

Old Meets New. An Electric Takes to a Siding to Let a Diesel Pass.

# ENVOY

IN WESTERN MONTANA

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Photos by  
Harley Hettick

## Forewell 'Little Joes'

By LYNN SCHWANKE  
Missoulian Staff Writer

She'll not be comin' around the mountain much longer. Or should it be he'll not be comin' around the mountain.

In either case keep a close eye on the Milwaukee Road for the next year because it may be the last time you'll see electric engines, nicknamed "Little Joes," by the railroad, proudly piloting strings of freight cars across Montana.

Milwaukee Road officials invited members of the press for a train ride last Tuesday from Deer Lodge to Missoula and back to explain how the electric engines were being phased out and why. The initial announcement about the company's plans to scrap the electric engines came last Feb. 26.

Two passenger cars were hooked to the end of a freight train pulled by two "Joes" to accommodate guests and railroad officials. During the trip, guests were treated to a ride in the engine and lunch. Prior to boarding the train, the group toured railroad maintenance facilities at Deer Lodge.

Officials explained that electric locomotives are no longer economical to run because of high maintenance costs, limited use and the age of the equipment.

"When first installed, the Milwaukee's electrified system was vastly superior to steam operation, and even to the diesel power of several years ago," Worthington L. Smith, president of the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific Railroad Co. said in a news release. "Given 1973 facts, however, with highly efficient and versatile diesel locomotives available for both main line and branch line service compared with the aging electric locomotives confined to main line only, the decision was inevitable."

The railroad had 486 miles of electrified main line at one time. One section is the 440 miles between Harlowton and Avery, Idaho, which runs through Missoula. The other was 216 miles between Othello and Seattle, Wash. The latter section has been operated entirely by diesel power for more than a year now, and railroad officials said almost all signs of electrification have disappeared from the route.

These two routes were specifically electrified because of the steep mountain grades and snowy winters. The electric engines were more powerful than the steam and diesel engines of the early 1900s and could easily navigate mountain passes and cope with heavy snowfalls.

But between Othello and Avery a gap of 212 miles of flat country was never electrified making travel from Harlowton to Seattle impossible without shunting engines.

The Milwaukee has been phasing out old electric engines for several years now. In 1972, 32 new diesel locomotives were purchased. Only 12 Little Joes, the largest and newest of the electric, are in regular service today as extra trains or helpers on freights between Harlowton and Avery.

By mid-1974 officials expect that even the 12 working Joes will no longer be needed.

The Joes got their nickname from Joseph Stalin. The engines were originally built for use in Russia, but the Cold War embargo on all essential equipment going to Russia put a damper on the sale. In 1950, 12 of the engines were purchased by the Milwaukee. Others were sold to the Chicago South Shore and South Bend Railroad and the Paulista Railroad of Brazil.

Built for the Russian 5-foot gauge track, the electric had to be modified for the standard American 4-foot, 8 1/2-inch track. That's not all that had to be changed. All instrument labels were in Russian.

Although Milwaukee officials believe better service, lower maintenance costs and more efficient use of men and machines will result from the conversion, opposition has been expressed, especially by a group in Hoquiam, Wash.

G.W. Rogers, chairman of the Northwest Rail Improvement Committee, said in a newspaper release: "The electric locomotives are well known by the men on the railroad to be faster, more reliable, and cheaper to maintain than the diesel locomotives which are replacing them."

Milwaukee officials don't agree. George Frazier, electrical engineer from Tacoma, Wash., said continued electrification would mean not only electrifying the 212-mile gap between Othello and Avery,

but also replacing the entire complex with a modern high-voltage system and purchasing new electric locomotives.

Others have inquired about the fuel oil shortage and whether the Milwaukee is wise to dispense with the electric at this time.

Officials said the railroad has been able to operate trains normally despite the shortages. They also point-out that only 3 per cent of the total locomotive unit miles on the Milwaukee system in 1972 was electrically operated and to replace the operation with diesel would result in a fuel consumption increase of 1 per cent for the company.

Railroad personnel don't know for sure what might become of the huge electric, D.A. Radabaugh of the mechanical department in Deer Lodge speculated that the Joes might either be sold for scrap, purchased by other electric railroads or sold to private collectors.

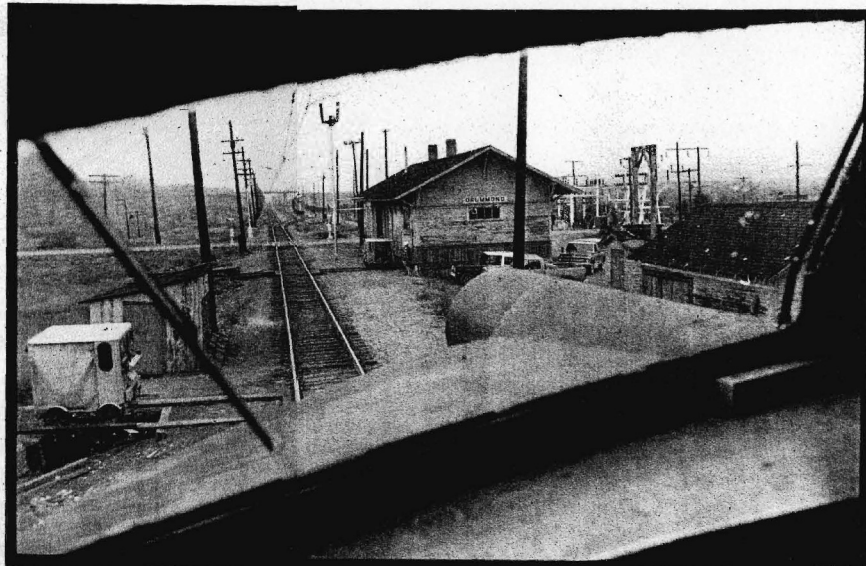
Along with the outdated electric, 22 power stations along the route will also probably be sold. Fourteen of the substations are in Montana.

But the passing of the electric will not go unheeded—especially by the Milwaukee. One of the railroad's brochures about the electric era says this:

"The Milwaukee's electrification, beloved by generations of railroaders, rail fans and travelers, will be missed. It has long been a proud part of the railroad's heritage, and its demise will leave a void. But the stories, the lore and the memories will live long after the last trolley wire is cut off for scrap and the last trolley (an early electric) is broken up."



Engineer Robert Inman Pilots 'Little Joe' E70.



Next Stop Drummond. View from the Engine Cab.

