

## The Big Switch

In the summer of 1955, Milwaukee track gangs began feverishly to resurface and lay new rail on the Iowa Division. Few people outside the Milwaukee Railroad, and not many in it, knew the reason for this sudden activity. It was not until almost the day of the "Big Switch" that all the nation became aware the Union Pacific would route its streamliners, operating through Omaha to and from Chicago, over Milwaukee rails effective October 30. The newsweeklies and the country's leading papers heralded the fact that, with the termination of the Union Pacific's 75-year-old agreement with the North Western, it would switch its passenger trains over to the Milwaukee.

The Milwaukee was so elated with the changeover it advertised the fact in some 138 newspapers, advertisements often occupying a full page. To expedite Union Pacific trains, it resolved to spend \$7 million, of which \$5½ million was for new diesels and \$1½ million for improved signalling. What is even more striking, the road voluntarily changed its color from the traditional orange to the Union Pacific's yellow with red and grey trim.

On the day of the changeover the five crack Union Pacific streamliners, the *City of Los An-*

geles, City of Denver, City of Portland, City of San Francisco (which is operated west of Ogden by Southern Pacific), and the *Los Angeles Challenger* began operating over Milwaukee rails east of Omaha. Despite some minor "bugs" in the new operation, the first week tallied a ninety-eight per cent on-time record. President J. P. Kiley was on hand in Chicago's Union Station to celebrate the *Challenger-Midwest Hiawatha*, first of the trains to leave the Windy City. In Iowa, people all along the line came out to welcome the new service. A crowd of more than 300 greeted the *Challenger* at Perry while at Marion, Mayor L. A. Franke (who had worked for the Milwaukee for thirty years) presided at a ribbon-cutting ceremony honoring the new service with Union Pacific Vice President P. J. Lynch.

With the inauguration of the new trains, the main line to Omaha has been constantly improved and Centralized Traffic Control extended over virtually the entire route. Although the line in Iowa is now almost entirely single track, its efficiency is nearly that of its former dual tracks, thanks to CTC and long passing sidings.

In keeping with modern economical operation in which trains are consolidated whenever possible, numerous modifications have been made since the change-over in 1955. Schedules have been altered and trains combined so that instead of five streamliners each way, there are now only two, plus the

Milwaukee's *Arrow* to Omaha, Sioux City, and Sioux Falls. The *Midwest Hiawatha* had lost out in the shuffling, and it no longer appears on the timecard, a fact that is much-lamented by many Iowans.

By combining the cities of *Los Angeles* and *San Francisco* and the *Challenger*, one train takes the place of three. Likewise, by consolidating the cities of *Denver* and *Portland* another train has been eliminated. In times of heavy seasonal traffic, particularly during the summer vacation period, some streamliners may be run in sections or as separate trains.

It is a common sight to see trains of twenty or more cars on these luxurious streamliners. All the *Cities* trains stop at Marion and Perry in both directions. From either of these Iowa towns, one can ride the finest trains to Los Angeles, San Francisco, Portland, Salt Lake City, Denver, and intermediate points, stretching from Lake Michigan to the Pacific Coast.

What local service is required is performed by the *Arrow*. When the *Sioux* was withdrawn from service between Chicago and Canton, South Dakota, in 1960, thereby terminating passenger service across northern Iowa, the Milwaukee concentrated its attention on its rehabilitated trans-Iowa line to the south. Thus, while the Omaha line is the only route of the Milwaukee's passenger trains across the state, it is more important than

ever before. There may not be the abundance of trains on this line as there were when orange limiteds streaked over the rails, but the yellow streamliners are much longer, more significant, and much finer than their steam-powered predecessors of yesteryears.