

# The Fireless Locomotive

Contributed by Hank Morris

The fireless locomotive is one of the most remarkable and foolproof locomotive designs devised. A locomotive equipped with a large tank or reservoir instead of a boiler and firebox, it carries no fire. This engine was essentially a giant thermos bottle lying on its side with wheels.

This type of locomotive was very desirable for service in plants where cleanliness and the elimination of fire hazards and noise were important. They were quite popular in applications where smoke and cinders could ruin the product, as in textile mills or agricultural processing plants. In those applications where this type of locomotive fits, it was a reliable and economical unit of motive power. Fireless locomotives could be found working in chemical industries, powder plants, paper mills, food plants and electric power plants, wherever a reliable source of steam or compressed air was readily available.

Before the perfection of electric street traction in the 1880s, American city railways tried many exotic forms of power in an effort to displace horse-propelled cars. In the 1870s the Crescent City Railway of New Orleans tried some steam storage motors built in Paterson, N.J., by Theodore Scheffler in 1876. These locomotives were fireless and obtained a "recharge" of steam from a stationary boiler house. Fireless locomotives were extensively used in Europe long before their introduction in this country. The first European-built fireless was brought to the U.S. in 1913.

Learn more at the [National Railway Historical Society website](http://www.nrmhs.org).