Underdog GP30

THIS BELOVED MODEL STILL COULDN'T BREAK THROUGH ON SOME CLASS I RAILROADS

BY DAVID LUSTIG

The 1960s saw a three-way race for diesel locomotive sales among Alco, Electro-Motive, and newcomer General Electric. Alco and EMD offered the C424/C425 and GP30, respectively, while GE made its entry to the North American mainline diesel locomotive market with the U25B.

For EMD, the 2,250 hp GP30 of 1962 marked a departure from prior models. It featured a unique "beetle-browed" cab, as described by Jeff Wilson in his "Guide to North American Diesel Locomotives," with a cowling that extended back to the dynamic brake blister mid-unit. It also featured a pressurized engine compartment that first appeared on the rival U25B. Finally, it marked a departure from EMD model designations that, for a brief while anyway, denoted a unit's approximate horsepower rating.

Despite selling almost 1,000 copies, the GP30 was not a uniform hit with North American railroads. Santa Fe, Southern, and Union Pacific saw the model as a logical next-generation replacement for their motive power rosters, much of it reaching retirement age. Others bought fewer, and some dipped their motive power roster toe in the turbocharged pool with only tepid curiosity. New York Central went for 10, Atlantic Coast Line picked up nine, and Canadian Pacific opted for just a pair.

Toledo, Peoria & Western 700 leads GP18 600 and an Alco RS2 at East Peoria, Ill., in February 1965. Lloyd Transportation Library collection

One way to quantify the insignificance of these fleets: note the mighty UP opted for 40 copies of the cabless GP30B variant.

Then there were the mid-size Class I railroads, when there were such things, that either surgically sampled the new model with an eye to augmenting their fleet or were just testing the new technology to see if was worth the investment. In that vein, Nickel Plate went for 10 units; Chicago Great Western eight; Chicago & Eastern Illinois three; and Alaska, and Toledo, Peoria & Western one each.

Part of the timidity of some railroads in the late '50s and early '60s was, besides lingering competition from Alco, EMD had a newcomer to the U.S. Class I mainline railroad market nipping at its heels; the just-introduced 2,500 hp General Electric U25B. Long a builder of all sizes of locomotives on the international market, the "Universal 2,500 hp, four-axle" design was loaded with advanced features for its day along with the company's more-robust-than-EMD model 752 traction motors.

The model designation proposed by EMD for its new creation was GP22, reflecting the approximate horsepower under the hood, similar to the GP18, GP20, and SD24 before. But with perception being key to marketing, GP22 sounded technically

Alaska Railroad 2504 rests at Anchorage in July 1979. Keith E Ardinger, Lloyd Transportation Library collection

Phelps Dodge 29 works at Ajo, Ariz., in May 1979. Thomas H. Chenoweth, Lloyd Transportation Library collection

Chicago & Eastern Illinois 239 with GP35 272 at Mitchell, Ill., in October 1966. Ken L. Douglas, Brian M. Schmidt collection

Canadian Pacific GP30 5000 at Windsor, Ontario, in 1967 with a Montreal-built Alco Century. Brian M. Schmidt collection

Scarlet-and-gray GP30s at Olivette, Mo.: Cotton Belt 5006 switches solo in 1982; below: SP 5011 mingles with first generation Geeps in 1984. Two photos, Michael A Wise, Lloyd Transportation Library collection

inferior to U25B, hence a quick rebranding to GP30.

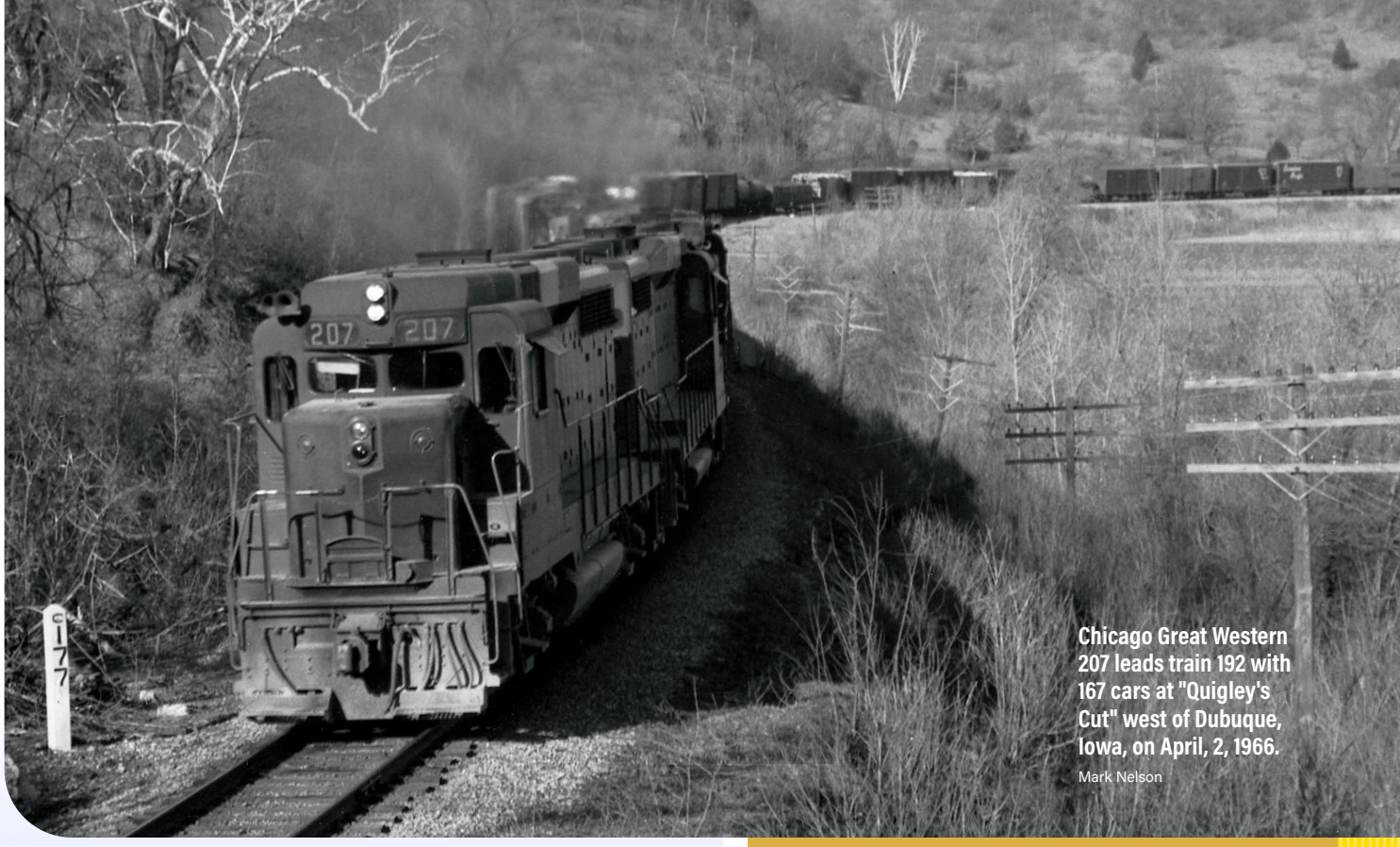
Despite selling about half as many copies as the GP30, the introduction of the GE product to the North American market shook EMD. Here was a new competitor, one not saddled with legacy thinking and designs of those that were now slowly fading into the past.

Railroads such as Santa Fe and Union Pacific bought small batches of U25Bs and when compared to the EMD product, found them either wanting or were just not really all that interested in complicating their rosters with yet another brand.

For Southern Pacific it was just the opposite, buying only eight GP30s (plus 10 for subsidiary Cotton Belt) but still finding spots for 68 U25Bs on its roster. Similarly, New York Central went for 10 GP30s, but had 70 of the rival U25B in its fleet.

In the 1960s and 1970s, North American railroads had their choice of turbocharged and non-turbocharged units when thumbing through the builder's catalogs. The thinking at that time was to use the newer turbocharged units, like the GP30, in mainline operations where they could be used efficiently, while their lesser, non-turbocharged, lower-horsepower brothers could be used to best effect on secondary lines and in peddler service where high speeds were not a priority. One exception was Phelps Dodge, which purchased nine GP30s for its New Cordelia Mine in Ajo, Ariz.

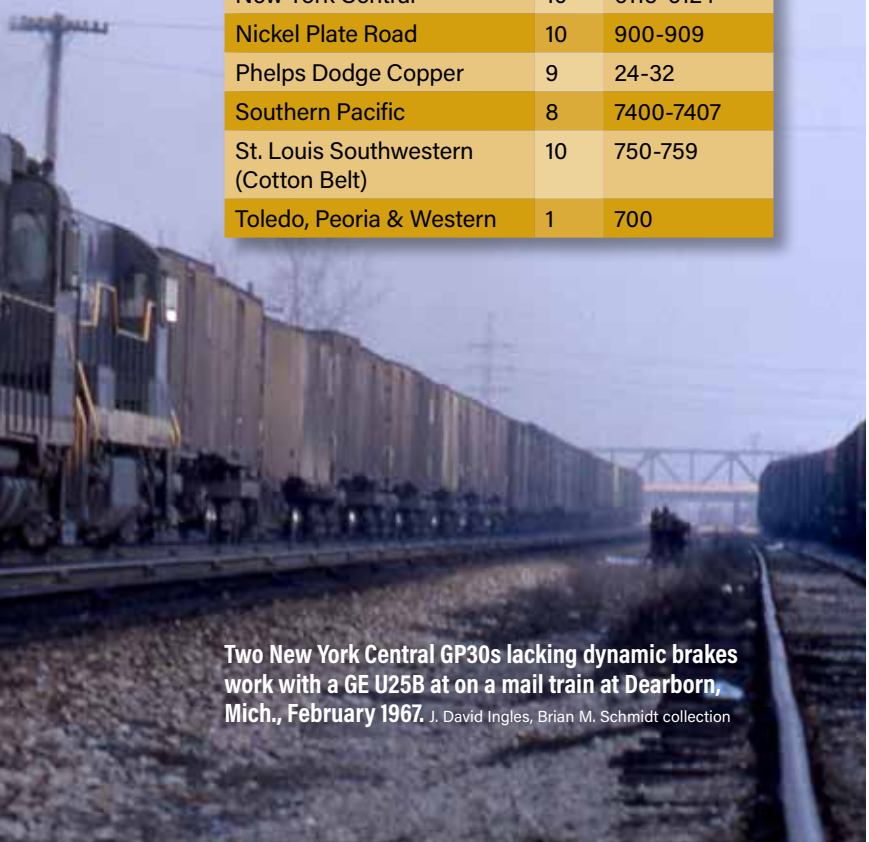
These smaller GP30 fleets showed that EMD was not always the dominant builder, as seen by the preference on some roads for the U25B over the GP30. Perhaps more important to railfans, they provided trackside observers some extra variety in their day.



Chicago Great Western 207 leads train 192 with 167 cars at "Quigley's Cut" west of Dubuque, Iowa, on April, 2, 1966. Mark Nelson

GP30 small fleets

Railroad	Qty.	Nos. as built
Alaska Railroad	1	2000
Atlantic Coast Line	9	900-908
Chicago & Eastern Illinois	3	239-241
Chicago Great Western	8	201-208
Canadian Pacific	2	8200-8201
New York Central	10	6115-6124
Nickel Plate Road	10	900-909
Phelps Dodge Copper	9	24-32
Southern Pacific	8	7400-7407
St. Louis Southwestern (Cotton Belt)	10	750-759
Toledo, Peoria & Western	1	700



Two New York Central GP30s lacking dynamic brakes work with a GE U25B at on a mail train at Dearborn, Mich., February 1967. J. David Ingles, Brian M. Schmidt collection

Atlantic Coast Line 906 heads train 109 out of Rocky Mount, N.C., in May 1963. The road had nine units. Wiley M. Bryan

Nickel Plate 909 poses for its builder's photo. Like ACL and NYC, NKP opted for units without dynamic brakes. EMD