Modern Freight Railroad

The North Western's double-track "high iron" across Iowa is ideal for freight. It is mostly straight track, with a few easy curves. It is virtually flat, the steepest grade being only .72 per cent. It is protected by continuous automatic train control throughout. High and wide clearances make it an admirable route for "piggy-backs" and oversize shipments. Time freights race across Iowa on schedules operated with passenger-train punctuality. Modern adjuncts, such as International Business Machines, process data on shipments well in advance of their arrival. And radio communication, with "walky-talkies" for trainmen, speed up over-the-road operation regardless of the weather.

All through freights are "highball jobs," which is to say they move with dispatch. Operated by the best railroaders and the most modern equipment, the North Western is surpassed by none in expediting transcontinental rail tonnage. Even in the days of heavy passenger traffic, the division headquarters at Boone, and men all along the "left handed" railroad, had a jealous pride in highballing freight. It is a North Western tradition.

Locomotive Engineer Wallace Hammond recalls how in other years each superintendent had

his favorite train. For instance there was Henry A. Parish. "Hank" Parish's favorite was the "Vegetable." He would invariably leave his office in the two-story brick building to greet the crew upon arrival about 2:00 p. m. One could spot him by a white carnation in his lapel. If they made a good run he was all smiles. If they were unnecessarily late someone would be called on the carpet.

Later came Superintendent "Monty" Williams. The apple of his eye, so to speak, was the "Calumet" which, incidentally, often had cars of big, red apples. It usually came in around 11:00 p.m. No matter how late it arrived, Williams seldom went to bed until it had steamed into Boone.

To expedite its time freights, the North Western had its famous Class H. or 4-8-4 type engines, built by Baldwin in 1929. These beautiful machines were designed for dual service; and, until the coming of diesels, they were the last word in handling the fastest freight and passenger trains. So popular were these versatile locomotives that when they were put on exhibit in Boone, school children were let out of class to see them.

Thanks to the diesel, however, along with other adjuncts of modern railroading, the North Western's time freights are better than ever. Every day, five through trains speed across Iowa from Chicago via Clinton with tonnage for the gateways of Council Bluffs and Fremont, Nebraska. Much of this is freight for West Coast points. It

is highly competitive cargo obtained only by reliable service and on-time performance.

Each day, starting with No. 255 leaving Clinton's West Yard at 1:15 a.m., the long freights roll with goods from East to West. The 255 is dubbed "The Piggyback" because it is largely composed of trailer-trucks on flat cars. At 5:00 a.m. there's No. 261 (Dispatch), a hotshot of mixed freight. But the pride of the road is No. 249 due at 1:45 p.m. and out five minutes later. Unlike the other through freights, it goes to Fremont, Nebraska, instead of Council Bluffs. Leaving the main line at Missouri Valley the "manifest" goes across the Missouri River to Fremont via the Blair Bridge, bypassing the congested Omaha yards on a route 24 miles shorter than going through the Council Bluffs-Omaha gateway. At Fremont a Union Pacific locomotive replaces the North Western engine, and the train is on its way west. Even the caboose goes through without change.

There's a respite in the West Yard until "The Local" whistles out at 5:45 p.m. This is No. 253, which picks up and sets out cars at the larger towns on its way to Council Bluffs. Finally, at ten at night comes the bright headlight of No. 251. After an all night run across Iowa it will pull into Council Bluffs in time for an early breakfast.

Such is the modern North Western, a specialist in handling freight and a mighty link in expediting transcontinental tonnage.