

# Western Pacific Railroad 917-D

## Carbody-type Freight Locomotive

In 1939, the Electro-Motive Corporation completed a revolutionary railroad locomotive powered by a diesel prime mover and using an electric transmission. While this combination had been used for years in some switching and passenger locomotives, EMC was determined that their new locomotive, the FT, would replace steam locomotives in freight service. Western Pacific was an eager early buyer of this model and later its improved successors. F3 and later FP7 models were acquired for the *California Zephyr*, while the F7 model helped retire many of the railroad's steam engines.

The "F" series of locomotives, and similar models from other builders, are referred to as "streamline" or "carbody" type locomotives. Unlike later road diesels and switching engines, where all structural weight is carried by a heavy frame and the body is a covering, a "carbody" locomotive is built like a truss bridge and the body is an integral part of the weight bearing structure. Take off the body and the locomotive would collapse.

WP 917-D was part of WP's first order for the F7 model, all delivered as 4 unit sets lettered A-D (A and D units had control cabs). These "F-units" served until newer models with higher horsepower and better visibility rendered them obsolete. The WP was slow to retire them, however. The railroad was always too short of money to completely replace many older engines which could still earn a profit. By 1977, when most railroads had long since replaced their full carbody style locomotives, the WP still rostered four. That year, two of the survivors were sent to Morrison-Knudsen in Boise, ID for rebuilding, while 917-D was rebuilt by WP in Stockton. For the next three years, the newly christened "Fab 4" continued to earn their keep while generating great publicity for the WP, typically working the regular train between Stockton and San Jose, California. After the Union Pacific merger, the 917-D was retired and donated to the Bay Area Electric Railway Association. In 2005, it came to Portola as part of a large equipment trade between the FRRS and the BAERA.

**builder**

Electro-Motive Division  
of General Motors

**built**

February, 1950

**type**

F7A

**horsepower**

1500

**serial number**

8971

**original cost**

\$671,530.00

4 unit set with 2 cab and 2 booster units

**top speed**

60 MPH

**operating weight**

237,750 lbs

**acquisition**

donated by Bay Area  
Electric Railway Association