

THE HARRIMANS— THEIR HEYDAY IS OVER



For years—61 to be exact—Southern Pacific’s suburban coaches plied SP rail hauling commuters between San Francisco and San Jose. While motive power on these trains changed over the years, only the paint on the outside of the 1924-built cars marked any kind of evolution of the “subs.”

In 1985 that was all changed. CalTrans, which had taken over financial responsibility of SP’s commute district in 1981, had ordered bright, shiny stainless-steel bilevels from a Japanese builder, which would soon be delivered.

So the service life of the old Harriman-profile cars would be limited to months. Over the years the fleet of “subs” had diminished. They were failing structurally, and stories of trainmen putting their feet through the corroded metal flooring were rampant. The cars were not air-conditioned and

were used as smokers on most trains that featured SP’s gray bilevels. Commuters hated them!

Three of us who recognized the historic importance of the Harrimans met at the San Jose coach yards on March 23, 1985, with tripods, cameras and several boxes of No. 25 flashbulbs. The photo shown here is just one of several exposed that night.

This would be the twilight of the subs’ collective careers. The last revenue run of Harriman coaches was operated in a railfan excursion to San Francisco and back on June 15, 1985. Soon after, the cars were put in storage and were sold by SP to several new owners. Today, they are scattered to the winds.

—KEN RATTENNE