

The Record of Engine No. 216

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ISSN 0003-4827

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Recommended Citation

Moore, Al. "The Record of Engine No. 216." *The Annals of Iowa* 35 (1960), 386-390.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.7565>

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The Record of Engine No. 216

By AL MOORE

This incident from the golden age of railroading in Iowa is reprinted from a collection of similar sketches which the author wrote and published as *Cab, Coach, Caboose* in 1902.* Mr. Moore was an employee of the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy before becoming a well-known newspaper reporter in Des Moines, where he died in December, 1916, at the age of 64.

Probably the fastest time ever made by a train on an Iowa railroad was achieved by Engineer Herm Wills with engine No. 216, on the Northwestern recently, when for three miles west of Nevada, on a straightaway course, a speed of ninety miles an hour was attained. The locomotive is one of four specially designed by the Schenectady locomotive works for service on its fast mail and limited express train, and is both in repose and in motion an epic in steel. Weighing sixty-five and a half tons each, with nearly 90,000 pounds of this weight distributed on the four driving wheels, the traction, associated with great cylinder area, combine to give them power and speed. The former is furnished by a boiler pressure of 190 pounds to the square inch communicated to cylinders twenty inches in diameter, while the speed qualities stand out in bold relief in driving wheels six feet eight inches over all, including the three-inch steel tires. That great speed may be maintained for a long distance they are equipped with immense tenders having a capacity for carrying ten tons of coal and five thousand two hundred gallons of water.

The engines have been in service on the Northwestern only two or three months, and were constructed along special lines suggested by Mr. Quail, master of motive power, for exclusive use on the two fast mail and the Colorado limited trains on which long stretches of high speed is required. At first some minor faults manifested themselves, but gradually these were eliminated and the engines brought to a degree of perfection that makes them the joy and comfort of Herm Wills and Art Howes, the engineers selected by Master Mechanic Coxfield to run the 216 and 219 on the Iowa division. By the kindness of general Superintendent Aishton and a quiet invitation by

* Welch Printing Company, Des Moines, Iowa.

Engineer Wills, I was privileged to ride with the latter from Clinton to Ames on the 216 Friday night, and if a hotter pace ever scorched an Iowa track than that on the occasion mentioned, from Nevada to Ames, history does not record it. Only the safeguards assured by the block system of train operation, with which the Northwestern is equipped, made this burst of speed possible without incurring danger. The solidly ballasted track, buttressed with crushed stone and gravel, every stream spanned by steel and every culvert rock-built, insured safety to the flying train as it sped, comet-like, through the sleeping towns and along the peaceful valleys. Looking back from the cab toward the green signal lights that oscillated gently with the swaying of the rear coach, the black smoke trailing behind and following the line of the track, formed a somber background against which the bright glow of the lights shown with almost electric brilliance. Racing around the arc of a long curve skirting a bold headland that pushes out from the hills along the river four miles east of Cedar Rapids, where the track bears close upon the stream, a pale glow, like the faint glimmer of a bicycle lamp, showed a mere point in the distance. Swiftly it came on, growing larger as it approached, and almost before it could be realized two headlights flashed past, and the eastbound express, spinning the miles out at the rate of one per minute and No. 9, the limited mail, had met on the double track in a tornado of noise, a cyclone of wind and a swirl of smoke and dust. The next instant the moon emerged from behind the obscuring curtain of a cloud, and sweeping by an extended arm of the river, the train, from the point of the pilot to the signal lights at the rear, was mirrored back in the nicety of every detail, even to the mellow glow of the Pintsch gas shining through the windows of the mail cars, on the glassed surface of the tranquil water. The scene at the instant, with the river in the foreground, the mail train speeding past with exhilarating velocity, the beetling cliff frowning down from above, the shifting lights coming and going on the water, with a bank of green shading back from the serene valley until it melted into the dim line of the distant horizon, was one calculated to stir into activity the inspiration of a painter.

The rockets of fire, cast a half hundred feet into the air from

the hot throat of the stack, were reflected back along with the dense smoke of the engine from the tranquil surface of the placid river. The myriad switch targets in the yards at Cedar Rapids burst into view, an unseen switchman moved out from the shadow, stooped over, turned a switch, a bright red was displayed where an instant before green was shown, and erecting himself, gave a signal for the limited mail to come on. The eyes of Engineer Wills, which seldom left the track while the train was in motion, were upon him, and when the red light burst into view the reverse lever was dropped forward on the quadrant, the throttle drawn out an inch or so, and belching fire and smoke, the huge engine gathered headway and rushed on to the depot, half a mile away, where several tons of mail were taken on and as much transferred to other and connecting lines.

Out from Cedar Rapids, across the bridge that spans the Cedar river the train gathered headway, the whistle giving hoarse warning at road crossings, while a longer call announced its coming to villages and towns through which it swept with speed unslackened. The regular schedule of the night limited mail is fifty-three miles an hour, which, with the necessary deductions for stops and slow orders, increases the speed to sixty miles an hour while the train is in motion.

"How fast can the 216 run?" remarked Engineer Wills to a question asked while waiting a moment at Marshalltown. "I believe she can make 100 miles an hour. But I'll give you a test after we pass Nevada. There's a stretch of straight track several miles beyond that place, and as it will be quite daylight when we get there I'll give you a touch of high life hitting the top places."

Out four miles from Nevada, Wills readjusted his position on the seat box, drew closer to the front window, and, giving the throttle a slight pull, called out across the deck:

"Now we will start. Get out your watch and catch the exact time when we pass the block. There's a mile post there. Then keep your finger on the face of the second hand and count the miles as we reel them off. Get ready, for we'll be tearing through the station in less than a minute."

Even at this time the train was moving so fast that the telegraph posts flitted rapidly past like a procession of receding

specters in the ghostly light of the dawn. The speed at this time was seventy-eight miles an hour, the mile to the station being reeled off in forty-six seconds. But a glance at the big drivers showed they were revolving faster. It is a mile to the block where the friendly arm of the semaphore displayed the signal that proclaimed the track ahead clear for five miles, but the distance is run in forty-four seconds. A quarter of a mile away, a mile post, distinguished by a stripe of black on its otherwise white surface, shimmered in the first rays of the morning sun. The wild grass bends low to the rush of the train, pebbles caught up in the swirl and suction are beating a weird tattoo against the steel apron of the tank, and as the engine rushes past the post to a flying start on a race against the swiftest course ever run on an Iowa track, a glance at the watch shows it has attained eighty-eight miles an hour. The cadence of the metallic ring of the drivers becomes a sullen roar; the exhaust, no longer distinguishable as separate escapes of steam, blend into a continuous roll; a hurricane is rushing through the cab, though a glance at the trees and grass beyond shows them in absolute repose; the atmosphere rolls, races and tumbles like the waters of the troubled sea; the huge drivers, measuring off twenty-seven feet seven inches at every revolution, are moving so fast that the key in the crosshead between the slides has the appearance of moving only four or five inches, though it travels twenty-six inches every half turn. A very pandemonium of noises reigns. Engineer Wills points across the deck to the watch in hand, and looking ahead warns by pantomime the approach to another mile post. A glance and it had flitted past.

The mile was run in forty-three seconds.

The rushing steam pulsated through the cylinders, and the drivers revolving like electric fans, send tremors through the giant frame, but still the limit is not reached. The splendid machine responds to a further call for greater effort, and the second mile is covered in forty-one seconds.

Then comes a burst of speed grand and terrific and the third mile of the test is run in thirty-nine and one-half seconds or at the rate of ninety-two miles an hour. The engine begins to rock and sway, the limit of her valve motion has evidently been reached, and though he betrays no external anxiety, the

drawn expression on his set face as he reaches for the emergency brake and applies it, indicates that Wills, too, feels that further urging may not be safe; the pace is slackened, the press representative draws a sigh of relief and the train rolls up to the platform and stops.

Arrived at Ames, two tramps, who have ridden the front end of the forward coach from Marshalltown, boldly get off, and addressing Fireman W. A. Gultry, one of them with just a touch of sarcasm, remarks: "Well, I was goin' to Omaha, but I'm no hog; a freight train is good enough for me."

Conservation Commission Established

The Conservation Commission was created and the duties of the old Board of Conservation and Fish and Game Commission placed under it by the Forty-sixth General Assembly, the act taking effect May 17, 1935. It is composed of seven members appointed by the governor. Their terms are for six years and they are allowed \$7.50 per day in the discharge of official duties, the sum total not to exceed \$500 for each fiscal year. Members of the first Commission were:

Logan Blizzard, chairman.....	McGregor
Mrs. Henry Frankel.....	Des Moines
A. E. Rapp.....	Council Bluffs
W. A. Burhans.....	Burlington
F. J. Colby.....	Forest City
E. W. Neenan.....	Sioux City
W. C. Boone.....	Ottumwa

Directors

Murray Lee "M. L." Hutton.....	1935-1941
F. T. "Fred" Schwob.....	1941-1946
G. L. "Lynn" Ziemer.....	1946-1948
Bruce F. Stiles.....	1948-1959
Glen G. Powers.....	1959-

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