



641 AT THE THROTTLE

CUSTOMIZING YOUR ROSTER

Let's have some fun with our locos. My idea is to do a little face-lifting, mostly easy changes, and at the same time do a little selecting. The result can be a roster fitted to your individual taste yet looking more rail-roady than now.

Walk into the engine terminal of a real railroad back in the steam days and you'll see that most of the engines look a little like each other even though they vary greatly in size and wheel arrangement. On some eastern roads you might find wide fireboxes for anthracite; Mother Hubbard cabs; tiny headlights; cap stacks; waterscoops; short tenders; brakeman's shanties (mostly on freight engine tenders); generally short wheelbases. The details differ on the various roads but not so often within a road.

Farther west you'll find other patterns. SP likes to mount big BL feedwater heaters on the left side, while Santa Fe stores an Elesco type on the pilot deck. Several roads use lighted engine numbers; smoke deflectors that telescope around or in front of the stack; Vanderbilt tenders; long wheelbases.

Up north there are curtains or even an enclosed cab; snow pilots in winter, sometimes all year. Down south a few roads take to decorative lettering, striping; or in the case of the Southern, B&O, etc., a bright color for the head end of the best trains. A study of some roster books and our *Model Railroader Cyclopedia, Volume 1, Steam Locomotives* will tell far more about such detailing than can be repeated here.

Notice that the differences fall into three general categories. First come the things related to the railroad's situation: climate; type of fuel; distance between division points; preference for short or long, slow or fast, trains; density of passenger traffic; special nature of freight.

Next come the political things. If a certain supplier is on the line, the fittings made by that company are likely to be preferred on most of the engines. It is just good business. Sometimes local regulations about whistles, bells, or smoke also prescribe special loco fittings.

Finally come the road's own traditions and the pet ideas of its superintendents, past and present. Some of these things, like size and location of numbers, might also be influenced by the operating department.

The shape of the cab is a predominant characteristic. So is the preference for the stack; sandbox shape; location of piping and certain parts; color; type of tender; method of access to firebox boltware; running-board routing.

If this approach to locomotive selection and fitting interests you, I suggest these steps:

- From what you own or will be owning, select the engines that are best suited to do switching, transfer, local, and through passenger and freight operations on your road. If possible, provide several identical locos in the more important classes. Otherwise plan to detail any nearly similar engines so they become more alike in final appearance.

- Select certain fittings from suppliers of fine-detail loco parts to be mounted on all engines of several if not all your classes. Try to relate these to climate, politics, and road tradition. Study the piping so you have it right. Exact piping similarity between engines is not necessary unless that also is a road tradition.

- Cabs are easy to rebuild, so why not design a new one or copy one from a favorite prototype? This may be only a matter of changing existing window shapes or adding a new roof; or it may be a complete rebuild. Leaving the original front wall in place is usually simplest.

- Repaint with your own color schemes and lettering but vary the aging so one or two engines look fresh from the shop while others look ready to go there.

With a few hours, a few dollars, and a little pencil planning, your roster will look convincing and each model will enhance the others: they'll seem to belong to your road and no other.

— Linn H. Westcott.

**Model
Railroader**