

Santa Fe's EB Box Car Special Freight Train - Final Report

JThomp1945@...09/29/19 #22120

To all:

It's time to edit the final report now, so here goes:

Train: ATSF's Box Car Special (BCS).

Direction: Eastbound only.

Description: Train of mostly semi-priority empty boxcars eastbound from SB or LA. These were solid trains of clean, empty box cars going east for distribution throughout the system. They consisted of hot empties to supply Santa Fe's eastern shippers. Although not as hot as loaded trains, they were important.

BCS stood for "Box Car Special" and (in the 1950s) it was the Hill version of the Valley BDK/BDJ "Bull Dog" trains of clean empty box cars out of First Street or Hobart in LA.

Origin: Los Angeles as of 1947, but San Bernardino in the 1950s.

Destination: Barstow and points east.

Railroads Represented: ATSF and railroads from all over the country, but especially the Northeastern railroads, returning empty cars to their home roads. It would also have empties returning to Midwestern connections

Products: Mostly empties. Not many loads and no priority empties (such as auto cars).

Train Length and Weight: Typical postwar train lengths were 70 to 90 cars, average weight was about 3000 to 4000 tons. (Longer and heavier in the 1950s than in the 1940s.)

Car Types: Almost all boxcars.

Typical Schedule:

1947:

Depart LA at 6-9 am. Travel time 4-5 hours to SB.

circa 1950:

Normally passed Summit in the early afternoon.

1955: (sample times)

Lv. San Bdn. 2:15 a.m. Ar. Bar. 6:50 a.m.

1956: (sample times)

Lv. San Bdn. 11:20 a.m. Ar. Bar. 3:20 p.m.
Lv. San Bdn. 1:30 a.m.
Lv. San Bdn. 7:40 p.m. Ar. Bar. 11:30 p.m.
Lv. San Bdn. 10:40 p.m.
Lv. San Bdn. 7:40 p.m. Ar. Bar. 11:30 p.m.
Median time leaving SB: 7:40 pm

Road Power: 4-unit freight FT sets, until 4-unit freight F3/F7 sets arrived in 1948-53. 2-10-2s during the June Spud Rush in the 1940s, and sometimes at other times in the 1940s.

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:

Westbound loads greatly outnumbered eastbound loads, so a lot of foreign-road cars were returned empty to the north and east. And since it was Santa Fe practice to run freight trains at frequent intervals, empty cars to be returned east were collected at Hobart Yard, adjacent to the LA Stockyards and UP's East Yard, and eastbound 3rd district trains stopped there on the way out of town and picked up enough empties to bring them up to full tonnage for the climb up Santa Ana Canyon East of Atwood.

As of July 1947, the Box Car Specials originated in Los Angeles at 1st street yard, and most of the empties were added at Hobart yard. There were six trains per week. The Box Car Special was numbered consecutively from January 1, and sometimes it ran alone, and other times it was paired with the Bulldog name. In every case it was always a train of only empties.

July 3, 1947, BCS 222 leaves LA with 88 empties and arrives in SB—waits for 5 hours and leaves for Barstow with 97 empties.

July 4, 1947, BCS 223 leaves LA with 74 empties and arrives in SB—waits almost 5 hours and leaves for Barstow with 90 empties.

July 4, 1947, BCS 224 leaves LA with 90 empties and arrives in SB—waits almost 9 hours and leaves for Barstow with 86 empties.

There were two ways it was spelled out in the dispatcher sheets (leaving LA):

July 24, 1947	Box Car 242
July 25, 1947	BxSpl 243/Bulldog
July 26, 1947	BxSpl 244/Bulldog
July 27, 1947	BxSpl 245/Bulldog
July 29, 1947	Box Car 246

The two different names appeared to have been written by the same two individuals. The Box Car Special did not run every day. There were often two or three Bulldogs running in a single day.

The rest of July 1947 shows the same pattern -- each of the BCS trains was also listed as a Bulldog while traveling over the Third District. In the May 1945 dispatcher sheets a different system appears to be in use. The empties are carried to SB in Bulldogs and then over the First District in a train marked 88. For example, on May 5 there is a first, second, and third section of train 88, all carrying a large number of only empty cars.

September 1945 train sheets show 1-4 Bull Dogs operated each day from LA, and at that time there were no Box Car Specials (BCS) indicated. The Bull Dogs (the official symbol of these trains was BD) ranged from an equal number of loads and empties to all empties with up to about 90 cars. The First District sheets often did not list a symbol for eastbound trains with mostly or all empties during this same time period.

It seems that practices changed from time to time depending on what symbols were being used at the time, and the entries of some data not critical to actual train operation will vary from dispatcher to dispatcher. It is possible that a Bull Dog out of LA that was made up of all eastward empties would assume the symbol at San Bernardino of a BCS but also be referred to as a BCS on the Third District DS sheet by the dispatcher.

The "Bull Dog" trains (also called "BDX") were solid consists of clean empty box cars for eastern points. They got their nickname from their true name Boxcar Dispatch. They originated at Los Angeles and carried that symbol to San Bernardino where they got a new symbol BCS for Boxcar Special (as of the 1950s).

The Bulldog was a long drag freight, about 100 cars long, mainly empties for the east. It was a long, slow train. It left Hobart any time of day, but usually in the late afternoon (in the 1950s), and got into SB around 9 or 10 p.m. It ended in the B yard, so there were no "Bulldog" trains on Cajon Pass. It was mainly empty boxcars lettered for Northeastern railroads. It carried whatever garbage cars were left in the middle of the night or late afternoon.

If they originated in First Street yard with cars cleaned and inspected there, they carried the symbol BDK. If they originated at Hobart yard with cars cleaned, inspected, and repaired, they carried the symbol BDJ. This was because the alpha symbol for First Street was K and the alpha symbol for Hobart was J.

Los Angeles was Santa Fe's largest originating point for cleaned, inspected, and repaired empty box cars ready to be loaded with lucrative shipments from any point in the system. The Hobart rip track, built in 1951, devoted its entire operation to keeping the Santa Fe running. The rip track facility was capable of handling well over a hundred cars. In addition to "repairing in place," it also cleaned the dunnage out of recently unloaded boxcars.

The afternoon rip track job pulled the repaired and cleaned cars, while the midnight job spotted the ones for the next day. They ran around dawn out of First Street and Hobart. It

must have taken about a full shift to assemble the cars in trains for the east. SB also had a rip track to clean empty boxcars arriving there.

The trains called BDJ "Bulldogs" out of Los Angeles and BCS "Box Car Specials" were not at the bottom of a dispatcher's priority by any means. A lot of the time excess tonnage capacity would be used to move hot loads from originating points along the way.

Although symbolized as a BDJ, 1952 photos show that one train had two gondolas behind two outside trussed wooden ATSF boxcars on the head end, followed by about a dozen mixed hoppers and dirty boxcars, before a solid cut of clean boxcars completed the train. Apparently it was not usual to put a fill on the head end of a Bull Dog. Maybe it was set out enroute or taken off at San Bernardino. At any rate, those Bull Dog trains would continue on east out of San Bernardino as Box Car Specials.

Eastward trains ran out of the B Yard in San Bernardino and were called about one hour before departure, which was the time they started to move in the departure track. The departure time at San Bernardino was from the B Yard, with 10 or 20 minutes required to get from there to the depot at San Bernardino, which was where the Cajon Pass running time began.

The arrival time shown by the crews was the time they hit the heading in switch at the old West Tower at Barstow. It usually took at least thirty minutes to reach the Red Barn diesel facility next to the diesel shops and tie up.

Modeling the Train: Use a mix of ATSF boxcars and boxcars from all over the country, especially the Northeast, and some from the Midwest, and sometimes a few loaded cars of all types on the front.

Please send any additions and corrections.

Thanks,
John Thompson