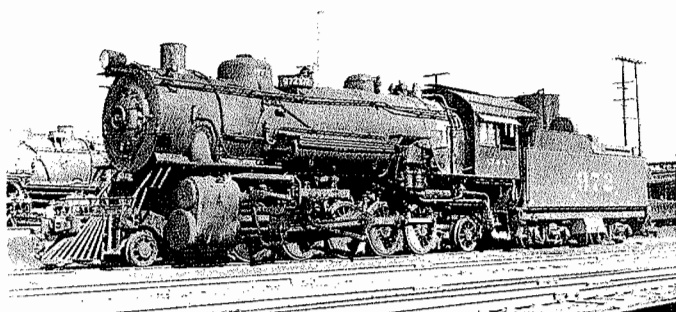
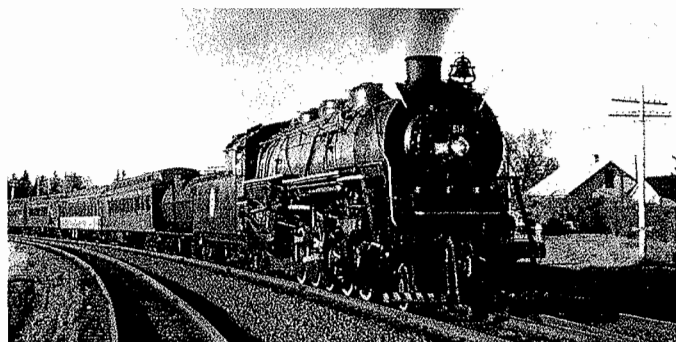


An improbable 2-10-2 revival

Chinese imports return a long-dormant wheel arrangement to the active list



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The 2-10-2 or Santa Fe type was one of the dominant steam locomotive wheel arrangements of the 20th century. Between 1903, when the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe commissioned the first ones, and 1931, when the Reading Company received the last examples, some 2,200 of the heavy freight engines were built for North American service. That's twice the number of 4-8-4 Northern's constructed, and three-and-a-half times the total for the 2-8-4 Berkshire. Yet, unlike those other two types, the 2-10-2 is underrepresented among preserved steam locomotives.

Only eight Santa Fe types survived the scrapper's torch: Duluth, Missabe & Iron Range No. 502 (Baldwin, 1916), now at the Museum of Transportation, St. Louis; DM&IR No. 506 (Brooks, 1919), National Railroad Museum, Green Bay, Wis.; Canadian National No. 4008 (Brooks, 1919), Rainy River, Ont.; CN No. 4100 (Canadian Locomotive Co., 1924), Canadian Railway Museum, Delson, Que.; AT&SF No. 940 (Burnham, Williams & Co., 1903), Bartlesville, Okla.; Texas & New Orleans (SP) No. 975 (Brooks, 1918), Illinois Railway Museum, Union, Ill.; T&NO (SP) No. 982 (Baldwin, 1922), Union Station/Minute Maid Park, Houston, Texas; and

Union Pacific No. 5511 (Baldwin, 1923), UP engine house, Cheyenne, Wyo.

Though powerful, 2-10-2's tended to be slow, heavy, hard on track, and old (they peaked in popularity around 1920), and so were not good candidates for restoration. So after Missabe No. 514 dropped its fire following a September 29, 1962, fantrip, it seemed unlikely that we would ever again see a live Santa Fe on this continent.

Yet, thanks to the motive-power policies of a developing nation half a world away and to the outside-the-box thinking of the head of an international railroad holding company, the unlikely became fact this past September. When China's JiTong Railway finally dieselized recently, a number of QJ-class 2-10-2's, some built in the late 1980's, became available. Thinking there might be a market in this country for such relatively new steam power, Henry Posner III, chairman of Railroad Development Corp., which operates eight railroads on four continents, bought two QJ's and moved them to the U.S.

The engines—Nos. 6988 (built 1985) and 7081 (1986)—arrived at RDC's Iowa Interstate Railroad in late June, broke in on IAIS freights in early September, and made their public debut on a series of excursions out of Rock Island, Ill.,

Santa Fe's first 2-10-2's (top left) were essentially Decapods with a trailing truck. Missabe 514 (above left, at Iron Junction, Minn., on September 29, 1962) was the last active 2-10-2 in the U.S. QJ's 6988 and 7081, newest steam engines in the land, pass through Davenport on the Iowa Interstate with a fantrip for Muscatine on September 17, 2006.

September 14-17. Minneapolis-based Friends of the 261 provided crews and cars, which the group ferried down to the Quad Cities behind its Milwaukee Road 4-8-4. The resultant gathering in Rock Island of three big engines in steam was a spectacle not seen since Railfair '99 at the California State Railroad Museum in Sacramento. The QJ's doubleheaded on trips to Iowa City and Homestead (on the Iowa Interstate) on the 15th and Muscatine and Fruitland, Iowa, (Iowa, Chicago & Eastern) on the 17th, and *tripleheaded* with the 261 to Bureau, Ill., (IAIS) on the 16th.

No. 261's presence enabled a comparison of U.S. and Chinese big steam. There were many similarities, as the QJ's were based on a Soviet 2-10-2 design which was derived from American-built 10-coupled engines of 1930-31. By U.S. standards, the QJ's are not especially large, with an engine weight of 293,000 pounds (vs. 460,000 for the 261).

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the QJ's is their position on the ladder of steam locomotive evolution relative to the 261, which was built by Alco in 1944. Commenting on the imports' relative lack of sophistication despite their youth, one 261 crewman observed, "The QJ's are 40 years newer than the 261, but 20 years older."

Nevertheless, the QJ's are free steamers with tight running gear, powerful yet light on their feet. Whether RDC finds buyers for them or keeps them for its own use, it seems the 2-10-2 type is back for a while.—Rob McGonigal ■