

VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF TRANSPORTATION

ABOUT THE NORFOLK & WESTERN CLASS J 611 STEAM LOCOMOTIVE

A marriage of beauty and power, The Norfolk & Western (NW) Class J 611 Steam Locomotive is the one of the finest American passenger steam locomotives ever built.

Simple lines, a bullet nose, a midnight black façade, a Tuscan stripe and a baritone whistle makes her the one of the most distinguished steam locomotives left in the world. She's an engineering powerhouse of steam, technology and near mechanical perfection.

The N&W Class J Locomotives were designed, constructed and maintained in Roanoke, Virginia. These streamlined locomotives captivated the hearts of rail fans worldwide since they first rolled out of the N&W Roanoke Shops, in 1941.

“The Class J Locomotives were the most technically advanced steam locomotive design of any type that was ever in service anywhere in the world,” says William Withuhn, Curator Emeritus, History of Technology and Transportation, Smithsonian Institution and editor and co-author of *Rails Across America: a History of Railroads in North America* (Smithmark, 1993). “The J was – and is now – under its graceful skin the apex and epitome of its era of design, helping to make Americans the most mobile people on the planet.”

The Class J Locomotives were built using American ingenuity, design and engineering. Even today, she is the pinnacle of steam locomotive technology known to man.

“The J class was the final fruit of more than 120 years of engineering development,” says Withuhn. “A Class J could hit more than 5,000 net horsepower, and reach 110 miles per hour. There was nothing like it.”

The Class J 611 Steam Locomotive was built in 1950, a time when men wore hats, ladies wore gloves and smartly dressed porters served lunch on real china in the dining car. The 611 Locomotive pulled the *Powhatan Arrow*, the famed passenger train, from Norfolk to Cincinnati.

The Class J 611 retired from passenger rail service in 1959. In 1962, she was moved to the Virginia Museum of Transportation in Roanoke.



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In 1981, Norfolk Southern pulled her out of retirement and restored her to her original glory. Once again, she blew her whistle to sleepy towns and thundered across the landscape.

In 1984, the Class J 611 was named a National Historic Mechanical Engineering Landmark by the American Society of Mechanical Engineers.

She retired from excursions in 1994 and moved back into the Virginia Museum of Transportation, where she sits today, greeting tens of thousands of her fans who visit from across the globe every year.

Since her retirement, rail fans have clamored, hoped and dreamed that she return to the rails, to blow her whistle and steam over the Blue Ridge and Appalachian mountains once again.

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