

Western Pacific Railroad 501

Diesel Electric Switching Locomotive

This little engine was the Western Pacific's first diesel-electric locomotive. Sent west by the Electro Motive Corporation in 1939 to demonstrate the virtues of diesel power to the WP, the railroad tried the locomotive in various locations and services in late September. Management liked what it could do and authorized the purchase of the engine and the building of two sisters within two months of its arrival. This event marked the beginning of the company's push to eliminate steam locomotives. Less than 14 years later, the WP became the first large western railroad to be completely dieselized.

The 501 worked at a number of terminals, including San Francisco, where it was needed to eliminate smoke and steam while spotting cars inside a can factory. Early in her career, the engine most often worked the yards and spurs in Oakland or San Francisco, including switching the barges and ferries that carried freight cars between the two cities. In later years, it was more likely to be found in Sacramento or leased to subsidiary Sacramento Northern.

In 1965, the 501 and sister 502 were formally transferred to the Sacramento Northern (a onetime electric interurban railroad). They were renumbered SN 401 and 402 and used to eliminate the SN's last electrified freight operation, located between Marysville and Yuba City, California. A "hangar queen" (locomotive from which parts are stripped to keep others running) by the late 1970s, some believed this historic locomotive would never run again. However, in 1980, 401/501 was repaired and sold to Corn Products Corporation in Stockton, California for use as a plant switcher. In 1987, Corn Products donated the locomotive to the Feather River Rail Society. It has since been restored to its original Western Pacific appearance.

builder

Electro-Motive Corporation,
division of General Motors

built

August 1939

type

SW1

horsepower

600

serial number

906

original cost

\$64,525.00

top speed

45 MPH

operating weight

201,000 lbs

acquisition

donated by Corn Products