

GGI No. 900



Oldest Amtrak locomotives

A SURVEY OF THE OLDEST LOCOMOTIVES AMTRAK INHERITED **IN 1971**

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The oldest electric Amtrak locomotive, GG1 No. 900, reposes at Harrisburg, Pa., in September 1976. It was built by the Pennsylvania Railroad in March 1940 and later became Penn Central 4892.

Amtrak inherited a menagerie of power at startup in 1971, but what were the oldest of its locomotives?

During the period leading up to the advent of the National Railroad Passenger Corp. (Amtrak's official name) in May 1971, it wasn't uncommon to see passenger train equipment, both locomotives and cars, of significant seniority.

Regarding what came behind the locomotives, heavyweight (typically pre-World War II) head-end cars were not uncommon, as well as coaches, both "modernized" to look like more recent lightweight streamliners, and those in their original configuration.

For that matter, the Gulf, Mobile & Ohio was still using a heavyweight dining car on its Chicago-St. Louis *Abraham Lincoln* on April 29, two days before Amtrak. A good number of earlier-vintage EMD E and F units were also extant, and the Delaware & Hudson continued to operate its former Santa Fe Alco PA units right up until Amtrak Day on May 1.

A Santa Fe E8B (rebuilt from a pre-World War II cab model) was in the power consist on the final westbound Santa Fe *Super Chief/El Capitan* on April 30.

Some of these rolling museum pieces persisted well after that date while Amtrak sorted out what equipment it would acquire and use. On Nov. 14, 1971, the date run-through St. Louis-Milwaukee service was inaugurated, I rode on the eastbound *Abe* from Joliet to Glenview behind a pair of E7s. Perhaps mercifully, the diner had been replaced by a stainless-steel *Sunset Limited* car previously belonging to the Southern Pacific, but the

"GM&O Special Sandwich" was still available on the menu.

So, of the equipment conveyed to and acquired by Amtrak, what were the oldest locomotives?

Though many E units were conveyed initially to Amtrak, nothing earlier than an E8 made the cut. Surprisingly, the oldest road diesel power was a cabless B unit, Amtrak 155, an F3 dating from January 1947. Originally Northern Pacific 6551B, by the time it came to Amtrak, it was Burlington Northern 9775, and was retired by the passenger carrier in 1975. Along with BN sister 9777 (Amtrak 156), these units were the only ones of this model acquired by the NRPC.

Turning to diesel switchers, pride-of-place for the initially conveyed group belongs to EMD SW1 No. 246, delivered to the New York Central in May 1939. It wore Penn Central number 8464 when it arrived at Amtrak.

As you might expect, discerning the oldest electric Amtrak locomotive was relatively easy: GG1 900, built by the Pennsylvania railroad in March 1940 as PRR (and later, PC) 4892.

It's worth noting that regarding electric locomotives, there was another class that, while not conveyed to or owned by Amtrak, certainly had the distinction of being the oldest power to routinely couple up with its passenger consists and haul them over the road, albeit over a relatively short distance.

This, of course, would be the P-motors built for the Cleveland (Ohio) Union Terminal project in 1929 and transferred in the 1950s to the New York Central's New York City area passenger services.

Between 1971 and '74, these creatures from another age, by now the property of Penn Central, handled all of Amtrak's Empire Service passenger trains over the 32.7 timetable miles between Grand Central Terminal and Croton-Harmon. There, diesels took over for the rest of trip. So, in a sense, one could say that the oldest Amtrak locomotives were not even Amtrak locomotives at all! 📌

Honorary mention for oldest Amtrak electric locomotive: A Penn Central P-motor electric handles an Amtrak-painted consist at Tarrytown, N.Y. Built in 1929 for the Cleveland (Ohio) Union Terminal project, these locomotives were never transferred to Amtrak ownership, but handled the passenger carrier's trains on a regular basis.



Penn Central P-motor