

WESTERN PACIFIC 563

- Norman Holmes

In the early 1950's Western Pacific was in the process of completing its dieselization program. Steam had been replaced by diesel east of Oroville in 1951 except for one or two Consolidations held in standby service. The Oroville-Keddie and Portola Keddie locals were being powered by Baldwin VO1000's (581-585), the Keddie-Westwood local had two Alco S-2s (559-561) that could be MU'd. These units were also used in helper service on the High Line. One undesirable characteristic with these Alcos was that they rode on Blunt trucks which had a tendency to "hunt" badly at speed which could damage the track.

WP took delivery of two Alco S-4 1,000 hp units in June, 1951. After serving the required time in Nevada to avoid California sales tax the units (563-564) were sent to Keddie to work the Westwood turn. These units rode on AAR switcher trucks which made them better suited for road work.

After delivery of EMD GP7s there was sufficient road power to assign one or more of these units to the Westwood turn, releasing the Alcos for service elsewhere.

My experience with the 563 was in the San Francisco and San Jose yards. I remember working with it in San Francisco. Because of a tunnel fire, which cut the direct route to the downtown freight house, WP obtained an alternate routing over the Santa Fe and Southern Pacific. This detour left the former line at Indiana Street WP used the Santa Fe tracks on Indiana Street to Mariposa where they crossed over the SP main line, then down between buildings to Sixteenth Street, up Sixteenth Street to the WP tracks.

WP had a large freight house on Brennan Street where WP LCL freight and several freight forwarding companies loaded and unloaded cars. There also were a number of other industries that had spur tracks in this area. The afternoon job would pull the empties from the freight house and other industries, the midnight job would spot loads for the next day.

The return trip from "uptown" involved a run down Sixteenth Street to near the SP main line where we had to be sure the switches were lined correctly for us, then around a sharp curve and up a steep grade to where we crossed over the SP.

Right when we crossed over the SP was a particularly hard pull. With the train hanging down behind you and the sharp curve at the top of the grade, this is where these Alcos really showed how they could pull. Usually a switchman or two would take a coffee can of sand and walk ahead of the engine pouring sand on the rail. The rail was full of burn marks where engines had spun their wheels. I would manipulate the throttle applying just enough throttle to keep moving, yet not allowing the wheels to spin. I always made it over the "hill".

I ran the 563 in San Jose quite often. The engineers did not like it in Stockton where it usually worked so it was sent to San Jose. The trouble with it was that the independent brake had a slow release. When the wheels would start to slide you would release the brake to stop the sliding, but this would take so long that the unit developed flat spots. After continuing complaints the mechanical forces in Stockton did something to the brake system to speed up the release.

By the mid 70's WP's Alco switching days were over. No. 563 was sold in October, 1973, to the Central California Traction and renumbered No. 50. No. 564 was sold in December 1976 to the Stockton Terminal & Eastern. It remains on the ST&E roster today although it suffers from wreck damage to the cab.

No. 563 worked on the CCT until November 1976 when it was returned to WP in exchange for RS-1, TS 746. WP immediately sold the 563 to Foster Farms for switching duties at its Livingston feed storage facility. It served Foster Farms until 1985 when replaced by a SP S-6 Alco. Foster Farms intended to either use the 563 as a standby unit or ship it to one of their other locations. They sand blasted the body and applied a coat of red primer, thus it remained exposed to the elements.

In October, 1996 the unit was offered for sale to our Society. Our organization did not have sufficient funds for the purchase so John Ryczkowski and I agreed to purchase the unit and donate it to the FRRS. We purchased the unit and agreed to move it within 90 days. On March, 1998, the 563 was loaded on a flat car and moved to Portola.

There were a number of problems encountered in the move. The high cost of crane service, availability of a suitable flat car and obtaining a set

of jacks to raise the locomotive to place it on a flat car. Steve Habeck found a set of Whitting 35 ton jacks on the Amador Central. These were brought to Portola for repair and then taken to Livingston. A power generator was rented, brackets were constructed and the unit raised to flat car height. Once the unit was placed on the flat car and tied down with cables, the SP car inspector was called to ok the load. This was not to his liking. 3/4 inch steel rods would have to be welded to the locomotive and bolted to the car. When the load finally left Livingston it had 12 steel cables and 12 steel rods holding it down. If the car turned upside down the 563 would probably not have fallen off the car. Those doing the work at Livingston included Doug Morgan, Meg Evans, John Risse, Hank Stiles, Janice Peterson, Jeremy Stiles and Bob Crews.

No. 563 arrived Portola in late March, 1998, and unloaded using the Whitting jacks in early April. Here the unit remained in its rusty primer until 2006 when I found time to give her a paint job. The 563 had six different paint schemes over its life. First black and white as delivered followed by orange and silver, solid orange, Perlman green, CCT red and finally Foster Farms carmel, black and white. I chose to repaint the green with orange trim. Since the primer had allowed the body to rust and I did not want to sand blast the body again, I choose to apply a rust sealer paint, POR-15. This special paint will seal in the rust and not allow it to penetrate the final paint. The final coat was with an acrylic enamel. Total cost of the paint job was about \$1,000. I wish to thank my wife Barbara for helping with the taping and watching to be sure I didn't fall off the roof or ladder.

Foster Farms removed the UP style number boards when they worked on the unit. I had saved the number boards from the 561 that ST&E was scrapping. I took these to Jerry Todd, a local sheet metal man, for repair. He said they were so badly rusted that he built new ones. With the help of Alan Hirasawa the 563 had its number boards. Back. In August, 2007, John and Mary Ryczkowski placed the Western Pacific on the hoods and 563 on the cab. It sure looked nice.

The 563 still needs some mechanical work, which hopefully will happen next year.

Info for this article came from WP Diesel Years by Joe Strapac, D Day on the Western Pacific by Virgil Staff and from Issue No. 90 of the Train Sheet.



*WP 563 was only 4 months out of Alco's plant when it was captured switching in Winnemucca, NV on September 24, 1951. The 2 S4s were the last locomotives delivered in black.
- photo by Norman Holmes*



Wearing bright CCT red, the former WP engine is a little over 2 years into its short career with the Central California Traction. Shown waiting at the Stockton shops on January 19, 1976, it will be traded back to the WP in November and then resold to Foster Farms.

- photo by Peter Arnold



Once again in WP colors, the 563 sits outside the museum's diesel shop shortly after its new lettering was applied.

- photo by Norman Holmes

Western Pacific Alco S-4 563

built - May 1951	cost - \$102,468
builder # - 78777	weight - 231,000 lbs.
1000 hp	tractive effort - 57,500 lbs.