

# Tips For Improving AZL s F59PHI

In 2004, American Z Line released their first run of F59PHI locomotives and Bombardier passenger cars. This was followed in early 2005 with a second run of F59PHI sets with Bombardier cars and the all new Amtrak California and Amtrak West coaches. Since releasing these sets, owners have reported the need for a few minor modifications.

The first release of F59PHIs and Bombardier cars really showed how smooth a locomotive could operate. The sets were offered in Metrolink, Sounder and West Coast Express. The second release increased the Bombardier selection to include Coaster, Dallas TRE as well as the two Amtrak sets.

Soon after the first release, clients reported tracking problems with some of the passenger cars. The issue was the inside axles on the trucks were riding up and occasionally derailing. The problem was addressed with Ajin. Ajin corrected the design flaw and has sent new chassis for all the passenger cars in the first run. The second run has the new chassis and does not need the upgrad. For those who purchased the above mentioned sets, free upgrade kits are available. Contact Ztrack for the parts. The upgrade kits are included with new sets sold through dealers. The passenger cars are easily disassembled. The trucks will need to be removed from the old chassis and snapped back in place on the new chassis. Clips hold the car shell in place. This is a good opportunity to add a few people to your car interiors.



**Figure 1** shows the pegs that insert in the clip on the chassis and the pins that hold the rear porch in place.

The F59PHI locomotive is masterfully engineered. The construction does not include a single screw and simply clips together. The shell is solid, but two areas have been troublesome for clients. The rear porches and snow plow are held in place with extremely small plastic pins cast into the shell. These pins can break and loosen causing the rear porch and coupler to become a problem. There is an easy fix. It is recommended that a small drop of CA glue is applied to the pins. This will hold the plow and porch firmly in place and strengthen the pin assembly.



**Out of the box**, this locomotive demonstrates the result of a improperly installed clip and raised DCC pocket.

On inspection, AZL found that shells on some of the locomotives were sitting too high (above). We have found two reasons this occurs. The first reason is the mis-position of the top gray clip that holds the chassis together. This clip has two small holes that correspond to pegs cast into the shell (figure 1). The two holes should face towards the rear of the



**Figure 2:** The holes in the top gray clip. These should be aligned towards the rear of the chassis as shown.

locomotive, not the front (figure 2). It is recommended all customers check the clips and correct as necessary. A small flat head screw driver should be used to pop the clip off of the chassis.



**Figure 3:** The raised DCC pocket (arrow). This should be filed flush with the chassis.

The second issue only affects the second run of F59PHIs. Strangely, this manufacturing issue did not occur on the first run. The DCC pocket on the second F59PHI run does not sit flush against the chassis on some locomotives. The rear of the pocket rises above the chassis. This causes the shell to lift and coupling becomes an issue. If this condition occurs, a file should be used to file away the plastic until it is flush with the metal chassis. Be careful that you remove all filings so they do not fall into the drive train.



The clip alignment has been corrected and the DCC pocket has been filed down. The couplers now align correctly.

AZL couplers: you either hate them or love them. I have found that I love these couplers. After extensive running of these sets for hours at a time, they don't uncouple. The issue stems more from the fact that they can be difficult to couple. Over time, I have found you can push the cars together. At first, though, you may need to lift the cars up slightly and drop down to couple. AZL did design their coupler system to match the dimensions of Micro-Trains couplers. If you are one that does not like the AZL couplers, they can be easily swapped with Micro-Trains #905. Note AZL couplers and MTL couplers are compatible and can be used together. Also, Ajin has installed a small number of couplers upside down on the Amtrak passengers. To fix, you will need to remove the screw holding the coupler box to the chassis and flip the housing.

As for long term maintenance, these sets are showing resilience and durability. I have been testing one set that easily has over 40 hours of operation and so far cleaning the wheels is the only needed maintenance. Light lubrication of the gears in the trucks is recommended after extensive running.

In summary, the AZL's F59PHI sets are outstanding. The few issues discovered are minimal and easily corrected. These sets stand out on a layout and offer the Z enthusiast a great option for modern passenger travel. - RJK