



FROM RS3s TO C420s

Little Lehigh & Hudson River bought the first examples of a distinctive Alco second-generation model

By Richard W. Jahn

The Lehigh & Hudson River Railway, formed in the 1880s, was the smallest Class 1 included in Conrail, having gone bankrupt in 1972 owing to traffic patterns changing, mainly from the Penn Central merger. L&HR originated traffic including coal, zinc, and limestone, but mainly it was a bridge route, a crucial link for goods bound for New England points. Most of this overhead traffic went to the New Haven Railroad at the Maybrook (N.Y.) gateway.

At its peak, L&HR's well-kept, block-signaled main line stretched 86 miles from Maybrook down to Easton, Pa. ["Fallen Flags Remembered," Fall 2007 CLASSIC TRAINS]. The last 14 miles from Belvidere to Phillipsburg, N.J., were on trackage rights of Pennsy/PC's "Bel-Del" line. An L&HR subsidiary owned the Delaware River bridge into Easton, then L&HR had rights on Jersey Central west to Allentown, Pa.

In modern times L&HR had been owned by its neighbors and connections. By 1975, ownership was divided among

Erie Lackawanna (33 percent), Lehigh Valley (22), Jersey Central (17), Penn Central (14), and Reading (14).

As a short railroad with a small management staff, L&HR to varying degrees was influenced by its owners and would turn to their officials for advice when it came to, for example, purchasing locomotives, first to replace steam, and later to augment and replace the early diesels. Interestingly, while all of L&HR's modern steam had come from Baldwin, the road turned to Alco for its first diesels: 11 (of an eventual 13) RS3s in 1950.

Why Alco?

At L&HR's request, a committee of three — one high-level manager each from Erie, Jersey Central, and Lackawanna — was formed in 1949 to determine the desirability of dieselization, and to study reports from three major locomotive builders. EMD and Alco both recommended two types of diesel power, road cab units and road-switchers, while Baldwin recommended some road diesels but also keeping some steam. EMD said L&HR would need 20

units, while Alco thought 15 would do.

L&HR borrowed and tested two 1,500 h.p. Lehigh & New England Alco RS2s, and the committee wound up recommending acquiring 11 1,500 h.p. road-switchers. Possibly because of the L&NE tests, the order went to Alco. Its RS2 model was succeeded by the 1,600 h.p. RS3 in May 1950, so that's what L&HR got, with Nos. 1–11 delivered during June–November '50. Traffic dictated two more, so Nos. 12 and 13 came in 1951.

A decade later, L&HR was again shopping for diesels. By the end of 1961, the average mileage total on its RS3s was 660,000, and the practice of the time recommended general overhauls be done at the 600,000-mile mark. Again L&HR asked its owners, and mechanical officials from Reading, LV, and Erie Lackawanna prepared a report. Because L&HR mechanics were familiar with Alcos and the builder offered attractive trade-in terms, the officials looked only at replacing older Alcos with new ones.

Two models were considered: the 2,000 h.p. DL721A (a.k.a. Century 420) and the 2,400 h.p. DL640A (C424). Both would be introduced in 1963, for in this era, builders were "improving" their



RS3 No. 1 splices two C420s arriving into Allentown Yard, Pa., in June 1967. The RS3s had four thin stripes on the long hood, two wide ones on the short hood.

Dave Augsburger

models almost annually like automakers. The C420 was the successor to the RS32 (a.k.a. DL721 — both had 12-cylinder 251C engines); the C424 replaced the RS27 (DL640 — both with 16-251B engines).

The report largely favored the C424. The new units were to be phased in over five years beginning in 1963, with two delivered then, two more in '65, four in '66, and five in '67, each on an RS3 trade-in beginning in 1965. This meant L&HR would need two additional Alcos suitable for trade-in on the 1963 pair, so it bought two retired FB1s from the Reading, whose official on the committee said were available. If by 1968 business warranted, the last two RS3s then would be traded for two new units.

Although the report, largely written by Reading's Superintendent of Motive Power Walter A. W. Fister, leaned toward the 2,400 h.p. choice, the addendum by LV Chief Mechanical Officer Ernie Lehr apparently carried more weight, because he wrote that the extra horsepower was not needed and 2,000 would meet L&HR's requirements. He added that since L&HR's RS3s did not have dynamic brakes, they would not be needed on the new units, either. So L&HR stayed with a 12-cylinder engine like the 244s powering its RS3s. Besides packing more horsepower than a 12-244, the 12-251C offered better fuel economy.

Thus L&HR ordered two C420s in 1963, Nos. 21–22. They would be the first-ever of the model, which sold 131 units to 12 U.S. carriers plus a Mexican line through August 1968. L&HR's 420s came in an attractive blue-and-gray scheme, a radical break from the dark green with yellow stripes on the RS3s.

Deviations in the plan

L&HR deviated from the five-year C420 plan, though, by ordering four for late 1965 delivery, on which four RS3s went to Alco in trade. A timing glitch occurred, however, when the second two C420s, 23 and 24, were badly damaged en route from Alco in a head-on collision (above right) on the newly coordinated CNJ-LV line at Laurel Run, Pa., at 5:45 a.m. on December 26, 1965. L&HR, with more RS3s already dispatched to Alco for the 1966 C420 deliveries, found itself short of power, so it leased units from its neighbors including, surprisingly, EMD F7s and GP35s.

Alco repaired the 420s involved in the wreck, and they were safely delivered in May '66. The rest of the nine came during that summer. Although L&HR still



L&HR 24 and 23 are all shiny at Bethlehem, Pa. (above), in September 1967 after a factory rebuild at Alco. They were wrecked en route delivery, in tow (left) on December 26, 1965, when a Jersey Central eastbound train pulled by six Alco RSs hit a 155-car westbound LV with three C628s at Laurel Run, Pa.

Top, Dave Augsburg; left, Richard Allen

had six RS3s as 1966 ended, it ordered no more C420s, a decision dictated by operational requirements but maybe also due to the uncertainty of Alco remaining in business (the builder would close in January 1969). L&HR's last RS3 didn't leave its property until late 1970.

L&HR's shop at Warwick, N.Y., a large facility for such a small road, was well-equipped to keep the fleet in top-notch condition, with only wheel work contracted out, to the Reading. L&HR used the 420s on every type of freight, usually in pairs or trios but singly on short trains. L&HR diesels often looked dirty, though, as hand-washing at Warwick was the only clean-up option.

Even though they were all the same model, L&HR's first two 420s had some differences from the other seven. Being the first C420s for anyone, Nos. 21–22 employed an older electrical system as found on the DL721s (the later ones had modular electronic controls, a feature that EMD didn't adopt until the Dash 2 line in 1972). The first two also had snowplows that were removable after winter. They were built with smaller fuel tanks, though later, during wreck repairs, 21's was replaced with the larger tank common to the others.

By the time L&HR declared bankruptcy in 1972, it had lost a lot of busi-

ness and had a surplus of locomotives. During that year it leased two C420s, 27 and 29, to the Lehigh Valley and sold three to Canadian roads: No. 22 to Essex Terminal in Windsor, Ont., and 25 and 26 to British Columbia Railway.

Six were on the roster when Conrail took over and given Nos. 2072–2077. For a time, all were based out of Bethlehem, Pa., then some were moved to upstate New York to work with other small Conrail Alcos. Only No. 21, as Conrail 2072, was repainted into solid blue, but with only "CR" initials.

Even though L&HR no longer exists and some of its main line is removed, most of its nine C420s are extant. Two, Nos. 21 and 28, were scrapped in the Conrail era. Arkansas & Missouri, the 1986 regional whose 20-plus C420s have comprised almost half its roster, has five: No. 22 (via Essex Terminal), 23 and 24 (via A&M sister Maryland & Delaware), 25 (via BCR), and 29 (via D&H). Possibly extant are 26, which went from BCR to a now-defunct Iowa short line, and 27, which went to Green Bay & Western, then Iowa Interstate, then in 1999, Indiana's Louisville, New Albany & Corydon. It was last reported owned by an individual and stored in Michigan. Perhaps somehow, a survivor will return to wear L&HR blue and gray. ■