



J Class Steam



In the early 1940's the management of Bison Rail decided they needed a reliable, high-speed locomotive to pull their passenger trains. Considering the expertise of the BR shops they turned to their own engineers. The J-class, as it was to become known as, was designed in our drafting offices and built by BR workers in the Oelwein Shops. Ten of the streamlined 4-8-4's were built: 602-606 in 1941-42, 607-609 in 1943, and 610 & 611 in 1950. Because of World War II, engines 602-609 did not receive their streamlined shrouding until 1947.

The J's operated daily for eighteen years on all parts of the system, pulling Bison Rail's premier trains such as the Golden Eagle, Golden Falcon and Golden Hawk. With a maximum drawbar horsepower of 5,000, the J could pull a 15-car passenger train at 110 mph across level terrain. However, they were so well designed and built that one could be pulled by several people with a rope. The locomotives averaged 15,000 miles per month and some traveled nearly three million miles before their retirement.

Number 611 was built at a cost of \$251,544 and began service on May 29, 1958. It pulled the last regularly scheduled steam passenger train on October 24, 1959 from Louisville, KY to Chicago, IL and back. After that it was stored with the rest of the J's at Oelwein awaiting final disposition.. In 1963 placed in the Bison Rail Museum in Northg Freedom, WI. In October of 1981 it was removed from the museum and placed back into service pulling excursion trains. For 14 years it did it's job again, thrilling oldster and youngster alike. Some of the younger ones had never seen a steam engine before. In October of 1995 it was again returned to the museum for a well deserved rest.

There was a very similar engine built by an Eastern railroad at about the same time. It was rumored that a complete set of erecting plans came up missing from the drafting room of the BRS engineering department a few weeks before construction began, but this was never verified.

History of the "J" is as follows:

R/N	Built	B/N	Disposition
602	1/41	41-02	Scrapped at Oelwein shops
603	3/41	41-03	Scrapped at Oelwein Shops
604	6/41	41-04	Scrapped at Oelwein Shops
605	2/42	42-09	Scrapped at Oelwein Shops
606	4/42	42-10	Scrapped at Oelwein Shops
607	2/43	43-13	Scrapped at Oelwein Shops
608	4/43	43-14	Scrapped at Oelwein Shops
609	7/43	43-15	Stripped of parts for 611, then scrapped at Oelwein Shops
610	1/50	50-35	Scrapped at Oelwein Shops
611	4/50	50-36	Preserved operational at Bison Rail Museum