

Santa Fe's SWG Freight Train - Final Report

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To all:

Our final report on the SWG train is due tonight, so here is what I have so far:

Train: ATSF SWG. Known as the "Swig." After freight train symbols were changed around 1970 or 71, the SWG became the "809".

Direction: Eastbound only (LA to Barstow, but then WB Barstow to Stockton). The westbound version of the SWG returning from the Northwest was the GWS.

Description: Fast train to the Pacific Northwest via the WP and GN. The letters SWG stand for Santa Fe, Western Pacific, and Great Northern. Competed with the SP for traffic to the Northwest.

Origin: Los Angeles, with a stop in San Bernardino. It was also listed as Train 138 from LA to SB.

Destination: The Pacific Northwest via Stockton, CA. (to the WP) and Bieber, CA (to the GN). The final destination was Seattle.

Railroads Represented: ATSF and Northwest railroads such as GN, WP, NP, WFEX, MILW, SP, UP, SP&S, CP, and CN.

Products: Mostly northbound perishables and non-perishables (miscellaneous products). Some oil and other petroleum products, including asphalt, sulphur, sulfuric acid, etc., in e.g., Warren, Anchor, Hooker, Spencer. A few returning empties (boxcars, stock cars, flatcars, etc.) to origin roads, including lumber empties (boxcars and flatcars) returning to the NW.

Train Length and Weight: 1948 sample train: 62 loads, no empties, 3602 tons (but some empties were normal).

Car Types: Boxcars, reefers, tank cars, flatcars, gons, stock cars, and maybe others.

Typical Schedule: 1947: Departed LA around 3:00 am, arrived at SB between 5:00 and 6:00 am. Departed the SB B Yard at 7:45 am. Also departed LA at 3:00 am in the 1950s. In 1951 it left SB between 6:30AM and 8:10AM and got to Barstow between 11:30AM and 2:55PM:

In 1955-56 it left SB at about 8:00 am (give or take a half-hour). Running time to Barstow was around 4 hours, and time to Victorville was around 2 hours.

After 1970-71, the departure time was changed to seven or eight PM out of Hobart. It was still a hot train.

Road Power: 4-unit freight FT sets, until 4-unit freight F3/F7 sets arrived in 1948-53.

Helper Power: 2-10-2s, 4-8-2s, 2-8-2s (often 2 or 3 steam helpers), also FT sets (full or partial), until GP7s arrived in 1950-53, and GP9s in 1956-57. Number of helpers depended on train weight.

Operations Details:

The SWG was a hot train, capturing business from the SP between Southern California and the Pacific Northwest. The SWG-GWS would be the main trains for cars to and from the Pacific Northwest, since it was a joint Santa Fe, Western Pacific, and Great Northern train. These trains could be filled with whatever cars that needed to be moved between points served within their tonnage limits.

The SWG had to reverse directions at Barstow. This was done on the passenger station tracks, probably on track three. Track one was the WB Main and track four was the EB Main. This was between the depot and the yard office.

The SWG was quite often used to send extra power to Barstow, so double-headed sets of 200 class Fs were not a rarity. During the 1950s, the SWG was the favorite train for deadheading power eastward from San Bernardino to Barstow, due to the imbalance of power caused by more westward than eastward trains during the afternoon and evening hours.

Regarding power, in the steam engine days it was mostly 2-8-2s in the Valley and 2-10-2s on the Hill. Power always was changed at San Bernardino. When the diesels replaced steam in the 1950s, it was two unit geeps in the Valley and four unit F units on the Hill, with power again changed out at San Bernardino.

Hot freight trains such as the SWG were loaded just enough below the locomotive tonnage rating to allow a speed of about 16 mph (up Cajon Pass). The SWG made the maximum authorized speeds downhill between Oro Grande and Barstow, which were 50 mph in the early 1940s, 55 mph in the late 1940s, and 60 mph in the 1950s and 1960s.

The SWG and Train 138 were the same train between LA and SB, operating with two different train authorities. Before 1947 when the Third District was a single track operation, the hotter freight trains ran as second class regular trains between Los Angeles and San Bernardino and as extra trains over the double track First District between San Bernardino and Barstow, but they also carried the same symbol (SWG) over the entire division.

The SWG was No. 138 over the Third District and ran extra over the First District. According to cost-based practice at the time additional cars would be set out or added at San Bernardino that were not SWG related.

Modeling the Train: One-third to one-half of the cars should be ATSF (including SFRD). For the foreign road cars, we could capture the flavor of the Northwest destination by having Northwest railroads well represented: GN, NP, MILW, SP&S, CP, CN, WP, WFEX, SP, and UP. Use a typical mix of boxcars, reefers, tank cars, flatcars, gons, and stock cars.

Please review this for corrections and additions. We will continue to amend this report as long as we get more feedback.

Thanks for your help,
John Thompson