

# Rock Island 'QJs'!

A fine portrait of 'QJ' No. 6988 as it rests on the turntable at Council Bluffs, Iowa, on June 9.



Just what are two of China's most iconic locomotives doing in the heartlands of the USA? **Ian Smith** watches the Yankee QJs break records. **Pictures by Bill Raia**

**N**ewton is a typical small American town where nothing out of the ordinary seems to happen. It's well off the tourist map in the middle of Iowa, a state which is almost smack-bang in the middle of the country. However, Newton is somewhat unusual as it has a reasonable amount of heavy industry in a part of a state which is predominantly agricultural.

Part of this industry is a new ethanol manufacturing plant on the edge of the town. Ethanol is the up and coming industry in the USA as it's seen as being a major player in combating the upcoming oil shortage - the substance now being used as an additive to petrol and perhaps in time being able to supplement it.

The ethanol plant is served by the Iowa Interstate Railroad, which operates on much of the Chicago-Omaha main line of the old Rock Island Line, made famous in the UK by skiffle singer Lonnie Donegan in 1955. However, it wasn't ethanol that had brought me to Newton on September 10 2007. It was what was contained in a large cream-coloured building alongside the plant - two Chinese 'QJ' 2-10-2s.

The mammoth 'QJs' are probably China's most famous class of locomotive. They were produced between 1964 and 1986, the majority being built at the famous Datong works. Their full name is actually 'Qian Jin',

which means 'Progress' and they were a great success as more than 4,700 were built - only the German 'Kriegsloks' and Russian 'E' 0-10-0s were built in greater numbers. To put this into perspective, Britain only managed to build a total of 842 'Black Fives'.

As the 'Black Fives' were to the end of British steam in 1968, the 'QJs' will be forever linked with the end of steam on China's JiTong line, the world's last main line built for steam.

So why are two Chinese locomotives resting in a shed in the middle of the United States? They were imported in 2006 (SR326) by Henry Posner III, Chief Executive of the Railroad Development Corporation which owns the Iowa Interstate Railroad. Henry had long admired these locomotives since his first visit to China in 1981. When he realised in 2004 that the end of commercial steam working was at hand, he began negotiations to purchase a number of 'QJs' for use and then resale in the USA.

Henry had originally looked at buying up to four 'QJs', but settled on two, with options for more if demand was there, and he began looking at suitable candidates.

The most interesting of the pair selected is perhaps No. 7081. This had the dubious honour of working the very last ordinary steam-hauled passenger train through the

Jingpeng Pass, the 'Ribblehead' of the JiTong line. If ever a steam locomotive required preservation, this one has to be near the top of the list! The second 'QJ', No 6988, was one of the end-of-steam survivors and was in reasonable condition. It thus secured itself a new life in the USA.

Before being shipped to America, the two locomotives received a full Chinese National Railway 155,000-mile overhaul as part of the purchase deal, with additional work required to ensure that they met US Federal Railroad Administration standards. One modification required was extra bracing for the front tubeplate to meet US standards, while other changes included the use of bolts for certain parts as opposed to welding, a standard process in China.

The boilers were thoroughly overhauled and tested to 294 lb/sq in, which gives a working pressure of 195lb/sq in for operations in the USA as opposed to their normal pressure of 215. One amusing aspect of the overhaul was that the Chinese head of testing, a Mr Gao, and Henry's representative, Dennis Daugherty, were supplied with hammers. This was not just for testing various components but also because the hammer was a symbol of their authority within the works, rather like the marching stick used in the British Army!

No. 6988 made its first test runs on

*"The two locomotives set a record for steam-hauled tonnage in the 21st century by hauling a massive freight train of no less than 4,213 tons."*

● For more images and further information on the North American 'QJs', see the Railroad Development Corporation's website: [www.rrdc.com](http://www.rrdc.com)



**Above: Proper working steam, USA-style! 'QJs' Nos. 7081 and 6988 pass Menlo, Iowa, at speed on June 9.**

**Right: 'QJ' No. 7081 pilots classmate No. 6988 on the Rock Island line, east of Adair, Iowa, on June 9 with Iowa Interstate's record breaking 4,213 ton test train. On July 21 1873, near Adair, the outlaw Jesse James and his gang committed his first robbery of a moving train.**



March 18 2006 and it wasn't long before both it and No. 7081 were loaded aboard MV Wladyslaw Orkan for the 4,500-mile journey to the USA.

Both engines were unloaded in Houston, Texas, on June 10 2006 and transferred to their new home in Iowa for final modification to meet full US railroad standards. This included fitting bells and the gauges to read in pounds per square inch as opposed to the Kilopascals that the Chinese used!

Nos. 7081 and 6988 made their North American debuts on September 15 2006 when they hauled a train of 'Hiawatha' coaches over the next three days, running from Rock Island, Illinois, to Walcott, Iowa, triple-heading in parts with the Milwaukee Road's No. 261, a massive 4-8-4 built in 1944. These runs were a great success and gained the railroad much publicity and goodwill throughout the area.

### Haulage record - 4,213 tons!

The two locomotives set a record for steam-hauled tonnage in the 21st century by hauling Iowa Interstate's train BICB-07 (Blue Island, Chicago, to Council Bluffs, Iowa) between Booneville and Hancock on June 9. The weight of this massive freight train was no less than 4,213 tons.


Back in Newton, Iowa Interstate Trainmaster Adam Sutherland was there to greet me and Art Peterson, my companion from Chicago who had arranged the visit. Adam normally visits Newton on a Wednesday but he said that a Monday worked out just fine and it gave him a day out of the office!

Adam took us inside the building, which



is divided into two sections. The area in which we were standing was a store for motor vehicles and other railroad equipment. When we reached the end of this section, Adam operated the roller shutter door to reveal the massive front end of No 7081, with No. 6988 behind.

We climbed into the cab of No. 6988 where Adam revealed that during the run in June, the automatic stoker had jammed, possibly owing to the larger coal in use in America compared with China. That meant the locomotive had to be fired manually. This is not a job for the faint-hearted as the 'QJ' has a 73sq ft grate - bearing in mind that a 'Princess Royal's' grate is 45sqft!

But what of the future? The intention had always been to purchase them for resale and negotiations are, a RRDC spokesman told me, 'ongoing'. But in the meantime, they are stabled at Newton and have occasional excursions on the old Rock Island, evoking many nostalgic memories for the people nearby. 

**Above: There's not much that can dwarf a 'QJ' but a double-stack container wagon has a good go!**



**Staff and crew of the Iowa Interstate Railroad pose at Booneville with one of the line's 'newest' items of rolling stock. Iowa Interstate boss Henry Posner III is wearing the high-vis vest.**