks, and not repainted nine years after merger.

regularly scheduled trains' consists.

The Monon's special usually made a side trip on the Sunday return, veering south at Orleans, Ind., 17 miles to the renowned French Lick Springs Hotel. The branch to French Lick terminated almost in the front yard of the grand structure. Guests then could enjoy the famed warm springs, ride horseback, or just relax before resuming their journey to Chicago.

A SHADOW OF DAYS PAST

After my Louisville years, railroads did continue to run office-car specials to the Derby, as much for entertainment as transportation, and some still do (as well as to such events as the Super Bowl), but like most such things railroad, this activ-



Nickel Plate *City of Chicago*, one of two 1950 Pullman-Standard 5-double-bedroom/café-lounges used on its Chicago–Cleveland overnights until their fall 1965 discontinuance, is among the “rainbow” line of other Pullman, office, and private cars in Maple Street Yard on May 7, 1966.



Milwaukee Road business car *Milwaukee* is rearmost on Monon 6, the *Thoroughbred*, as it heads up 15th Street in New Albany (above) on May 8, 1966. On the same day up north at French Lick, Ind. (right), Monon’s Derby train is parked at the famed French Lick Springs Hotel, as was customary on a side trip off its post-race return to Chicago. The Orleans–French Lick branch is gone and the old Monon inactive through Orleans, but the hotel and nearby classic West Baden Springs Hotel, both refurbished, flourish as a casino resort.



ity has become a pale shadow of its former self. As recently as 2011, at least two railroad-sponsored trains still went to Louisville for Derby Day, but whatever remains is a far cry from the 200 or more extra cars carrying Derby-bound pas-

sengers during my tenure in the city.

Among big events that attract private cars and special trains, the Kentucky Derby has been the only one to be held in the same city each year, versus such annual events today as the Super Bowl

and railroad society conventions (including that of AAPRCO, the private-car owners group). As such, the Derby of decades past probably was America’s last truly top drawing card for such a gathering of elegant “varnish.” 📖