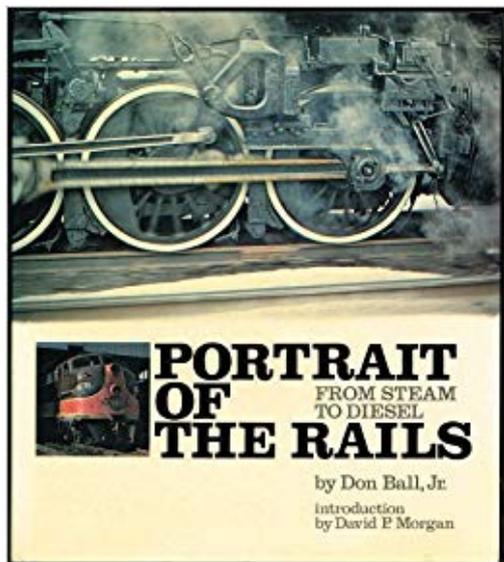


## Portrait of the Rails *by* Jr. Ball Donald



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**Author:** Jr. Ball Donald

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Portrait of the Rails: From Steam to Diesel



## Reviews of the **Portrait of the Rails** *by* Jr. Ball Donald

Daizil

If you enjoy looking at pictures of steam locomotives I find it hard to believe you wouldn't enjoy this book. Almost 300 pgs. with virtually every page occupied by a large photo although there are some pages where there are 2 or 3 pics. The pictures are mostly from the 1930's to the 50's and show the locomotives in a wide variety of background settings. One reason this book is so good is that the photos used are not all focused on just the engine itself but instead the engine in a natural setting such as a train yard or crossing a bridge. About 15% of the pictures show early diesel but the majority show passenger and freight locomotives. There are a number of interesting pics of the pre war bullet locomotives such as the NYC Hudson (great shot of one pulling out of Chicago station) and the Southern Pacific (probably my favorite pic is a SP pulling into a yard along a Los Angeles highway with the 1940's cars and hills of LA in the background). There are also a number of great shots of engineers and yard workers performing a variety of railroad jobs. Considering that most of the books for sale on amazon are inexpensively priced it's hard to go wrong adding this book to your

collection. Highly recommended !!!

Wrathshaper

“Portrait of the Rails - From Steam to Diesel” is the 1st of 8 books of railroad photography published by Don Ball Jr. (1938-1986). It is a 300-page album of black-and-white photographs of trains from the 1930s to the 1960s, emphasizing the 1950s transition from steam to diesel locomotives. Most of the photos are action shots of trains in motion, but there also scenes in roundhouses, yards, and stations. All regions of the United States are included, plus some Canadian steam. The glorious photos are by Mr. Ball and other well-known railfan photographers. Be aware that this book is offered in several printings and listings on Amazon; compare them and find the condition and price that works best for you.

Don Ball's 8 books comprise the finest body of work by any author in this genre. Each of these books gets an enthusiastic 5 stars; each one is a must-have for the railfan who collects books of rail photography and also makes a wonderful gift for the not-quite-railfan who just “likes trains.” His books are so good because: (1) Ball was an artist who visualized the frame, the lighting, the background, and the picture's message or atmosphere before the train arrived; (2) He always got top-notch photos from his contributors; (3) He covers the topic of his book thoroughly, without getting sidetracked in minutiae; (4) There are hardly any pictures where you say, “So what” and quickly turn the page; (5) The accompanying text is always to the point and sometimes inspiring.

Fortunately, all 8 books are still listed on Amazon (as of 2015) and copies are usually available. Don Ball was born in Lawrence, Kansas (where the Union Pacific, Santa Fe, and Rock Island visited frequently) and, in his last years, was director of Steamtown, U.S.A., a major operating railroad museum in the Northeast. The 8 books are:

- Portrait of the Rails (1972): Black-and-white photographs of trains in all sections of the United States in the 1940s and 1950s, mostly steam with some diesel and electric; photography by Don Ball and other well-known railfans
- Railroads - An American Journey (1975): Covers similar ground as “Portrait of the Rails,” but with even more beautiful photos, better printing, and more emphasis on the 1950s
- Decade of the Trains - The 1940s (1977): Black-and-white photographs of trains, rail yards, workshops, and stations in the 1940s, especially during World War 2, with fascinating text by “E. M. Frimbo” and showcasing the amazing photography by Jack Delano documenting the railroads' contribution to the war effort
- America's Colorful Railroads (1978): One of the first all-color train books, featuring vintage photos of steam and early diesel in the 1940s and 1950s from around the United States; photos by Don Ball and other well-known railfans
- America's Railroads - The Second Generation (1980): All-color photography of trains from around the United States in the 1960s and 1970s by Don Ball, Jim Boyd, T. J. Donahue, and other well-known railfans
- Rails (1981): Consists exclusively of black-and-white photography by Don Ball, selected photos spanning his career
- Railroads (1985): Consists exclusively of color photography by Don Ball, selected photos spanning his career [Careful! Do not confuse this book with the similarly titled “Railroads - An American Journey.”]
- The Pennsylvania Railroad, 1940s-1950s (1986): All-color photography of the Pennsylvania Railroad by Don Ball and other well-known railfans, covering all its major lines and operations. Mr. Ball died shortly after the book was published.

Born in 1938, Don Ball, Jr. had the fortune to see and photograph steam extensively and the misfortune to see it end. But he made peace with the diesel and became a top-notch diesel

photographer, too. Mr. Ball's great photos are supplemented with outstanding work by other prominent railfans such as William Barham, Richard Kindig, and Robert Olmsted, to name just a few. Coverage is nationwide and in-depth. Of course, all the famous steam locomotives are here, but also the scenes of a bygone era that other books often miss: steam-powered drag and local freights, local and motor-powered passenger trains. Plenty of space for the trains of his native Kansas (UP, Rock Island, Santa Fe) and the handsome locomotives of the Southwest: Frisco, Mopac, Texas & Pacific. Great coverage of Ball's favorites, the UP 4-12-2 9000 series. Splendid full-page or 2-page action shots of not-so-famous locomotives such as Delaware & Hudson 4-6-6-4s, Lackawanna 4-8-4s, and in the Pacific Northwest. A chapter on streamlined steam in the 1930s and 1940s and another chapter on the steam diehards (Norfolk & Western, B&O, Nickel Plate, Illinois Central, UP). A chapter of men and machines at work in roundhouses, yards, and shops. Good coverage of early diesels, including Alco, Baldwin, and Fairbanks-Morse. But my favorite is Ball's 2-page photo of a Santa Fe 2900 series 4-8-4 locomotive in Kansas, leaning into a superelevated curve, pulling a long freight. You can just about hear and smell that engine. The book has a nice introduction by David P. Morgan of Trains magazine fame and short, evocative texts by Mr. Ball.

If you are just starting to collect these 8 books and do not own any of them yet, I guess my highest priorities would be "Decade of the Trains," "Railroads - An American Journey," and "America's Colorful Railroads" - but, frankly, all 8 books are great and you can collect them in any order, depending on their availability, condition, and price.

Excellent

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