

PRESERVATION

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Tim Lab

QJ No. 7081, seen departing Yamenmiao on Sept. 28, 2005, is headed to the U.S. for possible resale or use on the Iowa Interstate.

Big Chinese steam is headed to the heartland

Railroad Development Corp.'s pair of 2-10-2s could be just the start; three others might join them

Mainline steam in China is finished, but two Chinese locomotives will have a second life in the U.S., with three more possibly coming later.

Railroad Development Corp., of Pittsburgh, said in late April it acquired two Chinese class QJ 2-10-2s, including No. 7081, which hauled the world's last regularly scheduled mainline steam passenger train. The other is No. 6988.

RDC is a privately held railway management and investment company that owns or has financial interests in properties in the U.S. and six other countries, including the Iowa Interstate Railroad.

RDC Chairman Henry Posner III said the two QJs were overhauled in China by the Jinzhou 701 Works to meet U.S. FRA standards, under the supervision of steam consultant Dennis Daugherty and under contract with the U.S. firm Multipower International.

The two were shipped April 21 via the Chinese port of Dalian. Upon arrival at Houston, they will be moved to the Iowa Interstate on flatcars. Once in Iowa, the pair will be operated to demonstrate that they are FRA compliant and in good

working order. Posner said the 2-10-2s will be tested in regular freight service.

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 roads. Absent that, other methods of generating revenue would be examined, such as photo charters or renting them out. If there is a market for the QJs, RDC has an option to buy three more.

Introduced in 1956, the QJ was the last steam design to enter production in China. More than 4,700 were built, most during 1964-1988. Nos. 6988 and 7081 date from 1985 and '86, respectively.

Two 1988 Chinese 2-8-2s operate on U.S. tourist lines. A class JS runs on Iowa's Boone & Scenic Valley. An SY built for Connecticut's Valley Railroad was sold to New York, Susquehanna & Western; the NYS&W Historical Society now runs it at Phillipsburg, N.J. Another SY is stored in Pennsylvania, having worked on the now-embargoed Knox & Kane.