



How many ways  
can you spell  
**ROCK ISLAND?**

BY J. DAVID INGLES



**TWO SIDES:** As with any argument, there are two sides to each unit. Compare U28B 270's right side, at Kansas City, Kans., on May 26, 1973, with the left side in the large photo at the top, during the same month.

Alan Miller



**DUPLICATE:** The "CK ISLAND" variant, seen on U25B 227 at Kansas City, Kans., on March 12, 1967, was identical to U25B 236, except the latter had a yellow short hood, vs. 227's maroon with three nose chevrons.

Hank Goerke

**GREAT EXAMPLE:** One correct U25B, repainted into the Rock Island's then-new paint scheme, splices misfit U28B 270 and leased WM GP9 27 at Denver in May 1973.

Hol Wagner



To get units back on the road, shop employees prioritized function over appearance

Knowing how detail-oriented to the point of obsession many railfans can be — and I admit to being in that population to a degree — there likely are Rock Island fans who have quantified the misspellings that wound up on its diesels 40-some years ago. The misspelling “affliction” was, to judge from slides of RI locomotives that I’ve accumulated, not a matter of misapplied stencils, as occasionally happens on freight cars. No,

the variations were due to the interchangeability of hood doors, especially on early General Electric units. When a door replacement was needed, it seems that shop employees at Silvis or El Reno just selected whatever was handy, with little regard for appearance.

Obviously, the proper spelling is staring at us on the middle unit, 235, in the big photo above. The large slanted white capital letters are on RI’s new bright-red-

and-yellow paint scheme. The “U-boat” was among 39 U25Bs delivered during 1963–65, the earliest batch in an austere solid maroon with a blank hood adorned only by a cab emblem, a look that at least did not lend itself to misspellings.

A prime example of the misspellings is on unit 270 at left above, among 42 U28Bs delivered in 1966 whose group was ripe for “wrong” replacement hood doors being obvious since the railroad



**PHONETICALLY CORRECT:** Probably not the only such example, U25B 238’s left side has the pronunciation correct, if not the spelling, at the railroad’s compact St. Louis engine terminal on August 15, 1970.

J. David Ingles



**LONE WOLF?** Perhaps only one EMD was afflicted. A check of slides of all RI’s contemporary (to early GEs) GP35s and GP40s yielded only one spelling error, on solid maroon GP35 332 at Denver in July 1967.

Norm Herbert

**UNFINISHED:** One substitute gray door on U25B 229, in Chicago in June 1970, spoils the name. The identical treatment was in evidence on U28B 247.

Harry Juday



name was spelled out in large and small capital letters. The borrowed GP9 in the photo, Western Maryland 27, is an example of another factor in play — the poor old Rock's financial frailty in its final years, when it was forced to scratch for motive power wherever it could.

Rock Island's supremely eclectic diesel fleet was interesting enough in its own right, early-on drawing my attention and resulting in my feature story, "Christine and the Mongeese," in December 1965 *TRAINS*, which included a full-page roster.

(The headline referred to the first EMD-re-engined Alco DL109 passenger unit, RI 621, and the railroaders' nickname for RI's BL2s.) When you add the many, sometimes humorous misspellings that turned up on early second-generation power, the attraction just gets deeper.

The "spelling versions" presented on these four pages are the result of simply thumbing through my slide files. Despite having slides of better than 80 percent of Rock's 190- and 200-series GE and 300-series EMD four-motor road units (a

total of only 125), it's likely that those pictured here represent only some of the misspellings. And don't forget, there are two sides to each hood — see unit 270!

Curiously, most of the examples I found were on "roster shots," but then, trailing units' lettering details are often difficult to discern in a typical three-quarter action photo. Also, the door misspellings came on only the one paint scheme, with ROCK ISLAND spelled out. This livery was, I believe, applied by the builders to fewer than 100 units, al-



**NOTRE DAME VS. LOS ANGELES?** With "ND LA" on U25B 224's left side, at Denver in May 1969, what else might one infer? The three Union Pacific units behind it probably are run-through or borrowed power.

Ken Crist



**THREE-WORD CHAMPION?:** A repetition door and a missing one make for this almost-a-sentence ("is" what?) on the engineer's side of U28B 277, laying over at a Chicago terminal in September 1973.

Ron Plazzotta



though some plain-maroon units were repainted with the spelled-out name.

At any rate, many of these photos have entertained slide-show audiences over the years, and I hope the ones here do the same for you.

Now, who wants to try to quantify the paint schemes on Rock Island diesels over the road's lifespan? Not me. You'd have to start with listing the types of units: yard, passenger, freight, etc., and define which details constituted "another scheme" or not. Yellow short hood? Sure,

to cite an easy case, but how about the only change being three chevron stripes on the nose (see U25B 227), popular for a while? We also cannot forget secondhand or inherited units that were not repainted. Paint costs money, as does the labor to apply it. One of my early photos to appear in TRAINS was of RI 839, one of two EMD SW8s RI inherited when it bought a remnant of the failing Texas short line Wichita Falls & Southern, which I shot in Oklahoma City in December 1960, still in WF&S black and orange. Similarly, RI

later acquired 10 of Rio Grande's 13 GP7s, which ran around in D&RGW colors, as did ex-Union Pacific F3s and E units in Armour yellow.

Whatever the answers, Rock Island was surely the king of different paint schemes, as well as the misspelling champion. **I**

*J. DAVID INGLES, who has served on CLASSIC TRAINS' staff since CT's launch in 2000, raids his large slide collection for an "Ingles Color Classics" entry in each issue.*



**WORN OUT?** Not a door substitution but likely just a "wear-off" on U33B 191, one of 10 the road received in 1969, fades the name from "ROC" onward in this left-side portrait at Chicago on June 20, 1976.

Ron Plazzotta



**UNREPAINTED HAND-ME-DOWN:** Rock Island didn't expend much money or time relabeling former Rio Grande GP7 5113, at Blue Island, Ill., on May 26, 1974, leading U28B 292, a "Rock ISLA" U25B, and a caboose.

Ron Plazzotta