

More Chinese steam coming to the U.S.

by Steve Glischinski

PITTSBURGH — Mainline steam in China is finished, but two Chinese locomotives will have a second life in U.S. in 2006, with three more possibly coming later. Railroad Development Corp. of Pittsburgh said Friday it has acquired a pair of Chinese class QJ 2-10-2 locomotives, including No. 7081, which had the distinction of hauling the world's last regularly scheduled mainline steam passenger train. The other is No. 6988. RDC (www.rrdc.com) is a privately held railway management and investment company which owns or has financial interests in rail properties in the U.S. and six other countries in Latin America, Africa, and Europe, including the Iowa Interstate Railroad linking Chicago, Des Moines, and Omaha.

According to RDC Chairman Henry Posner III, the two locomotives were overhauled in China by the Jinzhou 701 Works to meet U.S. Federal Railroad Administration standards, under the supervision of steam consultant Dennis Daugherty and under contract with U.S. company Multipower International. They were being shipped through the Chinese port of Dalian, and upon arrival in the U.S. will be shipped to the Iowa Interstate on special eight-axle flatcars. Once in Iowa, the pair will be fired up and operated once, to demonstrate that they are FRA compliant and operate properly. Posner says the locomotives will probably be tested in regular freight service on the Iowa Interstate.



No. 7081 being loaded at Dalian Port, China.

Photo by Dennis Daugherty

Why bring Chinese steam to the U.S.? "It's a test of the market, without any preconceived notions," Posner said. "I didn't see anyone else putting their hands up to buy these engines in the last year." Ideally, there would be a market to resell the engines to regional or tourist railroads. Absent that, other methods of generating revenue would be examined, such as serious photo charters or renting them out. If there is a market for the locomotives, RDC has an option to buy three more QJs.

The QJ (a derivation of the Soviet LV class) was the last Chinese steam design to go into production and was the most numerous steam class to run in China. The first prototypes were introduced in 1956. Eventually more than 4,700 QJs were built, the majority between 1964 and 1988. The Datong Locomotive Works built No. 7081 in 1986, while No. 6988 was built in 1985. Two Chinese-built steam locomotives, both 2-8-2s built in 1988, currently operate in the U.S., hauling tourists. A class JS runs on Iowa's Boone & Scenic Valley, and a class SY, built for Connecticut's Valley Railroad, was sold to the New York, Susquehanna & Western, which transferred the engine to the NYS&W Historical Society, which operates it on the Bel-Del line at Phillipsburg, N.J. A third 1988 Chinese 2-8-2, also class SY, is in storage in Pennsylvania, having worked on the now-embargoed Knox & Kane tourist line to Kinzua Viaduct.