

5. Ernie Little's "Spirit of Roanoke"



My favorite motive power would be the Norfolk and Western number 611, J class, 4-8-4 locomotive, which is also known as the "Spirit of Roanoke" and the "Queen of Steam." It was built in May of 1950 at the Norfolk and Western East End shops in Roanoke, Virginia and went into revenue service as a passenger locomotive on May 29, 1950. On January 23, 1956, the locomotive derailed near Cedar West, West Virginia, running as the westbound *Pocahontas*. The engineer was killed and 60 passengers and crew were injured. The accident was the country's last major steam-powered revenue passenger train wreck. The 611 was extensively repaired and returned to service the following month and retired from service in January, 1959. It has gone through two rebuilds, the first in 1981 by Norfolk Southern, and the second in 2014 at the North Carolina Transportation Museum.. It is the sole survivor of fourteen J class locomotives built by Norfolk and Western and still pulls excursions such as the Shenandoah Valley Limited I had the pleasure of riding behind it on Friday, October 27th from Goshen, Virginia to Staunton, Virginia.

A few facts about 611:

- Painted black with a Tuscan Red stripe with golden yellow linings and letterings.
- Equipped with a Hancock long-bell 3 chime whistle
- Weighed 494,000 pounds, 109' 2" long, 11' 2" wide, and 16' tall.
- Driver wheels were 70 inches in diameter.
- Maximum speed was 80-100 miles per hour.
- The power output was 5,100 horsepower at the tender drawbar.

Ernie Little, MMR