



GP7 - GP9

In January 1954 EMD upgraded its product line with the 567C engine, D12B generator, and D37 traction motors. The GP7 became the 1,750 horsepower GP9. The GP9 marked the end of the car body freight locomotive (there were 3,808 F7s built). Externally, the first GP9s were little changed from the last GP7s. Later versions would change the louver arrangements and the last versions would come without the frame skirting. The GP9 came with all of the fuel tank, steam generator, and dynamic brake options as the GP7 including "torpedo boats." There were also GP9Bs built for Pennsylvania (40) and Union Pacific (125). Production lasted until December 1959, although 13 additional units were built in Canada after 1959, the last one in August 1963. There were 3,444 GP9s built for U.S. railroads, 646 for Canada, and 15 were exported to South America. Five railroads purchased over 300 GP9s each. These were Chesapeake & Ohio (363), Canadian National (349), Illinois Central (348), Southern Pacific (328), and Norfolk & Western (306). Union Pacific and Pennsylvania also had over 300 GP9s when the GP9Bs are included. Pennsy had 270 GP9s and 40 GP9Bs and UP had 219 GP9s and 125 GP9Bs. Other railroads who bought more than 100 GP9s include Canadian Pacific (200), Baltimore & Ohio (194), Northern Pacific (176), New York Central (164), Milwaukee Road (128), and Nickel Plate Road (107).

GP stood for General Purpose and the GP7 and GP9 lived up to that designation. On Soo Line and Norfolk & Western they handled the premier passenger trains. C&NW used GP7s for commuter service in Chicago and SP used GP9s for commuter service in San Francisco. Santa Fe, MP, and numerous other roads powered branch line and secondary passenger trains with steam generator equipped GP7s and GP9s. GP7s and GP9s worked in yards and switched industries all across North America. They powered locals and branch-line trains and worked as mine shifters in the coal fields of West Virginia and Kentucky. They worked as helpers on mountain passes all across North America, including Tehachapi, Cajon, and Marias Passes. Combined into multiple unit consists, they handled coal drags, reefer blocks, and hot shot manifest trains. They were often mixed with F units.

As they aged and newer and more powerful locomotives were put into service, the GP7s and GP9s were often downgraded to secondary trains. But that did not mean they were excluded from main line service. Up until the 1970s, SP used sets of GP9s as the helpers on the Kaiser Steel iron ore trains in Southern California and GN continued to use them as helpers on Marias Pass.

In the 1970s, several railroads had rebuilding programs that remanufactured older locomotives. The most prolific rebuilders of GP7s and GP9s were Illinois Central Gulf, Santa Fe, SP, C&NW, and Rock Island. ICG cut down the short hood (often called a chop-nose), added paper air filters, and eventually fabricated a new cab for their GP7 (called GP8s) and GP9 (called GP10 and GP11) rebuilds. ICG also rebuilt GP7s and GP9s for other railroads including Conrail and Clinchfield. Santa Fe cut down the short hood, removed dynamic brakes, and fabricated new cab roofs to accommodate air conditioners as they rebuilt their GP7s, GP7Bs (with cabs added), and GP9s into switch engines. Other than a paper air filter box, SP's rebuilt GP9s were little changed externally. Seaboard Coast Line got into rebuilding much later, but turned out 155 GP16s. Other railroads like MP and MKT did not have specific rebuilding programs. Instead they cut down the short hood and reworked the diesel engines as the units were sent in for shopping. Both Canadian National and Canadian Pacific rebuilt some of their fleets. Eastern coal haulers N&W and Chessie System did not have any rebuilding programs or chop-nose programs, but kept their fleets running on locals and mine runs well into the 1980s with just minor changes and new paint.

Although almost all of the GP7s and GP9s are gone from the major railroads, they can still be found working on short lines and as industrial and grain elevator switchers in many parts of North America.

By Charles Mylar