



EMD GP38-2

Some railroads ordered fleets of several hundred GP38-2s, while some short lines bought only one or two. The GP38-2 lived up to the “general purpose” description that was the original meaning of “GP” in first GP7. GP38-2s worked in yards, switched industries, and powered local freights all across North America. They powered locals and branch-line trains and worked as mine shifters in the coalfields of West Virginia and Kentucky. They worked as helpers on grades all across North America. Combined into multiple unit consists, they handled manifest freights and drag freights. They worked with almost every other type of locomotive from F-units and GP7s and GP9s to today’s latest power. Belt Railway of Chicago used pairs of GP38-2s to shove cars over the hump in Clearing Yard. Phelps Dodge and the San Manuel Arizona Railroad bought them to haul copper ore from the mine to the smelter. Cleveland Electric Illuminating Company bought nine to haul a dedicated unit coal train from West Virginia mines to the power plant. Southeast Coal used them to switch their mines. At the other end of the operating spectrum, GP38-2s powered commuter trains on Long Island Railroad, and Illinois Central Gulf regularly ran piggyback trains with four GP38-2s as power. South of the border, Chihuahua Pacific ordered units equipped with high short hoods and steam generators for use in passenger service. On eight of their units, Southern Pacific swapped out the Blomberg-M trucks for Blomberg-B trucks with clasp brakes, and added rotating disc windows, snow shields, and icicle breakers in order to better suit them for winter-time flanger service on Donner Pass, doing their part to help keep this vital route open despite heavy snowfall.

The first GP38-2s, an order for ten, were delivered to Louisville and Nashville in January 1972; the last would go to CP Rail in July 1986. Missouri Pacific bought the largest fleet of GP38-2s with 274, followed by Southern Railway with 257. Penn Central bought 223, and Conrail added another 119, giving Conrail the largest overall fleet of 342 GP38-2s. Louisville and Nashville bought 95, and received another 34 as part of Family Lines. 124 went to Nacionales de México, the Mexican national railroad. St. Louis San Francisco, better known as the “Frisco”, bought 116, and Canadian Pacific acquired 115. Canadian National bought 60 standard-cab GP38-2s, in addition to 51 of the aforementioned GP38-2(W)s. Seaboard Coast Line had 76 units, with twenty of them coming under the auspices of Family Lines. Rock Island’s last new locomotives were 68 GP38-2s, all delivered in blue “The Rock” paint. With the bankruptcy and shutdown of the Rock Island, these units went on to several other roads, including Chicago & North Western, Grand Trunk Western, and Pittsburgh and Lake Erie. Union Pacific bought two orders totaling 60 GP38-2s, while Soo Line had eight orders, for a total of 53 units. Southern Pacific and Illinois Central Gulf each had just one order; SP bought 45 and ICG purchased 40 units. There were also some notable GP38-2s; Boston and Maine, Detroit Toledo and Ironton, Durham and Southern, and Illinois Central Gulf, each painted a GP38-2 in a special scheme to help celebrate the U.S. Bicentennial. Burlington Northern’s “Pacific Pride II”, which sported the logos of BN’s predecessor roads, was a GP38-2. Since its debut 40 years ago, the GP38-2 has gone on to become one of EMDs most popular models, with nearly all still in service as of this writing.

By Charles Mylar