

## WPMW 37 - RARE WORKHORSE

- Rod McClure, President

The WPMW 37 is an often unseen item in our vast collection. It is almost always spotted on the East end of Track One, locked up and quiet. For those of you who don't recognize the number, the 37 is our 200 ton rail-mounted Industrial Brownhoist Derrick. It was built new for the WP in 1937 as a steam powered wreck crane and spent most of its carrier cleaning up derailments in the Feather River Canyon. In 1972, it was repowered by Holt Bros. Caterpillar in Stockton with diesel prime mover.

This historic derrick was donated to the FRRS in the 1980s. In many of the books on the WP, you can almost always find a picture of the 37 cleaning up a derailment or wreck. It has been used around the museum for those odd mishaps and other heavy lifting duties. Some years ago member Jim Ley was the only one qualified to operate the 37. I took an interest in learning how to make it work and Jim was a great teacher.

The 37 is a very big and delicate machine and it takes a lot of TLC to keep it in running condition. All the controls and equipment are original to when it was built except the diesel engine and hydraulic drive. Unlike most modern cranes of all types, the 37's controls are completely air powered and its outriggers are hand operated. Like much of our equipment, the less it is used, the more things don't work right. Over the last few years Steve Habeck, Dave McClain and Phil Schmierer and I have been doing a lot of maintenance work on the 37 in an attempt to make it more reliable. Last year, we began to have a growing need for the 37's assistance with projects around the Museum and found we were using it more and more often. The diesel engine began to smoke quite a bit and make unusual (and mechanically unpleasant) noises. McClain found an auxiliary internal drive gear that was going bad and would require replacement soon. A temporary fix to return it to service quickly was needed as we committed to loading five former Southern Pacific passenger cars onto trucks for our friends at the Timber Heritage Association of Eureka, California.

The day before the first load, and half way through getting the passenger car rigged for lift,

the drive quit. Knowing the need to load these cars and other jobs that were waiting I called Cashman Caterpillar of Sparks, Nevada. The next day one of their mechanical people was inside the 37 looking for the problem. He found it alright: Three weeks and over \$6000 later, the 37 was running better than it had in a long time. This is the first time we have had to do major work in the 37 since it was donated by the UP.

For the next few weeks, Steve Habeck, Cody "Noodle" Wilson, Norman Holmes and I met every Monday morning around 10:00 AM with the truckers and volunteers from Timber Heritage to load an 80 foot SP coach onto a truck with a moveable bolster on one end and a dolly on the other. We would lift one end of the car into the air with the 37 and pull out the trucks, place the truck dolly under the rear just right and balanced and then turn the crane and do the other end. You will note from the pictures this was not an easy accomplishment as the car had to be perfectly centered on the dolly and balanced.



*"Railcars" and "Precision" are not words that often go together, but here we see members of the loading crew ensuring that the 37 and Rod McClure drop the end of this 85+ year old SP suburban coach precisely in place on the truck dolly. There are few museums that regularly perform such operations.*

*- David Epling photo*

The decision was made by Timber Heritage to scrap out the last car rather than move it. So instead of loading it on a truck, we helped lift the cut up pieces with the 37 and load them in trucks. Like a true champion, the 37 performed without a single hiccup.

Now with winter here, the 37 is quiet and locked up. During the museum's winter nap time, we will start it every couple of weeks to keep it

lubed and ready to go the next time it is needed. And next spring the work will begin again as we have to replace the 200 ton cable on the big block. This will take some money and a lot of volunteers willing to get really dirty. Please feel free to contact me if you would be interested in helping or learning more about this project. The 37 has many stories to tell – If you want to listen, let me know and I'll see if I can help you to hear some of them.



Formerly owned by the Golden Gate Railroad Museum, these five Southern Pacific "subs" have been stored at the WPRM for several years after being purchased by the Virginia and Truckee Reconstruction Project. Originally built for commuter service in the San Francisco - San Jose corridor, they were deemed unsuitable for the rebuilt V&T and were resold to the Timber Heritage Association. This group is creating an amazing collection of lumber railroad equipment in the Eureka area and hopes to operate on the former Northwestern Pacific around Humboldt Bay, a service where these cars would be ideal. Here we see Steve Habeck keeping a keen eye on the lowering of one end onto the main trailer. The boom of the 37 and the spreader bar needed for slinging the cables under the car without crushing its sides towers over the scene.

- David Epling photo



A rear view of the equipment cabin of the MW37. The windows flanking the Union Pacific herald open into the operators cabin, access via a sliding door in the front right corner. The side door leads into the motor area. Originally, the rear section contained a steam boiler.

Future plans call for repainting the 37 into its traditional WP black paint scheme as funds become available.

- Mike Mucklin photo