



GRAVEL GERTIES

BY H. C. CROUCH



Here are a trio of the unpopular "Gravel Gerties" as delivered by Baldwin Locomotive Works in 1947. Never a big Baldwin customer in either steam or diesel days, the operating problems inherent with these diesels did little to endear Baldwin to the hearts of N.Y.C. management. For further information on these locomotives, see the Society's book, "Diesel Locomotives Of The New York Central System."

H. L. Broadbelt Collection

This rather uncomplimentary name was bestowed on the Baldwin combination units class DCA-2a, the 3200 series. These units were purchased to run opposite the EMD combination units class DCA-1a, the 3500 series, on trains nos. 27 and 28 — the "New England States".

Originally, Baldwin had the idea of using a power module for each axle. Thus when repairs were required, the complete module could be changed out. However, the state of the art in diesel power plants was such that this idea was impractical. Consequently, the Model 608 turbocharged eight-cylinder

in-line oil engine with D.C. traction generator was used. Today, of course, a modular arrangement would be possible using gas turbine-alternators with rectifiers. For load control, Baldwin employed a carbon-pile regulator which worked off the pneumatic throttle air line. This device caused a great many difficulties and many times these units came into Albany depot off the Mohawk Division with a report of "not loading". Someone would then screw down on the carbon pile and then No. 27 would "fly" over the B&A! Needless to say, this was not good for the equipment. In passing, the

F-M units class DFA-6 were delivered with this same load regulator, but so many failures and delays resulted from its use that the manufacturer finally provided a small vane type regulator similar to that used by EMD. This solved that problem for the F-M units and surely would have done the same for the Baldwins.

As delivered, the Baldwin combination units had six-wheel rigid bolster trucks with a rather short wheelbase, not unlike a tender truck. However, when track speed was reached, the vibration produced by these trucks was so intense that all sorts of actions occurred – the equipment was literally being shaken to pieces. For a long time it was a standard saying around the railroad that if anyone wanted diesel experience – ride a Baldwin – everything happened!

Finally the decision was made to re-equip the units with a new six-wheel truck similar to that on the Alco passenger units. Thus the Baldwins became the best units the railroad ever had, no road failures, no delays – all out of service at Harmon Electric Shop! The modifications necessary to accommodate the new six-wheel trucks, which had a longer wheelbase, were rather extensive. The fuel tank had to be shortened, the pilot relocated, traction motor leads extended, etc. In due time an "A" unit was completed, but, due to the pneumatic throttle, could not be MU'ed with anything else. Consequently it was used on Peekskill and Poughkeepsie local runs while a "B" unit was being converted.

Eventually the "B" unit was completed and so one day this writer received a notice that the two units were to be dispatched on a Troy local that evening and I was to ride them. Arriving at the shop well in advance of the scheduled departure, the dispatching foreman was contacted. On inquiring about the units he said "Not tonight – we have some more oil engine work to do. I'll call the roundhouse and have a steamer (usually a J class) cover the job." The next evening, the same story – steam generator work, the following evening, "We will make it tonight." The units were located in the DPA where the air men were repairing the horn on the "A" unit. While this work was progressing, an inspection of the trucks and running gear was made. At once it was noted that the brakes were applied on the "A" unit, but no brakes on the "B" unit. Checking the trainline air hoses and cocks between the units took no exceptions so the difficulty must be on top side. On checking the 24RL control valve no exceptions were taken either and thus there was no reason why the brakes should not be applied. The air men did not know of any changes that would affect the brakes so, when the horn work was completed, they investigated the brake difficulty. The dispatching time was fast approaching and no progress had been made, so the roundhouse was called and they covered the job once again. The air men finally exhausted all possibilities and so gave up for the night. A re-

quest was then left that if the trouble was located and the units were to be dispatched to give me a call. The next morning the day shift air men discovered the source of the difficulty and the units were dispatched. Through an error, no call was received and so the crew took the units and made a successful round trip.

Subsequently, modification of another "A" unit was started while the previous two units ran on Albany/Troy locals out of Harmon. By the time the second "A" unit was completed, the handwriting was on the wall. The new (then) E-8 units, class DPA-5, had arrived and "bumped" both the EMD and Baldwin combination units from their assignment to No. 27 and No. 28. As was noted in a previous issue of the "Central Headlight" most of the EMD units went back to freight service while the Baldwins continued in local service. Finally, the Baldwins were re-engined with EMD 567 engines and, like the F-M DFA-6 units which received the same treatment, their life was prolonged.

In considering maintenance costs, the lives of both the Baldwin and F-M units were predestined to be short. With EMD costs as unity, Alco costs were 1.5 times as great, Baldwin costs were 3 times, and F-M costs 4 times as great. Thus for the railroad to keep maintenance costs under control, these expensive units had to go.

As it was, the Baldwin combinations were finally retired in 1960 after several years of storage, and a great sigh of relief was heard as the N.Y.C.'s "Gravel Gerties" came to an end.



At the end of her service life, 3505 huddles with several of her sisters stored dead and waiting for scrapping several years later. The date is July, 1958 and these units now show the results of almost desperate N.Y.C. attempts to make them reliable members of the diesel roster. E.M.D. 567C engines have replaced the balky Baldwin 608SC prime movers and the original Baldwin straight equalized trucks have been changed to drop equalized A.A.R. type A-1-A castings.

