



DIVERSITY AND ADVERSITY

# The locomotives of Penn Central

By Robert J. Yanosey







In May 1968, ex-PRR GP30 2229 already wears full PC attire leading a PRR FP7 and an NYC F7A westbound on the old PRR at Gallitzin, Pa.

William J. Brennan, Morning Sun Books collection



On January 19, 1969, PC- and NYC-liveried units join New Haven U25Bs in former NH territory at Maybrook, N.Y. PRR, NYC, and NH had U25Bs with numbers starting at 2500; PC planners moved the PRR fleet into the 2600-series, while NH's became PC 2660-2685 in '69.

Robert F. Collins, Morning Sun Books collection

How some  
**4,400** locomotives of almost  
**100** types from  
**3** railroads came under  
**1** big, black umbrella



In September 1972, nearly new GP38-2 8029 leads a U25B and U30C west out of Marion, Ohio. PC owned 264 GP38s and 223 GP38-2s and used them in just about any service imaginable across the vast system.

Paul Geiger, Morning Sun Books collection



**B**y the early 1960s, only Norfolk & Western dividends and Park Avenue rentals kept up some pretense of prosperity for the mighty Pennsylvania Railroad and its rival, the stately New York Central. By this time in their long lives, both stalwarts were teetering on the brink of insolvency, all the while paying out fat dividends to present a pretty face for Wall Street. Having exhausted all traditional solutions, by 1962 they concluded that merger was their only salvation. N&W had scooped up the Virginian in 1959; Chesapeake & Ohio won Baltimore & Ohio in 1962; and N&W followed in 1964 by acquiring Wabash and Nickel Plate. So, top management at PRR and NYC pushed government and labor hard to approve their plan — in the process making disastrous agreements and bad promises, including grafting the moribund New Haven to the proposal.

On merger day, February 1, 1968, Penn Central made an inauspicious entrance when it rolled out former PRR SD40 6072 for the press in new PC attire. It's hard to know what had been expected, but just about everybody was underwhelmed. The "livery" of solid black with white lettering was universally panned for lack of imagination, and later at-



**PC ordered no new power after mid-1973. This meant the continued use of relics like RS1 9915, built in 1952 for PRR. The old Alco switches at Meadows Yard near Newark, N.J., in fall 1975.**

William J. Brennan, Morning Sun Books collection

tempts to add color to the PC "mating worms" logo didn't help. Day 1 found 1,802 locomotives of the NYC joining 2,277 from PRR in a roster made coherent by a 1966 renumbering that lumped identical models from both roads together. No attempt had been made, however, to accommodate locomotives of the New Haven, whose efforts to join the union had been stoutly resisted. Only when it succeeded and became part of Penn Central on January 1, 1969, did the 313 NH locomotives receive PC numbers.

### First-generation survivors

The new railroad had the dubious distinction of having one of the most diverse

fleet of locomotives imaginable. Prior to the merger, all three components cleansed their rosters of most non-EMD cab units such as Alco DL109s (NH) and PAs (PRR, NYC, NH); Fairbanks-Morse Erie-builts (PRR, NYC) and C-Liners (PRR, NYC, NH); and Baldwin Sharknoses (PRR, NYC), Centipedes (PRR), and Babyfaces (NYC). However, there was still plenty of exotica to go around. For example, although PRR had retired its entire fleet of Alco freight cabs, both NYC and NH still had a handful of FAs that continued in secondary freight service for Penn Central. EMD F units were on the way out, too, but PC inherited a

**By 1970, most railroads were retiring their F-unit fleets. PC still had hundreds, and even added four D&RGW F7 retirees to its horde. "Grande gold" stands out between two black ex-NYC mates at Cleveland in March 1971.**

Dave McKay, Morning Sun Books collection







**PC inherited hundreds of Baldwin diesels, most of which were PRR switchers. S12 8100, at Camden, N.J., in August 1972, is former NYC.**

Krambles-Peterson Archive



**One of 20-some Fairbanks-Morse H16-44s assigned to Chicago, 5158 was the only ex-PRR one, and the only PC unit with italic numbers.**

J. R. Williams, Krambles-Peterson Archive

stout fleet of more than 260 F3, F7, and FP7 A-units and 60 B-units from PRR and NYC, still in regular use.

PRR and NYC E8s continued as the mainstay of PC's vanishing intercity passenger service, many continuing in that role after the May 1971 startup of Amtrak. With the reduction of intercity service, the remaining E7s were soon hauling mail trains or confined to Jersey Shore commuter work, some even outlasting Penn Central. One of the more interesting power shuffles took place east of the New Haven's electrified territory when ex-PRR E8s replaced ex-NH dual-mode FL9s, which were reassigned to former NYC third-rail commuter territory.

First-generation road-switchers, be they Alco, Baldwin, FM, or EMD, were still valued by Penn Central, filling in on the main line or switching in yards but chiefly working on the many secondary lines that still existed. Early on, FM H16-44s from all three predecessors handled switching and transfer tasks around Chicago, while PRR and NYC Baldwin light road-switchers shuffled freight around Baltimore and even worked a commuter train out of Camden, N.J. Alco RS1s from all three roads prowled PC's northeast industrial trackage, and all three contributed RS3s and RS11s to PC; only PRR had some of the larger RSD5s, 7s, and 12s. A rarity sought out by diesel fans were the half-dozen six-axle PRR Baldwin AS616s working out their dotage around Baltimore and later Camden.

The three merger partners also had sizeable fleets of GP9s: NYC, 176 (most without dynamic brakes); PRR, 270 (plus 40 GP9Bs); and NH, 30 (all equipped for dual service), but PC's hundreds of GP7s came only from PRR and NYC. GP7s and 9s were found systemwide, but special features kept some batches close to specific assignments. West of Harrisburg,

Pa., 25 PRR SD9s did the heavy lifting in major yards like Enola, Conway, Buckeye, and Elkhart, while two heavily ballasted PRR SD7s stayed in southern Indiana on the 5.89 percent Madison Hill assignment for which they were built. If all this variety of first-generation road-switchers wasn't enough, a couple of PRR FM Train Masters still worked at Columbus and Chicago in 1968, and two NYC Lima road-switchers with EMD engines, formerly stationed as passenger-car switchers in Chicago, were moved to Philadelphia and lasted until 1973.

In speaking of PC's end-cab switcher roster, it's probably easier to take the "what they didn't have" route. There were no EMD NW3s, NW5s, SW1001s, or MP15s; no Alco S5s, S6s, or S8s; no Limas; and no "cow-and-calf" sets from any builder. A few goodies, such as PRR's road-switcher-powerful H20-44s and NYC's (Chicago River & Indiana) Lima switchers *almost* made the list but were gone by 1968. Generally, PC maintained PRR and NYC practices and kept its EMD switchers in the central and western reaches of the system, while Alcos

were the mainstay in the Northeast. The NYC Baldwins joined PRR's more substantial fleet in the Philadelphia Terminal area and points south. Likewise, PC concentrated its PRR and NYC H10-44 and H12-44 switchers at Chicago, along with its remaining FM road-switchers, which came from all three predecessors.

## Eclectic electrics

The Penn Central merger put three of New York City's major passenger carriers under one flag. The backbone for commuter operations on all were hundreds of M.U. cars in various makes and models, but all three roads also used unique electric locomotives for intercity trains and heavy commuter runs. Although the units had been tailor-made for each predecessor, PC increased utilization through clever reassignments, permitting retirement of the most elderly. Central's 40- and 50-year-old class P and T motors kept up their customary passenger work in NYC's third-rail territory until surplus NH FL9s began bumping them, while ancient S motors handled switching. In an extreme example of upgrading, an



**Lima-Hamilton built PC 8063 for NYC, which gave it an EMD engine in 1957. A boiler in the short hood won it and sister 8062 coachyard jobs at Chicago, then Philly, where it works in June '69.**

William J. Brennan, Morning Sun Books collection





**PC ended electric freight operations on its New Haven lines and moved NH's 11 E33s to the former PRR; two pass Seabrook, Md., in early 1971.**

T. H. Desnoyers, Krambles-Peterson Archive

NYC T-1b constructed in 1913 replaced a 1910-built Pennsy DD1 in Sunnyside Yard wire-train service.

Under catenary, years of deferred maintenance caught up with the New Haven EP-5 "Jets," causing their banishment from passenger service. PC, on which they were class E40, rebuilt two for freight work on ex-PRR electrified lines, where they had limited success but nevertheless freed up a few much-needed diesel road-switchers. More successful were the 11 NH road-switcher electrics originally built for the Virginian; as PC class E33 they quickly traded their NH

orange for PC black and went to work on Pennsy freight routes. Although PC soon retired PRR's antique B1 and L6 box-cabs, its 119 GG1s and 66 E44 freight motors continued to head up most trains under former PRR wire. The GG1s continued to suffer frame cracks in the PC years, causing more retirements, but the loss was minimized through the increased use of diesels on trains that began or ended their runs beyond PRR wire. In one of the more visible PC power adjustments, GG1s began leading passenger trains in NH electrified territory east of Penn Station, New York, after a

nasty problem with pantograph catches was straightened out.

## Second-generation alumni

Although New Haven finished off steam by 1952, the much larger NYC and PRR took another five years to accomplish the task. In their rush to dieselize, all three roads made a number of poor diesel purchases, and began rationalizing their rosters in the late 1950s. PRR had its Baldwin Centipedes and FM Erie-builts in and out of storage by 1959; NYC put EMD prime movers in much of its Baldwin and FM fleet in 1956; and NH



**After absorbing the New Haven, PC began running GG1s through Penn Station, New York, without an engine change. G 4919 is under ex-NH wire with the westbound *Colonial* at Pelham Bay, N.Y., in April 1969.**

William J. Brennan, Morning Sun Books collection



**The oldest units on the PC roster were the S motors, built during 1904–08 for NYC's third-rail lines into Grand Central Terminal. Long since demoted to switching duty, three rest under GCT in March '72.**

J. W. Swanberg



Small efforts to brighten the PC image took the form of a red “P” on more than 100 ex-PRR/NYC units (like RSD7 6809 with a similarly painted GP9B at DeWitt, N.Y., in September 1969), and an orange “C” on a group of new GP40s (including No. 3170 at Rochester, N.Y., in July 1970).

Two photos, Tom Hoffmann collection (3170, Al Gorney)

picked up 30 GP9s, 15 RS11s, and 15 H16-44s in 1956 to begin retirement of its well-worn DL109 fleet. As the early-1960s trade-in programs became popular, Central sampled small batches of GP20s and RS32s in 1961, followed by GP30s in 1962. Pennsy followed suit in 1962 with handfuls of U25Bs and RS27s.

During 1963–65, both big roads dove deeper into the second generation and began assembling fleets of GP30s, GP35s, and U25Bs in sizeable numbers, while No. 3 builder Alco began to trail off, shunned by NYC and given only token C425 orders by PRR. At the same time, in 1964–65 New Haven bought its final new diesels: 10 Alco C425s and 26 U25Bs.

In early 1965, while both Pennsy and Central continued adding to their fleets of GP35s and U25Bs, PRR diverged by adding a new breed: 40 six-motor SD35s along with 10 C628s and 10 U25Cs. Pennsy's reason was, of course, the mountainous terrain it traversed in western Pennsylvania. While the second-generation, four-axle units were ideal in the flatlands, they were not equal on the grades where six powered axles produced superior continuous tractive effort.

In 1966, a committee of NYC and PRR mechanical supervisors prepared the locomotive roster for the merger. The master renumbering took place without a hitch. Henceforth, all new locomotives began arriving in “basic black” with only four NYC oval emblems or six PRR key-stone emblems, anticipating easy Penn Central rebranding when the time came. In 1966 and '67, selection of specific new models, however, was still the prerogative of each road, and both were careful to choose only models they could live with should the whole merger idea collapse. “Water-level” NYC stayed with four-axle units, ordering GP40s, U28Bs, U30Bs, and a token 10 C430s; PRR threw all its business to big-pawed six-axle jobs, exclusively ordering SD40s,

SD45s, U28Cs, U30Cs, and C630s, never returning to the four-axle market.

Technically, the name was different that bleak February 1968 morning, when 4,079 NYC and PRR first- and second-generation diesels, plus electric locomotives, began working as a team. New purchases and older units receiving major shopping soon began to appear in full PC black attire with little of the later notorious PC “patchwork” to be seen. U33Cs and C636s ordered by PRR were delivered in PC paint in spring '68 (but the five SD45s also ordered by PRR in January didn't arrive until August). PC 6540, the first U33C constructed by GE, was shipped in full Penn Central paint on February 16, 1968, slightly more than two weeks after the merger. Most NYC E units were reassigned to Harrisburg, with the remainder coming after the arrival of Amtrak in 1971.

Maintenance was divided along builder lines: GEs were handled at Selkirk, N.Y.; EMDs at Collinwood, Ohio, and Altoona, Pa.; Alco Centurys at Conway, Pa.; and older Alcos at DeWitt, N.Y. Out on the road, strange consists appeared, mixing PRR, NYC, and PC units in places that didn't seem right, such as NYC F7s in Enola and PRR E8s at Harmon. Anticipating power shortages, PC leased diesels from Bangor & Aroostook; Bessemer; Missabe; Great Northern; Katy; Northern Pacific; N&W; and Richmond, Fredericksburg & Potomac.

Reacting to negative comments about the PC livery, in April 1968 Altoona began releasing shopped diesels with a red “P” in the logo. Eventually, 149 diesel and electric locomotives received this treatment until it was discontinued two months later when the red began to fade to pink. PC GP35s received the most red P's with 21, followed by GP30s with 19 and GP9s with 16. After the program was discontinued and all-white PC logo production returned, in October 1968



Fresh at Harmon, N.Y., in March '76, PC 5041 was one of 39 FL9s that, beginning in 1970, got blue and yellow at the behest of New York's MTA. Alas, the colors did not age well.

Robert J. Yanosey, Morning Sun Books collection

fans were surprised by the appearance of 17 new GP40s wearing orange C's. There has never been a satisfactory explanation of this phenomenon.

Four months after Penn Central's creation, one of its trains was watched on TV almost as closely as the moon landing a year later would be. On June 8, 1968, the 21-car Robert F. Kennedy funeral train was drawn between New York City and Washington by two fully PC-painted GG1s.

## True Penn Central power

Later in 1968, true PC-ordered locomotives began arriving: 154 GP40s in August and October, 65 U30Bs in September, and 4 U33Cs in October. Despite the new power, operations in the field were seizing up. Implementation of pre-merger planning was severely lacking, and weaknesses quickly resulted in service problems. Connecting railroads were ignoring instructions and delivering cars to the most convenient junction or yard, some only on the other side of town, but miles away railroad-wise from where they should have been. Nothing had been done to integrate the PRR and NYC computer systems. The newly combined railroad turned nightmarish — cars without billing and misrouted and/or misplaced cars were commonplace. Entire trains were “lost.” Yet the federal





**PC's 77 U23Bs — GE's answer to EMD's versatile GP38 — arrived in 1972–73. Nearly new 2720 leads an ex-PRR SD45 on a westbound at Terre Haute, Ind., in September '72.**

Art Peterson, Krambles-Peterson Archive



**SW1500 9509, approaching Dolton, Ill., with a hot-metal train in September 1975, was among the first new units PC acquired after the hiatus caused by the June 1970 bankruptcy.**

Art Peterson, Krambles-Peterson Archive

government persisted in its plan to unload the deeply distressed New Haven Railroad on Penn Central's back. NH was added to PC on January 1, 1969, creating further losses and distraction.

The picture didn't improve in 1969: an economic recession set in, traffic levels were off nationally, and the winter of 1969–70 proved one of the worst in the 20th century. Mid-year, PC finally veered away from PRR/NYC practices and ordered some universal power equally at home on Horseshoe Curve, skirting Lake Erie, or wandering down a branch in Connecticut. It began placing

orders for GP38s, eventually amassing 264, and after 1971 continuing with 223 GP38-2s. Remarkably, in picking up a batch of Rio Grande F7s for trade-ins on the 1970 GP38 order, PC found four of the covered wagons in such good condition that they received PC numbers and were put into service around Cleveland. In addition to a batch of U33Bs originally intended for Rock Island, other new models came to PC in 1970: 19 U23Cs and 35 SD38s for hump service. However, all the new locomotives in the world were not going to help what ailed Penn Central. On June 21, 1970, the unthink-

able happened as Penn Central declared bankruptcy, 29 months after inception.

The initial effects of PC's bankruptcy were unexpectedly felt by two of the road's affiliates. Five SW1500s delivered to and painted for Indiana Harbor Belt and five GP38s painted for Pennsylvania-Reading Seashore Lines were suddenly withdrawn, sent back to EMD, and relettered PENN CENTRAL to make the banks happy. In October 1970, PC agreed to sell the commuter-train portions of the Hudson and Harlem lines to New York State's Metropolitan Transit Authority, and to lease the commuter portions of the New Haven Line to Connecticut. Although PC continued to operate the commuter lines, some FL9s were repainted into MTA blue and yellow with PC logos. Most concern for reorganization revolved around the freight business, however, and the bankruptcy trustees granted permission for PC to lease 45 SD40s with delivery commencing December 1970.

On September 1, 1970, the trustees named a new Penn Central president, William H. Moore, who hailed from the Southern Railway. He set about restoring





**PC's bankruptcy caused new PRSL GP38s 2010–2014 to be diverted to the parent road.**  
Bill Lane collection

the confidence of PC's major shippers, making changes to provide better service, and streamlining management, operations, and facilities. One of his first edicts was to wipe out all names and heralds from the predecessors in order to dampen "red team vs. green team" thinking and unify PC under one banner. Moore wanted this done immediately, and paint cans came out from Boston to St. Louis, slapping black on any key-stone, oval, or "NH" still extant on locomotives. As a result, many PC units took on an untidy look that only seemed to mirror the road's chaotic condition.

### Forced frugality

New-locomotive orders soon resumed after the bankruptcy disruption. Happy with the SW1500s acquired through the IHB, PC ordered 10 of its own for delivery in February 1971, and 50 more in 1972. With the coming of Amtrak in May 1971, PC sold 30 GG1s and more than 50 E8s to the passenger railroad. The GP38s

continued to arrive in waves, now including specialized batches with or without dynamic brakes, dual controls, extended cabs, larger fuel tanks, more ballast, or greater sand capacity. In 1972–73, 114 of the new GP38-2 model arrived with hi-adhesion trucks. PC also placed orders in 1972 and '73 for 77 U23Bs, the slightly larger GE equivalent of EMD's GP38. Another Bill Moore legacy was his effort to put a Southern Railway stamp on PC's diesel fleet: 9 GP38-2s and 27 U23Bs, all with standard low short hoods, were set up to run long-hood forward!

Driven to frugality, PC took steps to extend the life of some of its more valued first-generation power. In 1969, it rebuilt more than 100 old NW2s, SW7s, and SW9s into 1,200 h.p. NW2u's. More innovative, in 1972 Dewitt Shops experimented by installing an EMD V12 engine from a retired E8 into one of PC's hundreds of RS3s. The result proved successful, and PC started the "Dewitt Geep" program, releasing the first production-model RS3m in January 1974; the road did more than 30 conversions and the program continued into Conrail. Another PC program was intended to stretch the life of an early second-generation model, the former NYC GP20s. Continued operation of the GP20s' turbocharger was no longer cost-effective and, in 1972, PC elected to modernize some for use in local or yard service with non-turbo 645 engine parts and paper air filters.

By 1974, motive power on Penn Cen-

tral main lines became both predictable and conventional: modern GPs, SDs, and U-boats led most general freight or mineral trains. The TrailVan fleet was almost the exclusive domain of GP40s, U30Bs, and U33Bs. Wherever possible, GP7s and 9s handled secondary assignments with RS3s, RS11s, and RS3m's filling in elsewhere. After the 3-R Act passed in January 1974, it became clear that trustees were holding off expenditures for more new locomotives and instead concentrating on the shape of the evolving federal plan. With this still uncertain, the consensus seemed to be to keep PC intact, maintaining operations albeit with slow orders, deferred maintenance, and frequent derailments.

So it was that the SW1500s and GP38-2s delivered in October 1973 were Penn Central's final new-locomotive acquisitions. As PC approached the startup of Conrail, it could look back on an all-time locomotive fleet that totaled at least 82 diesel models and 13 electric types. However, it had done much to boil the oddballs out of the fleet by 1976 and would enter Conrail with a pure EMD, GE, and Alco diesel roster (plus three Baldwin switchers). Counting the electrics, PC turned over 3,866 locomotives to Conrail on April 1, 1976; this was 526 fewer than PRR, NYC, and NH contributed to Penn Central. They would provide almost 80 percent of Conrail's opening-day roster, the core that would carry Big Blue through its first years. ■

**PC's thousands of diesels quickly flooded all corners of Conrail. Sayre, Pa., once colorful with Lehigh Valley units, is all black in fall '76.**

Robert J. Yanosey, Morning Sun Books collection

