

NEWS&PHOTOS

QJs set freight record, help flood victims

Iowa Interstate's adopted Chinese twins set 21st century record for heaviest steam-hauled freight train

Railroad Development Corp.'s Chinese QJs 6988 and 7081 raised more than \$45,000 for the Salvation Army in October to help victims of this summer's floods recover.

The majestic 2-10-2s, freshly painted with Rock Island-style Iowa Interstate logos, hauled several passenger shuffles and a dinner train out of Rock Island, Ill., on Saturday, Oct. 18. The next day, the locomotives powered a one-way move to Iowa City, Iowa, en route back to their Newton, Iowa, home.

No. 6988 made three round trips from Rock Island seven miles eastward to Silvis, Ill., and the 7081 went westward 14 miles to Walcott, Iowa, twice. Each train had four coaches and a diesel on the rear because of a lack of turning facilities. Fares were \$40 per person. The dinner train, handled by No. 7081, carried 80-seat diner *Powder River* provided by BNSF, 40-seat Iowa Interstate diner/kitchen *Abraham Lincoln*, and Interstate business car *Hawkeye*. Fares were \$150.

The doubleheaded ferry move included a tool car, all eight coaches, the *Lincoln*, and the *Hawkeye*. Coach passengers paid \$125; premium seats cost \$200.

All the while, Iowa Interstate ES44AC diesel No. 502 [see December 2008 "Locomotive"] was on display in Rock Island. People who donated were permitted to tour the weeks-old locomotive.

"The pot got so heavy we had to change it three times," says Henry Posner III, the railroad's chairman. "One guy handed me a \$50 Canadian gold coin."

The QJs hauled mainline freight CBBI (Council Bluffs, Iowa, to Blue Island, Ill.)

from Iowa City to Rock Island on the previous Friday. Posner says the 66-car train was the heaviest hauled by steam this century.

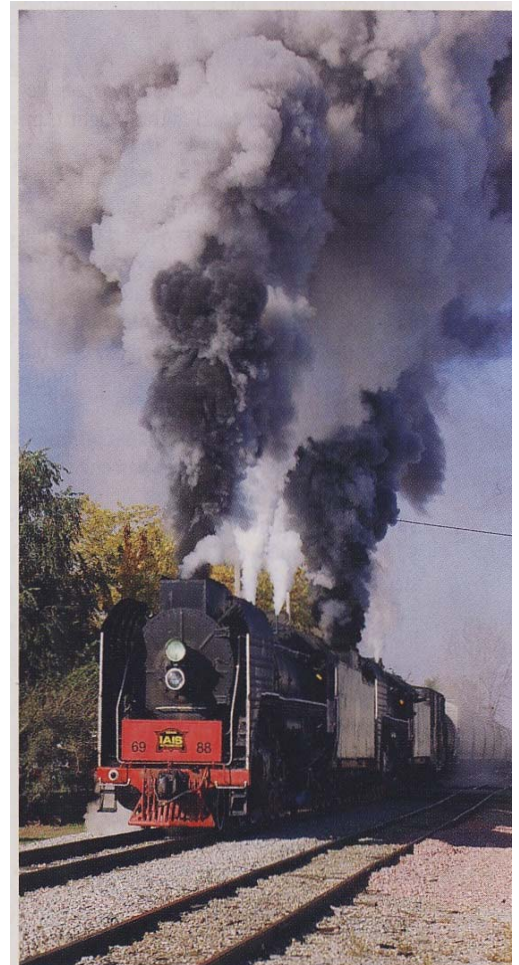
"The shock and awe of two steam locomotives starting a 6,252-ton train was a sight to behold," Posner says. "It was reminiscent of steam in the U.S. more so than in China, because Chinese practice is not to load trains to the limit."

China's Datong Locomotive Works built the QJ class from 1964 until 1986. Posner bought Nos. 6988 and 7081 for steam excursions. Because they're so new, the engines don't require as much money to keep operating as older U.S. locomotives. R.J. Corman's Central Kentucky Lines also rosters one QJ, acquired through Posner, which wears Corman No. 2008 [see August 2008 "News"]. Posner debuted his steamers in tandem in 2006, hauling passenger trains in tandem with Milwaukee Road 4-8-4 No. 261.

This summer's floods devastated the Upper Midwest but particularly Iowa. It washed out Iowa Interstate in five places and submerged its home town of Cedar Rapids.

The successful October trips will help flood victims recover.

"While it was a great thing to support the Salvation Army, I'm equally proud of the flawless execution of what was a very complicated series of events," Posner says. "It required the coordination of the Iowa Interstate, BNSF, the city of Rock Island, a small army of volunteers [including R.J. Corman's Matt Schwerin, Heber Valley's Mike Manwiller, and other steam gurus] and, of course, the Salvation Army." — *Bob Withers*



Iowa Interstate's record-setting double-headed steam freight powers out of Walcott, Iowa, after stopping to take on water on Oct. 18, 2008. Stefan Loeb