2001 UPDATE

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There is an old saying that starting a job means that it's already 50% complete. I'm sure many of you have noted that our GP20, the WP 2001, is slowly having it's complexion changed.It's a big job, and very exciting in that we all can't wait to see it finished (yes, we are painting it in the original factory silver and orange paint scheme).

I admit to being an amateur, but in the last year and a half I have learned more about prep work, kinds of paint, costs, kinds of sandpaper (you get real familiar with sandpaper) and so on. I've also become familiar with the 2001 and its little idiosyncrasies.

I decided to take this project on during Railroad Days in 1987. I've been hounding the paint pros ever since about how to paint something measuring 15 feet high by 56 feet long by 10 feet wide. That makes 2540 square feet of various area that need to be prepped and painted. I also gained a lot of knowledge painting the Mountain Diesel F units when working for MDT.

One thing everybody agrees on is that a good paint job is only as good as the surface it was put on. Prep! You probably remember what a dog the 2001 looked like. This is mostly from lack of good prep work in the past. There are several opinions on how to prep properly. The Western Pacific's method was to send the locomotive through the washrack, using harsh chemicals to clean the locomotive enought so that a paintable surface would be created. That's fine if you plan to retire and/or scrap a locomotive in 3 to 5 years I suppose. But what if you want to have the paint job last an indefinite amount of time where it will sit outside in the hot sun and cold winters of Portola? We're talking archival type stuff here, gang! You don't want to have to do it again later (witness the #608, no offense to those who did that work) because you need it in a hurry now.

One method of prepping is to sand blast the entire locomotive. This is the method used on the #6051, the California State Railroad Museum's SP E-8, a paint job I truly admire. Did you know that the CSRM and the City of Portland bought their "Daylight" colored paints together in the same batch? Sand blasting has the advantage of eliminating both old paint and rust, leaving an immediately paintable surface after cleanup.It also gets those hard to reach places that sandpaper can't get to.

The problem? After sand blasting you have to paint immediately or rust takes over. Sandblasting also leaves a satin texture which may not be desireable in the final analysis, although usually the paint is thick enough to hide this and it won't be noticeable. But another major problem with sand is that you'll be forever cleaning it out of your locomotive. When you paint a sandblasted locomotive, you'll invariably find a pocket of sand that your compressed air spray gun will spray all over the new paint thereby inviting you to start your prep work again! I won't even detail the work involved in sealing the cab, engine, motors, electrical equipment and other items against the sand. I heard that the CSRM will never sand blast a locomotive again. Certain areas, like handrails, steps, plow and so on can be removed and blasted (by the way, we are putting the snowplow back on the 2001).

Chemicals. I've had several people recommend using paint remover. It's a very expensive proposition and a toxic nightmare. But there (again) are certain areas that it is well-suited for, like radiator shutters, fanblades, grids, etc, where you can't sand and blasting is not recommended.

This leaves sanding for the rest. Your old paint has to be roughed up so that the new paint will stick. Sanding (with paper, rotary tools, etc) is the most often used method. An auto usually only has a couple of paint coats. On the 2001 I have discovered as many as 10 coats in some areas!

This creates other problems. Because of the WP's shortcut methods, the old paint jobs have a high rate of failure, such as cracking, peeling, rust, fading and bubbling. The worst areas are the front and back ends. Lack of prepping and weathering has let the aged paint crack all the way to the metal surface. After sanding down to metal, there are many tiny lines of rust throughout to which one has to apply the grinder and slowly work them out. Because paint, as you know, will not adhere to rust. This causes yet another problem. The thickness of the paint is such that where you sand to metal, or for that matter, 2 or 3 coats of paint, you have created an uneven surface that shows up quite well after being painted. This means Bondo work - filler putty that fills up the holes. If you've ever worked with Bondo, you know there's a lot of work involved just getting it right. I'm still learning. But a decision was made that it's easier to sand down to bare metal in those areas, than it is to use Bondo. You use almost as many sanding discs in either process. And with Bondo you don't know if it's right until you've got that final coat of paint on.

This is fun?!?

Many of you have noticed that I have Bondoed and primed one end of the 2001 and on the other have take it down to bare metal. The primered end doesn't look bad from a distance, but up close you can see where the surface is just slightly ragged. I was taking a chance that the bare metal end, exposed as it is, might rust, but thanks to Portola's dry air, no rust has developed!

To me this is a learning process and something we'll all benefit from. Doing a careful job will help us determine how to do future paint work, especially on the #805. Everyone has been very supportive of our efforts and hopefully the results will be something we'll all be proud of.

Win A Trip!

Enclosed with this issue of the Train Sheet are 5 raffle tickets for a railfan trip for two to South America. Chris Skow is donating this trip through his Trains Unlimited Tours. You may purchase one, two or all, but are under no obligation to purchase any of the tickets. If you do wish to purchase the tickets, please fill in the stubs and mail with your remittance to :

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