

RAILS

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NORTHEAST



THE CENTRAL LIGHTNING STRIPE

BY

GARY STUEBBEN

Talk to any New York Central fan about railroad paint schemes, and the lightning stripe is sure to be mentioned. Few trains equalled in beauty a perfectly matched consist of E's and Pullman Standard streamlined cars, all painted in two-tone grey. An equally few number of railfans realize that there were at least fourteen variations, all painted within ten years!



*Above #4017 & 4032 photographed at Harmon, N.Y.
5/18/57 by David Nyce.*

The first cab units on the Central were two A-B-B-A sets of FT's (#1600-1603) delivered in June 1944. The railroad was delighted with the diesels and ordered more, but because of the war, it was not until July 1946 that the two F3's were delivered (#1604-1605). All wore an almost unrecognizable predecessor to the lightning stripe. Since the engines were exclusively freight haulers, a spartan scheme was applied, consisting of a steam locomotive black body with white stripes and lettering.

The image was significantly improved when the first E-7's went into service in March 1945. They were all "factory painted" in color and design to match the pre-war 20th Century Limited, a dark grey stripe running through a light grey body. By the time the third order of E-units was delivered in April 1947, the scheme had been changed to match the post-war passenger pattern: a light grey stripe running through a dark grey body. In addition, the stripe was lowered so it would not cover the number boards. The same scheme appeared on all the subsequent E-7's and E-8's.

When the third set of F-units (#1606-1623) were delivered in 1947, (and yearly deliveries after that), all new engines were being painted with the lightning stripe. At this point, all seemed to be well (and settled down to a standard painting arrangement), or at least until the Baldwin, Alco, and Fairbanks Morse units were purchased. The noses were quite distinct from each other,

ranging from a bulldog snout to a variation of a PRR steamer (the PRR's T-1 4-4-4-4 was the first "shark"). In addition, the center row panels on each diesel type were at different heights. Consequently, the lightning pattern was crushed, bent, and stretched to conform ("one size fits all"). If the stripe height didn't match the passenger equipment the engine was supposed to haul, a second smaller lightning was added toward the rear of the unit to provide continuity through the train.

When hood units (alco RS-3's, EMD GP-7's, etc.) were delivered in the fifties, they too were painted in the classic stripe, however much narrower. Not to be outdone, electrics were painted in their own unique variation. What determined the variation to be applied was, logically, the design that happened to fit the best. Thus some FM switchers wore broad stripes, while the products of other builders' wore narrow ones. This diversity of the road name, as well as the length of the stripe.

Since most surviving photographs of engines wearing the stripe are in black and white, it is difficult to tell that they were also painted in different colors. On the NYC proper, passenger engines wore a light grey stripe on a dark grey carbody. On freight engines, black was substituted for dark grey. The Pittsburgh and Lake Erie used a shade similar to Pullman green (also used until recently on the Baldwin switchers of the affiliated Monongahela Railway) instead of black on their freight engines, while retaining schemes of the New York Central.

The GP-7's were the last engines to be delivered in the lightning stripe. By the time the Alco RS-11's and EMD GP20's arrived, the paint specifications had changed, dropping both the lightning stripe and the traditional red oval.

Fortunately, for NYC fans, the stripe has returned on the Indiana Harbor Belt's bicentennial switcher in yet another variation - red, white and blue! So if you're yearning for a bit of the old Central, head for Gary, Indiana. Bring a few rolls of film and lots of luck!

*#1600 wearing the original paint scheme for cab units.
Photo by Paul Dunn at Elkhart, Indiana 7/2/46*





Prewar paint scheme for two toned grey scheme to match the 20th Century Limited. Photo by Paul Dunn at Chicago, Ill. 6/47.

Postwar style with prewar colors on E7 #4005 at Cincinnati, Ohio on 9/10/49. Photo by Paul Dunn.



Postwar passenger scheme: full length wide stripe, with road name in stripe with second lightning, on unit #4042. Photo by Paul Dunn.



Postwar passenger scheme, full length wide stripe, with road name in stripe, with second lightning. Photo by Paul Dunn at Elkhart, Indiana 6/10/50.



#1644 with half length wide stripe, with road name below stripe, at Bellefontaine, Ohio 6/6/49, photo by Paul Dunn.

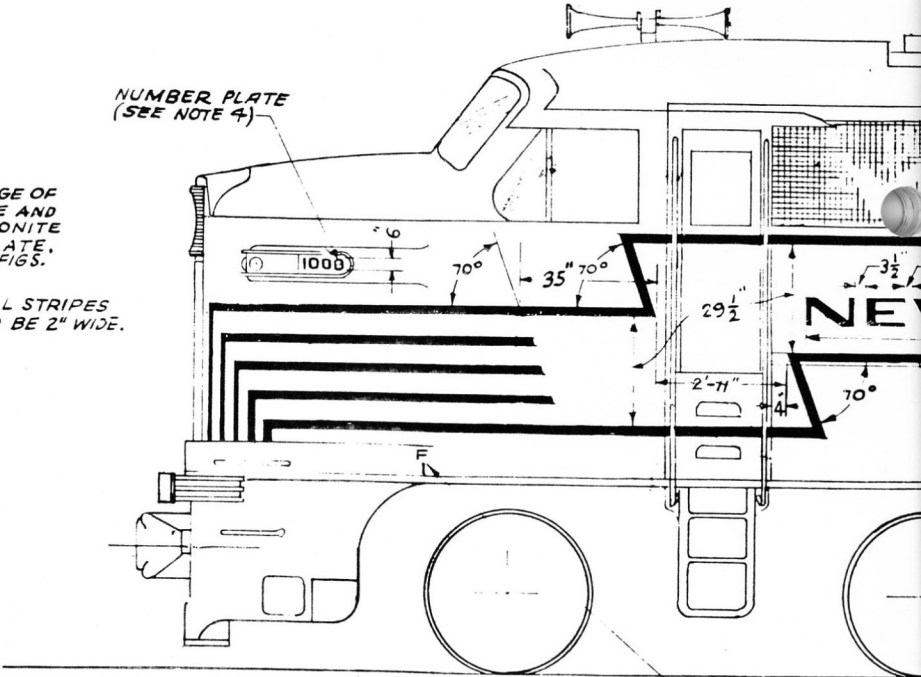
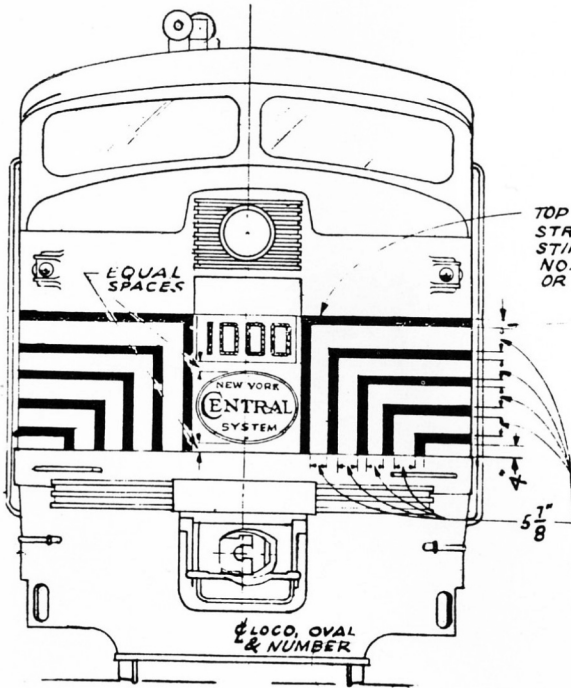
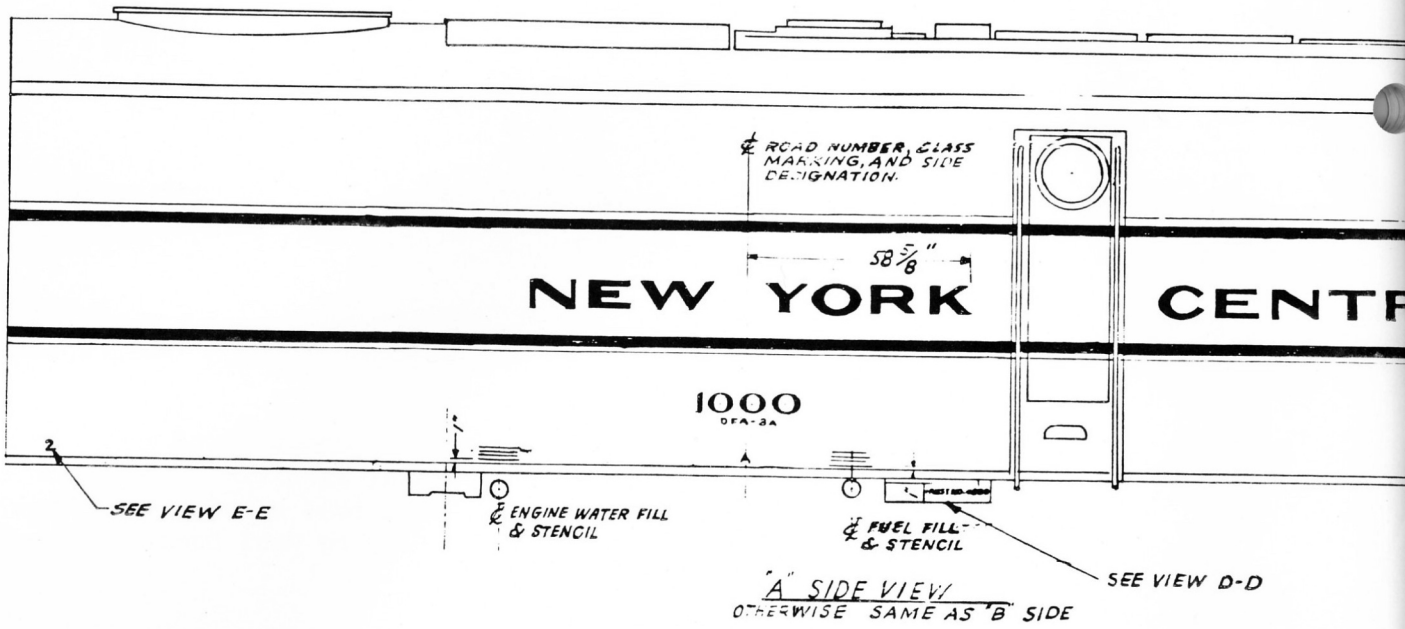


#3501 with 3/4 length wide stripe, with road name below stripe, 1948, photo by Paul Dunn.

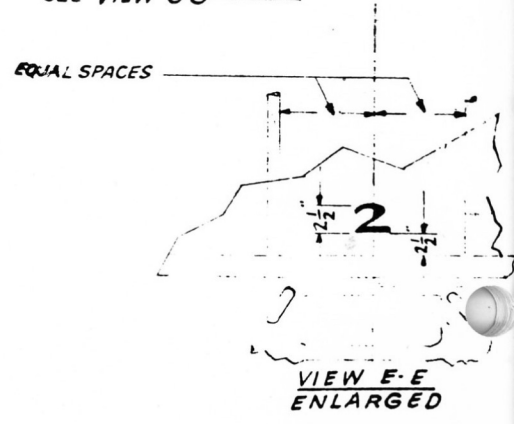
#3818 with full length stripe, with road name below stripe, at Columbus, Ohio 8/26/56, photo by Paul Dunn.

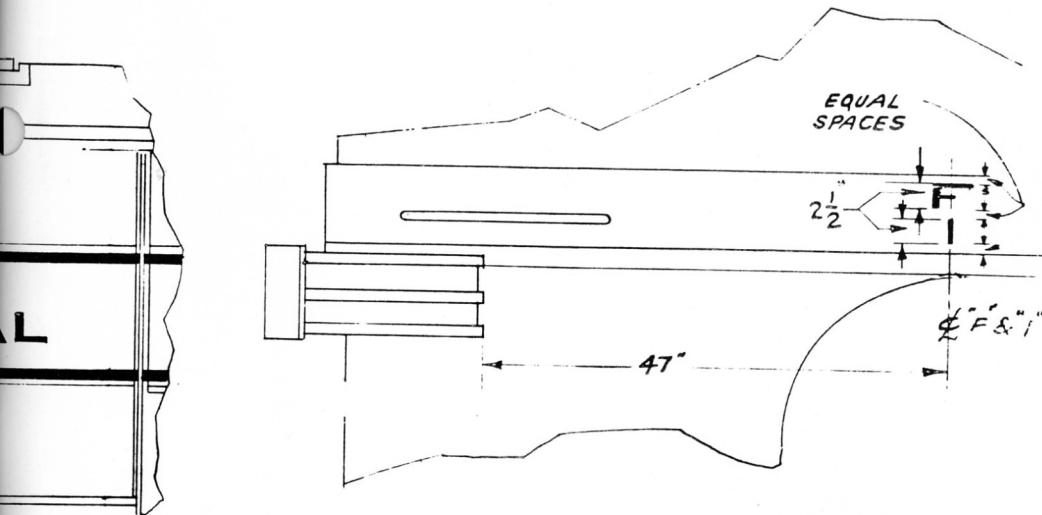


Full length wide stripe, with road name in stripe. #6600 at Youngstown, Ohio 10/8/61, photo by the Garys.



SEE VIEW C-C

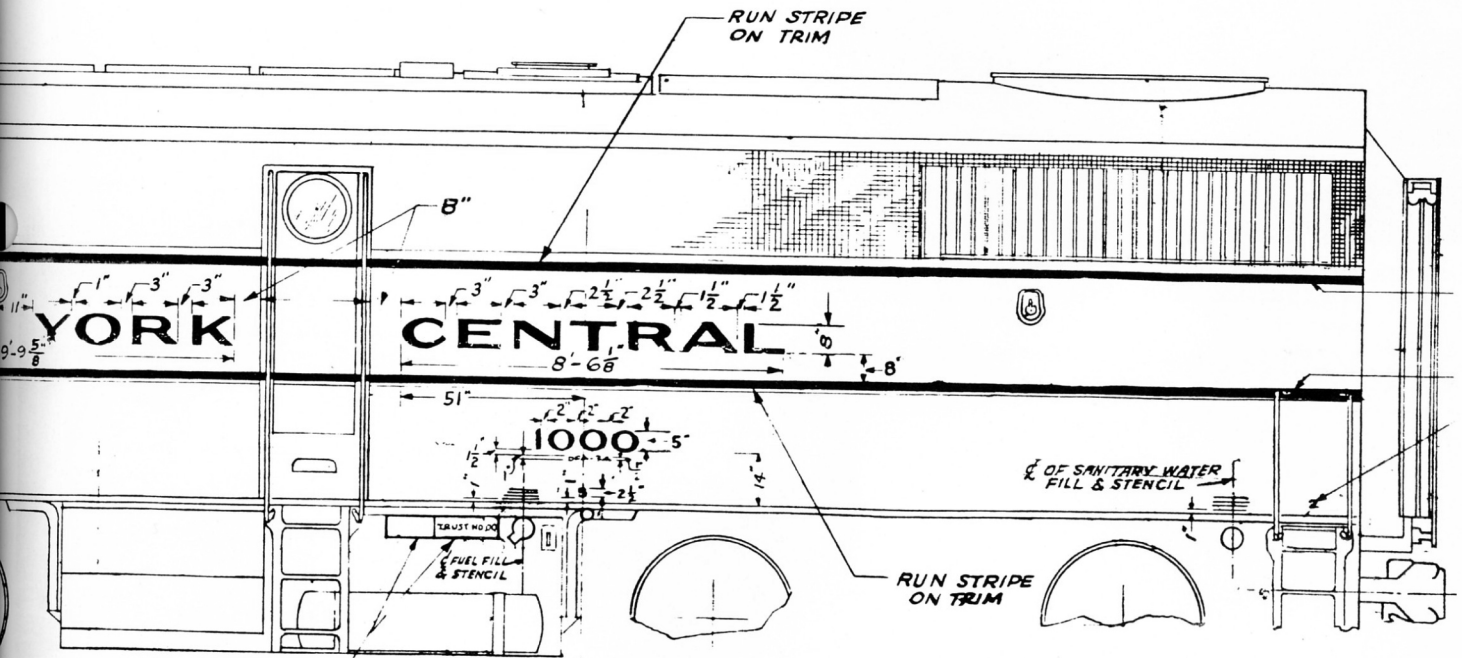




VIEW C-C
ENLARGED
"B" SIDE SHOWN
"A" SIDE SIMILAR

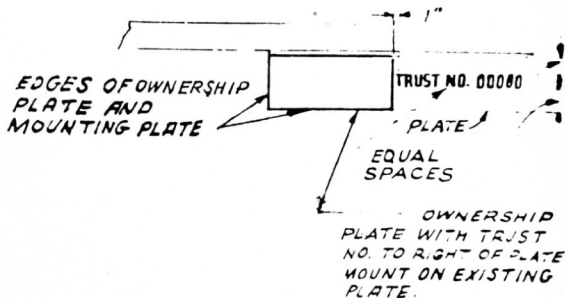
Opposite page - #1004 with 3/4 length wide stripe, with road name in stripe. Photographer unknown.

Below - #1066 with full length wide stripe, with road name in stripe, at Youngstown, Ohio 9/23/61. Photo by the Garys.



SEE VIEW D-D
"B" SIDE VIEW

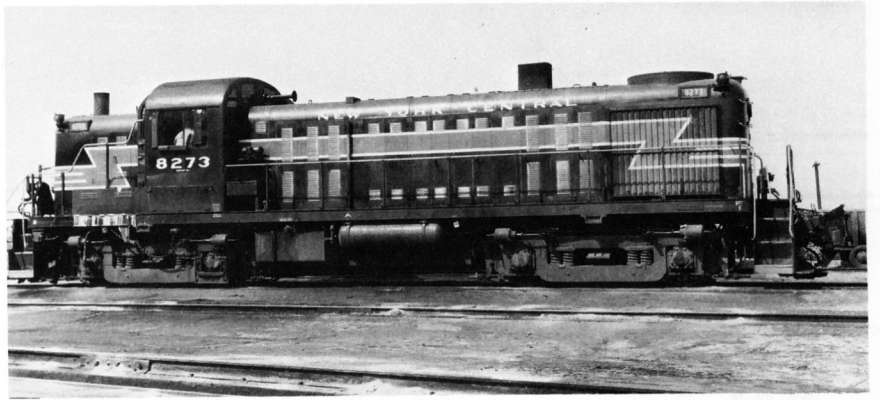
LETTERING & NUMBER



VIEW D-D
ENLARGED



#8273 with full length narrow stripe, with road name over stripe, at N. Bergen, N.J. 5/30/57. Photo by David Nyce.



#7111 with 3/4 length stripe, with road name in stripe, as applied to switchers, 5/31/60. Photo by H.N. Proctor.

#7000 with full length wide stripe, as applied to switchers, at Kingston, N.Y. 8/18/57. Photo by Dave Nyce.



#6230 with full length narrow stripe, with road name in stripe, at N. Bergen, N.J. 10/12/55. Photo by David Nyce.



#5683 with full length narrow stripe, with road name over stripe, as assigned to P&LE, at College, Pa. 2/3/55. Photo by David Nyce.

#228 with full length broad stripe as applied to electrics with road name in stripe, at Harmon, N.Y., mid-50's. Photo by William Curtis



#273 with full length broad stripe as applied to electrics with road name over stripe, at Harmon, N.Y. mid-50's. Photo by William Curtis.



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