CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION
Slowly but surely, dieselization changed everything ...............................4

1 DEFINING THE TRANSITION ERA
The decade and a half following World War II saw dramatic change .......... 6

2 THOSE BLACK THINGS WITH ALL THE WHEELS
Modern steam locomotives waged a strong battle to the last ....................18

3 THE GIANT KILLERS
Versatility and reliability were assets impossible to ignore ........................28

4 ELECTRIFIED RAILROADING
It hung on in the West but did better in the East .....................................38

5 THOSE COLORFUL BRANCH AND SHORT LINES
Where lighter, smaller, and older equipment found homes ......................48

6 MODELING STEAM POWER
It’s a lot easier today than it used to be ................................................54

7 MODELING EARLY DIESELS
Colorful factory-designed paint schemes made their debut .....................62

8 MODELING THE PHYSICAL PLANT
Lineside structures make irresistible modeling subjects ............................72

9 OPERATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS
From timetables and train orders to Centralized Traffic Control ..............84

10 TRANSITION ERA PHOTO GALLERY
Model and prototype images that recall a unique period .......................100
How it all began: Former Rutland RS-1 No. 405 chirps into Chester, Vt., on the Green Mountain’s portion of the former RUT main line between Bellows Falls, N.H., and Rutland, Vt. At a time when enclosed cab units were all the rage, this seemingly unremarkable machine set the trend for locomotive design that continues to this day.
The wagon train
A seemingly endless stream of covered wagons headed west as the remainder of what became the 48 contiguous United States was settled in the 1800s. An equally irresistible and revolutionary stream of “covered wagons,” as diesel-electric cab units came to be called, spread out across the continent roughly a century later. No matter how hard steam enthusiasts, and not a few professional railroaders, bemoaned this incoming tsunami, it was not to be slowed, let alone stopped. Although, like any large, heavy piece of machinery, a diesel locomotive requires periodic maintenance, that work was far less labor intensive and frequent than the routine servicing of even the best modern steam locomotive. True, some railroads ran their modern steam power over multiple divisions, but it was more typical to cut the engine off at each division point for inspection and servicing, as we discussed in the previous chapter. Diesels, on the other hand, were more like the family car, almost a turn-key machine.

Alco followed the RS-1 with the 1,500-h.p. RS-2 (1946–50) and similar 1,600-hp RS-3 (1950–56); six-motor (RSD-4 and -5) and A1A (RSC-2 and -3) versions were also offered. WM 186 is an RS-3: Note boxes on frame fore and aft of the cab.

From switcher to road switcher
The diesel-electric locomotive first gained a foothold in the form of switch engines. Here the railroads had the opportunity to discover that a relatively low-power, diminutive diesel could start and switch a train that took a 4,000-hp modern steam locomotive to bring into the yard. They also discovered that the diesel switcher spent a lot less time in the roundhouse or shops than its steam contemporaries. By stretching the frame a bit, adding a short hood, and equipping a switcher with better-riding road trucks, the road switcher was born. Compare an Alco 5-class switcher with a road switcher.

what began as boxy urban switchers and progressed to a more streamlined carbody segued to the ultimate diesel locomotive, the road switcher. Before that, however, styling and streamlining were primary considerations shortly before and, more dramatically, after World War II. Electro-Motive Corporation and successor Electro-Motive Division (of GM) E and F units proved to be an apt canvas for myriad colorful liveries. Alco was able to join the party following the war with its elegant PAs and FAs, as did Baldwin and finally Fairbanks-Morse with distinctively styled cab and hood units. It was quite a time!

Dick Dilworth’s utilitarian “Geep” debuted in late 1949. The carbody remained largely unchanged from the first GP7 until the introduction of the GP30 in 1961. Nickel Plate 490 is an early model GP9; note the four 36”-diameter rooftop fans (later GP9s had two 48”-diameter fans). GP7s also had two sets of louvers on the panels below the cab number. The NKP eschewed dynamic brakes. The unit has been repainted in the railroad’s post-1959 wide-stripe scheme.
CHAPTER SIX

Modeling steam power

You can choose an era to model or let an era choose you. Either way, there are major compromises to accommodate: Pick this, lose that. I’ll cite some examples of choices that modelers made where their hands were forced by reality. As a result, one chose to freelance, the other to have a sizable fleet of 2-8-0s custom built. Despite today’s plethora of superbly detailed, good-running steam locomotive models in every scale and gauge, difficult choices remain. But the rewards remain equally high, 1.

Considering capabilities

By titling this chapter “Modeling steam power,” as opposed to modeling a specific steam locomotive, the point is that we’ll take a high-level overview of what one should consider when choosing to model any part of the steam era but especially the last decade and a half of steam locomotives. That the rewards exceed the liabilities is apparent from steam models’ ongoing popularity with model manufacturers and importers and their customers. But, as with full-size steam power, there are liabilities we need to discuss.

One of the first surprises that typically greets the steam modeler is that the performance of a model locomotive may not equal its appearance. There’s a comment in Linn Westcott’s book about John Allen and his remarkable Gorré & Daphetid (pronounced “gorry and defeated”) HO railroad that meant little to me until I too faced the same problem.

Under a photo of a Pacific Fast Mail Chesapeake & Ohio 2-6-6-2, Linn noted that John never could get the locomotive to perform as well as he expected. I later acquired two of the same model, an early brass import with decent detail, and they didn’t perform well for me, either. Until I had the suspension of the front engine rebuilt—it came from the factory with nothing more than a spring-loaded pin pushing down on a wide plate above the front six drivers (“engine”)—it performed like a light 0-6-0. Afterward, each Mallet would haul about 12 loaded hoppers up a 2.5-percent grade and around 30”-radius curves.

Was that adequate? C&O documentation suggests the prototype would pull between 12 and 20 hoppers under similar conditions, so—after the rebuilding and expenditure of many hundreds of dollars (times 2)—all was well, 2.

Three of my Key Imports brass Nickel Plate Road 2-8-4s were loaded with weight and would handle loaded 20-plus-car coal trains up those grades and around those curves with ease. When the Allegheny Midland was dismantled and they resumed service on the Nickel Plate Road, tackling the worst westbound grade, which was well under 2 percent, was and is no problem. I usually stage these “lead sleds” at the east end of the division so they are ready to handle westbounds up to the railroad’s passing track length of 30 cars.

But other brass and “plastic” Berkshires were not up to the task. I still recall the sinking feeling I had when a test train out of Frankfort, Ind., stalled with a dozen cars. Alarmingly, efforts to add weight were unsuccessful on the mass-produced locomotives.

Bill Darnaby had encountered the same problem with his Maumee Route 4-8-2s, which began as Hallmark brass Illinois Central Mountains. After the initial panic attack, he tried changing freight-car wheel sets to free-rolling metal ones from InterMountain. That basically solved the problem for both of us. (It also facilitated Bill’s subsequent installation of signals at interlocking plants, which required adding resistors to bridge the insulation on those wheelsets.)

In the 1960s, Indiana’s Monon sported a varied roster of modern power, including no. 400, the first Century 628, and the high-hood C-420 514, and high-hood 501 at Lafayette Yard in September 1967. Modeling this and earlier diesel power is appealing, but the resulting long trains greatly reduced train frequency.