



IrwinsJournal.com Presents:

The Unofficial Micro-Trains® Release Report Issue #321 – September, 2023

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Hello again everyone! We lead off this issue with a pair of cars lettered for a railroad company that's in two parts – hey, just like the virtual two pack. Let's get right to it...

N SCALE NEW RELEASE FREIGHT EQUIPMENT:



092 00 570, \$32.90.

Reporting Marks WW 4123.

092 00 580, \$32.90.

Reporting Marks WW 8840.

**Two Bay Center Flow Covered Hoppers,
Winchester and Western.**

The 4123 is gray with maroon roadname at top right and maroon reporting marks with black road number at left. Black lettering otherwise and white on black COTS panel at bottom right. The 8840 is yellow with blue lettering including reporting marks on left, "WW" logo in center and roadname on right. White on black COTS panel at bottom right and orange vertical conspicuity stripes at five points along side. Approximate Time Period:

2004 to no later than 2014 for the 4123, and 2006 to no later than 2018 for the 8840. These items are "Regional Railroad" releases and are not included in Micro-Trains Dealer Standing Orders.

The Regional Railroad Releases return with a shortline that definitely fits the category. And since we have a virtual two pack, it's fitting that I can tell a two-part story of the Winchester and Western... which has been around a lot longer than I realized.

The Baltimore and Ohio was largely behind the chartering of this line. It was interested in harvesting timber from area forests. The company was founded in 1916, completed from Winchester, Virginia to Rock Enon Springs in 1919, and extended to Wardensville, West Virginia by 1921. The route was theoretically in line with the "and Western" part of the name, but meandered quite a bit to reach Wardensville, which is around thirty miles southwest of Winchester. There was a limited passenger business to Capon Springs, West Virginia, to which the line was cut back in 1934 after the timber played out. The line was cut back to Gore in the early 1940s, where it served a sand quarry. Connection was with the B&O at Winchester, via the B&O's branch south from Harper's Ferry, as noted in the Official Railway Equipment

Register of July 1935—where the railroad’s name is listed as the Winchester and Wardensville, not the Winchester and Western. (I’ll leave the finding of when the name changed to the reader.) This original W&W was the subject of a short softcover book published by the National Railway Historical Society’s Washington, DC chapter in 1975.

In 1986, the W&W grew substantially when Conrail sold to it that part of the former Pennsylvania Railroad “Winchester Secondary” line from Winchester northeast through Virginia and West Virginia to Hagerstown, Maryland, which roughly parallels Interstate 81, bringing the track mileage up from 18 to 53. At the time, the W&W was owned by Unamin, a producer of non-metallic industrial minerals—like sand, for instance. I see online that Unamin was founded in 1970, but I suspect its history goes back a lot farther than that, including the quarry at Gore which the W&W serves. It took a while for the Official Railway Equipment Register (ORER) to catch up with this: as late as July 1989 the interchange with Conrail was still shown in Winchester, along with CSX. The October 1991 edition shows the interchange moved to Hagerstown, with Norfolk Southern as well as Conrail. And that ends Part One.

Here’s Part Two of the story: in 1987, the W&W grew again, but this time, in my home state of New Jersey, where it acquired from Conrail Shared Assets several parts of the former Pennsylvania-Reading Seashore Lines in the southern part of the Garden State. The next year, a short section of the former Central Railroad of New Jersey was added, for a total of 47 miles of track. This trackage was also used to serve Unamin’s sand interests. (The CNJ had done sufficient business in sand in that same area to keep its Southern Division working... barely... until the line hobbled into Conrail.) The two physically disconnected operations were called the Virginia Division and the New Jersey Division. Both parts were sold to shortline operator Omnitrac in September 2019, which still has it as part of its holdings.

A company that does most of its business with sand would have covered hoppers for that purpose, and the W&W did. Also surprisingly for a shortline, its roster included both second hand cars and newly built cars. I’ll guess that the 4123 appears to be among the former, and I’ll explain that shortly. There are six bingo photos of it on RRPictureArchives that date from 2006 to 2011. I first pick up this car as one of a “series” of two, 4122 and 4123, in the October 2004 ORER. Only outside dimensions are given: length 41 feet 11 inches, extreme height 15 feet 1 inch, along with the 2980 cubic foot capacity and 263,000 pound Gross Rail Weight (car plus lading). Both cars left the roster between the April 2013 and October 2014 ORERs, and how’s that for a relatively precise end to the ATP. Well, maybe, since the MTL car doesn’t have conspicuity stripes and these should have been added sometime after 2005. On the other hand, the bingo photo of the 4123 dated November 2011 doesn’t show any on the car.

I found the 8840 as of May 2006 on RailcarPhotos.com. It was on or near its home rails in Millville, New Jersey, pretty far down south in the state. (Fun fact: If you were to extend the Mason/Dixon Line—the boundary between Maryland and Pennsylvania-- eastward, one third of New Jersey would be south of that line.) Those conspicuity stripes aren’t that easy to make out against the bright yellow paint, but they are there. Also there is an “ACF Center Flow” legend and the light weight of 59,900 pounds and load limit of 203,100 pounds, which adds up to the 263,000 pound Gross Rail Weight.

The ORER for January 2006 is the first one in which I have this car, which is in its own series of, well, one. Again, only the outside dimensions are given: length, 44 feet, and extreme height, 14 feet 8 inches, along with a capacity of 3300 cubic feet.

As for the end of the ATP, there are no cars at all listed in the January 2018 ORER, which surprises me since I thought I'd been seeing them from time to time. "Freight Cars Owned: None" is what's found in the Equipment Register listing. However, an unrelated question on the MFCL at groups.io discussion led to the "Lineage" search on RailcarPhotos.com, which led to the WWUX reporting marks, to which a number of Winchester and Western cars were restenciled – those marks belonging to the W&W's parent Unamin. Mystery solved, at least partially! Perhaps the sale of the railroad to Omintrax didn't include the rolling stock.

Now here's why I think the 4123 at least came second hand, or more, from other railroads. Our Special Correspondent David Grothe pointed me to WW 4112 on RRPictureArchives, on which the former Southern Pacific lettering is bleeding through... under a non-trivial amount of rust, I might add. (A future MTL Weathered Release, perhaps?) In addition, captions on other cars in the roster – though, I hasten to add, not the 4123 – show its progression from other owners including the Missouri Pacific and CSX, originally from the C&O, B&O and Monon.



107 00 012, \$32.95.

Reporting Marks: ATSF 170943.

65 Foot Mill Gondola with Drop Ends, Santa Fe (AT&SF).

Brown with white lettering including reporting marks on left. Metal wheels and body mounted couplers. Metal wheels and body mounted couplers. Simulated pipe load included. Approximate Time Period: 1940 (build date) to early 1950s as painted. This item is scheduled to be available mid-month. Micro-Trains advises that this item requires a minimum 15 inch radius curve. Previous Release: Road Number 170902, August 2023.

I mostly covered this in last month's issue since this is Part Two of a virtual two pack of this car (as correctly guessed by this byte-slinger, pause for self-pat on back). This car is in the same prototype series as last month's car, ATSF 170850 to 170974, built in 1940 by General American, the Santa Fe's Class GA-48. A quick search of the usual online places didn't turn up a bingo photo for this road number – not surprising considering how long ago it was built – but I have no doubt that Micro-Trains has that evidence.

There is one important update, however, directly from Micro-Trains. As noted on the MTL website and in a direct e-mailing to its distribution list, "Micro-Trains has determined that the Truck selected for this all-new release is not performing correctly. The truck side frames conflict with the gondola's stirrups, which can lead to the car derailing." To its credit, the folks in Talent are not only fixing this quickly, but also offering free replacement truck frames to those who purchased the first release of the Santa Fe gondola (107 00 011). See the MTL website for details on how to receive them.



108 00 621 and 108 00 622, \$28.90 each.

Reporting Marks: NYC 489659 and 492042.

100 Ton Three Bay Open Hoppers, CSX Transportation.

Black with yellow lettering including NYC reporting marks on left and underlined CSX on right. White on black COTS panel at bottom right. Small "HL" in a yellow circle at bottom center. Simulated coal load included. Approximate Time Period: No earlier than 1998 through the decade of the 2000s, possibly with conspicuity stripes after 2005 (see text).

Let's start here with bingo photos for both cars on RailcarPhotos.com. The 489659 was at Shenandoah Junction, West Virginia, in May 2007 while the 492042 was found in Alorton, Illinois in October 2006. At the time neither car had conspicuity stripes. As another data point, NYC 489611 and 489627, close to that first road number in this virtual two pack, were photographed in 2010 and they didn't have conspicuity stripes either. Both cars are fourteen panel three bay hoppers, which is a key spotting feature for comparison to the MTL 108 body style.

I suspected that road numbers this far apart weren't going to be in the same series, and that's what we find in the ORER for January 2000. The 489659 is in the group 487309 to 489798 with a car count of 1098, while the 492042 lands in the group 491890 to 492420 with a car count of 185. Both cars have an outside length of 48 feet 9 inches, but the first set has an extreme height of 12 feet 4 inches and the second an extreme height of 12 feet 3 inches. Get out the micrometers... The capacity listed is 3422 cubic feet with the first set and 3433 cubic feet with the second. In the January 2011 ORER the 489659 and 492042 could still be in service, but with the car count of the groups in which they reside down quite a bit, to 486 and 121 respectively, we'll give that decision to the modeler. The car counts are 442 and 108 respectively in the April 2013 Register, then just thirty and six in the January 2018 ORER, so "to present" does not seem to be likely in terms of the Approximate Time Period.

Conrail's H1B series of hoppers, built by Bethlehem Steel in 1978 and 1979, carried the numbers 487301 to 489800 and 490801 to 490875. The NYC group 487309 to 489798 group is pretty close to that CR group. From RailcarPhotos.com I have photos with captions of NYC 488125 and 488826 keeping their Conrail road numbers. The 487309 had only its "CR" pasted over with an "NYC" but was in Conrail paint otherwise; the 488826 was in a complete CSX repaint. If the rest of these H1B also kept their original Conrail numbers, then we know the heritage of NYC 489659, the first of this virtual two-pack. If the second of this month's cars, NYC 492042, also kept its original Conrail number, that would make it an H1G class hopper, and it would also be coming "home" in a sense since that class was built at the former Chesapeake and Ohio shops in Raceland, Kentucky. Some of these cars carried the infamous "Hopper Toppers" including CR 492182 which was modeled by MTL in February 2021.



109 00 290, \$28.95.

Reporting Marks: SSW 80005.

Heavyweight Depressed Center Flat Car, Cotton Belt (St. Louis Southwestern).

Black with mostly white lettering including reporting marks on left and roadname on right of depressed section. Black on yellow routing instructions sideboard right of center ("When empty/ return to agent S.S.W. / Pine Bluff, Ark" in all capital letters). White COTS panel on far right. Approximate Time Period: 1958 (build date) or early 1970s given COTS panel to no later than 1997. This item is scheduled to be available mid-month and I've confirmed it for sale online.

There's no photo but there are plenty of specifications for the series of just two depressed center flat cars on Richard Percy's "My Espee Modeler's Homepage" (espee.railfan.net). The capacity was 250,000 pounds, light weight 120,000 pounds, and load limit 274,000 pounds, with smaller load limits in higher concentrations in the center of the depressed deck. The length of that depression was 26 feet and the overall deck length was 62 feet 9 inches; both of these are a bit longer than the MTL 109 body style. The car's depressed section had a steel deck with the balance of the deck being wood. The direct URL for the partial SP Specification Sheet 12A which also has a photo of an SP super duty car with four six-wheel trucks, is directly available at espee.railfan.net/sp_fcsc-12a.html.

There is a bingo photo on RRPictureArchives, taken in October 1976 in Indio, California. Noted in the caption: "Experienced high water somewhere. Here at Indio shop for a checkup." That's with its payload, what looks like the back end of a Very Large Dump Truck, still attached to the car! I'm not sure this is what MTL used for its artwork, unless they are very good at getting clear graphics out of a rather unclear image. There's also an extra set of stencils on the right end of the non-depressed section of the car. But this photo will have to do for us.

The first ORER in which I pick up this car and its counterpart is January 1958, where the "80005, 80006" series is marked as an addition. This is after parent Southern Pacific adopted the gothic roadname, so the not-so-strictly-speaking ATP could start with the build date. Strictly speaking, though, the COTS panel puts the start of the ATP no earlier than 1972. Between the April 1995 and October 1996 Equipment Registers, the car count of the "series" drops from two to one... but which one was left, the 80005 or the 80006? (More to the point, why couldn't the ORER reflect reality...) Well, whichever one was left, it was gone no later than the next ORER in the Research Accumulation, from April 1997.



109 00 300, \$28.95.

Reporting Marks: PC 766145.

Heavyweight Depressed Center Flat Car, Penn Central.

Green (the PC's "Deepwater Green") with mostly white lettering including reporting marks on left and small herald on right of depressed section. White on black COTS panel on far right. Approximate Time Period: no earlier than 1968 to early 1980s. This item is scheduled to be available mid-month and I've confirmed it for sale online.

Yikes, the bingo photo for this car, over on RailcarPhotos.com and taken in April 1980, shows a very beat-up car. The wood deck to the right of the depressed section is in really bad shape, and entirely missing on the left of the depressed section, revealing that the steel casting which forms most of the car is not solid, but containing multiple slots and other openings. That casting came from General Steel Castings in 1958 and went to the Pennsylvania Railroad, which finished the construction of their series 470271 to 470276 at their Altoona Shops. They were the Pennsy's Class F43. (The Micro-Trains Depressed Center Flat Cars in PRR paint, so far, by the way are 470011, 470016, 470017, and 470019, which were part of the PRR Class F35. "Rob's Pennsy Page" (pr.railfan.net) has the drawing for this car which includes some dimensional information: overall length 58 feet 4 inches over strikers, depressed section length 18 feet, truck centers 40 feet, light weight 126,000 pounds, and capacity and load limit both 280,000 pounds. All six cars in the series were shown in the ORER entry for April 1968, the last one in which the PRR appeared as an independent railroad.

It's noted in the caption for the bingo photo that these cars became the Penn Central series 766145 to 766150. While the series is in place by the October 1969 ORER, there's only one car in it; the other five are still in PRR paint. Moving up to the coming of Conrail in April 1976, we find all six cars in Penn Central paint. In July 1980, two months after the photo of the awful looking 766145, the car count is down to three. That's only two in the April 1981 Equipment Register. Only the 766149 is left in the April 1984 ORER, which is where I stopped looking.



In addition to the above, the Norfolk Southern Ribbon Rail Single Flat Car (045 44 670, \$31.95) is confirmed available. I saw online listings for it just after the August UMTRR went "to press" – and it's also already tagged as sold out on the MTL website.



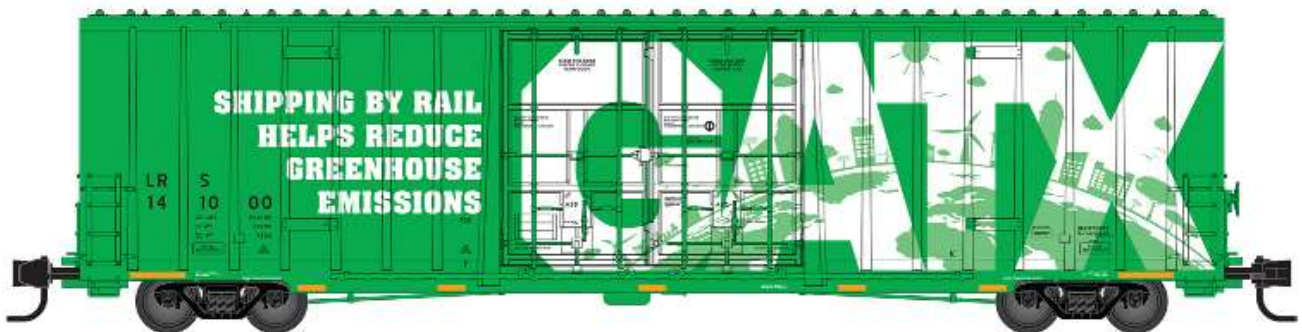
The **Southern Pacific Rio Grande Division Safety Caboose (050 00 250, \$45.95, Road Number 316)** was expected mid-month but just before “Press Time” was shifted to “Coming Soon.” UMTRR coverage was in the June 2023 issue.



Meanwhile, a funny thing happened on the way to Authorized Micro-Trains Dealers: one of the road numbers for the **Department of Defense Depressed Center Flat Cars** was changed. Here’s the updated information: **109 00 271 has Reporting Marks DODX 39810** (was 39830) **and 109 00**

272 has Reporting Marks DODX 39814 (no change). MSRP remains \$31.95 each. The official MTL images are now available, and I’ve seen these cars for sale online. The changed road number still fits into the prototype series of cars I described in the pre-order coverage of this virtual two-pack in March.

*The following is in pre-order at present and is NOT currently available. Scheduled delivery is as noted below. UMTRR coverage is being provided ahead of the actual release in order to facilitate pre-order decisions; pre-orders close **September 30**.*



Targeted Delivery February 2024:

123 00 080, \$51.98.

Reporting Marks: LRS 141000.

60 Foot High-Cube Exterior Post Double Plug Door Boxcar, GATX/Laurinburg and Southern.

Green with black lettering including reporting marks on left. White legend “Shipping by Rail Helps Reduce Greenhouse Emissions” (in all capital letters) left of door. White and green “GATX” mural with depiction of the earth with power generating windmills and office buildings. Orange horizontal conspicuity stripes at seven points along bottom of side. Approximate Time Period: 2022 (build date) to present. Micro-Trains artwork is preliminary; actual product may vary.

The Laurinburg and Southern is a shortline with 28 miles of track in the Laurinburg, North Carolina area. The line began operations in 1909 as part of the Aberdeen and Rockfish. In 1921 it was “spun off,” to use that term anachronistically, to the L&S. Since 1998 it has been owned by Gulf and Ohio Railways of Knoxville, Tennessee, which has three other shortlines in North Carolina and Tennessee and the “Three Rivers Rambler” tourist operation in Knoxville. According to the Wikipedians, much of the trackage is not in regular operation and is used for car storage. The LRS reporting marks are often seen these days as a vehicle for leasing of cars by GATX. The October 2020 showed 8,114 cars on its roster, and that’s before the purchase of a number of large capacity sixty foot boxcars in the past couple of years, including this one.

The bingo photo for this car is on RRPictureArchives, along with other cars in the 141000s there and on RailcarPhotos.com, shows that One Of These Boxcars Is Not Like The Others – and I’m not just referring to the paint scheme here. The 141000 is of a different design that looks to be a close if not an exact match to the MTL 123 body style. Other cars like the 141028 have horizontal ribs across the car in three rows approximately equidistant from each other. So I’ll not jump to any conclusions about the origin of the 141000 although Greenbrier is given as the builder of the series starting at 141000 on RailcarPhotos – albeit with a question mark.

On its website (gatx.com, of course), the company cites the American Association of Railroads, noting that freight rail is three to four times more fuel efficient than trucks, and while rail transportation makes up 40 percent of the long-distance freight volume in the United States, it accounts for only 2.1 percent of the total transportation greenhouse gas emissions. But we already knew how much more fuel-efficient railroads are, didn’t we?

N SCALE REPRINTS: A blast from the past...



104 00 011, \$30.95.

Reporting Marks: GTW 384060.

60 Foot Excess Height Boxcar, Single Youngstown Door, Grand Trunk Western.

Blue with mostly white lettering including roadname and reporting

marks on left and large GT herald with slogan “The Good Track Road” on right. Black on yellow warning sideboards at bottom left and right. White on black COTS panel on far right. Black end markings on white band at top of ends. Approximate Time Period: 1985 (rebuild date, see text) into the decade of the 2010s. Previous Releases: Road Number 384063, October 1998 (as Catalog Number 104010); Road Number 384046, February 2009.

I suppose I wince at the idea of calling this a “blast from the past” but it has been more than 14 years since the previous release of this car (at right), and almost 25 (!) years since the initial run which kicked off this body style in 1998. That first run was sufficiently long ago that “to present” was part of the Approximate Time Period. There was



also a bit of a mystery that came up with my coverage of the reprint in 2009, namely, were these cars increased in height during their service period?

Let's start with the ORER for January 1985, the first in the Research Accumulation in which this group appears (it's not in the April 1984 Register). All 100 of the series 384000 to 384099 are listed. Let's cover the vital statistics: inside length 60 feet 8 inches, inside width 9 feet 2 inches, inside height 13 feet 2 inches, outside length 68 feet 2 inches, extreme height 17 feet, door opening 10 feet, capacity 7320 cubic feet or 130,000 pounds. These dimensions exceeded the "Plate F" specifications.

The Canadian Freight Railcar Gallery (canadianfreightcargallery.ca) has photos of cars in the series—though no bingos to the three road numbers MTL has done including this one-- but more importantly, some history. American Car and Foundry built the series GTW 383000 to 383248 in 1966, a set of 60 foot single door auto parts boxcars with inside height of 11 feet 6 inches and extreme height of 15 feet 4 inches... pretty big in their own right. But apparently not big enough, since in 1985 they were rebuilt to the series in which we're interested, by, among other things, adding to the sides and ends. A photo of GTW 383138 illustrates the "before" version of these cars. So it's true that the cars gained height during their service period, just not quite in the way I had imagined. And by the way, in addition to catching the rebuild for the car copy for this reprint, the car copy for the original Micro-Trains release did note that the cars were built in 1966, so score one for the folks in Talent. The prototypes' side extensions don't have the weld pattern of the original portion of the sides, so there's a delta to the 104 body style. The door has been extended as well, with what looks like another panel added to the bottom. That wouldn't be easily to replicate without some serious incremental tooling.

Returning to the ORERs, the October 2007 edition showed sixteen total cars, four of which had been demoted to just "Box, Steel" and the other twelve described as "Box, Steel, Cushion Underframe, Single Sliding Door, 23 DF-1, 50K." The extreme height was up an inch to 17 feet 1 inch, but perhaps that's just a change in rounding protocol. That entry was sufficient for me to keep the ATP "to present" for the 2009 reprint, but just barely: only two cars remained as of the January 2011 ORER, which hung on through at least the October 2014 Register but were gone before January 2018.



In addition to the above, the **TTX Depressed Center Flat Cars (109 00 143, Reporting Marks QTTX 130529 and 109 00 144, Reporting Marks QTTX 130532, \$31.95 each)** were changed to "Coming Soon" on the MTL website just before "Press Time." UMTRR pre-order coverage was in the March 2023 issue.

N SCALE NEW RELEASE PASSENGER CARS: No new releases or pre-orders this month, but see N Scale Multi-Packs below for expected mid-month releases of previously announced pre-order packs.

N SCALE WEATHERED RELEASES:



056 44 480, \$27.90.

Reporting Marks: N&W 125134.

33 Foot Two Bay Open Hopper, Rib Sides, Flat Ends, Norfolk and Western / former Virginian Railway.

#5 in the Norfolk Southern Family Tree Series (pre-orders taken December 2022).

Black with white lettering including

reporting marks on left and small roadname with large “N&W” in center. “Bleed-through” of previous Virginian round herald at top left and roadname in center. Light to moderate weathering including rust effects. Simulated coal load included. Approximate Time Period: early to mid 1960s at least. Previous Releases: None.

Page 59 of the **Norfolk and Western Color Guide to Freight and Passenger Equipment** has an example of the N&Ws Class H33 cars, the series N&W 125000 to 125999. That class was an amalgamation of Virginian’s hopper classes H13 to H13D. That’s a lot of coal cars! This particular set was the former Virginian 25000 to 25999 according to the Norfolk and Western Historical Society. Essentially the N&W dropped a “1” in front of the road number, though we wouldn’t know with complete certainty whether N&W 125134 was the VGN 25134. These cars were built by Pressed Steel Car Company in 1947 and 1948 for the Virginian. They were eight panel two bay hoppers with flat ends, matching the key attributes of the MTL 056 body style. The ORER for July 1963 has an even larger series, N&W 123000 to 129999, with 2207 cars. The key dimensions were: inside length 33 feet, outside length 34 feet, extreme height 10 feet 9 inches, and capacity 2041 cubic feet or 100,000 pounds. Importantly for our story here, the series had a car count of 2455 in the April 1970 Equipment Register, in other words, there were still plenty of these cars in service.

I didn’t find a bingo photo for this specific car, but I did find something more interesting, also on the N&W Historical Society website. There is an undated image (direct URL to this photo is www.nwhs.org/archivesdb/detail.php?ID=33712) of N&W 129652, one of three cars in the photo. While the paint looks fresh, the Virginian herald and roadname is already showing through the N&W lettering! And while we don’t know the date or location of these shot, we do know that the three hoppers are being pulled by a Trainmaster Locomotive that is still in Virginian paint. This suggests to me that the Approximate Time Period begins earlier than I would have expected, perhaps not long after the N&W merged in the Virginian in 1959. That aligns with the service date of September 1962 on the car, which also carries the pre-1964 N&W paint scheme which doesn’t include the N&W “hamburger” herald. In addition, there is no ACI Label on the MTL model; those were introduced starting circa 1967. So what we have here is a Weathered Release that fits nicely into the early to mid 1960s timeframe, which is unusual – but welcome – from the folks in Talent. I can even somewhat plausibly operate this on my model pike, which is nominally set in 1963, and point to the image of a newly painted N&W hopper on which the former railroad was already peeking through.

In addition to the above, the following was announced on the Micro-Trains website and via the "E-Line" newsletter on September 14.



983 05 058, \$77.95, with Jewel Boxes.

993 05 058, \$68.95, with Foam Nest packaging.

Reporting Marks NW 604529 and 604532.

Norfolk and Western Weathered Two Pack.

Consists of two 60 Foot Excess Height Double Plug Door Boxcars with Waffle Sides. Black with mostly white lettering including runtogether "NW" herald and reporting marks on left and small roadname on right. Black on yellow warning sideboard at bottom left of side (varies by car). Black

lettering on white band at top of ends. Orange conspicuity stripes at multiple points along bottom of sides. Heavy weathering; multicolor graffiti on one side of both cars. Approximate Time Period: After 2005 given conspicuity stripes, or more precisely, the year 2020, plus or minus. Previous Releases (both unweathered): Road Number 604545, November 2000 (as Catalog 102070); Road Number 604531, October 2013. Individual catalog and road numbers are: 103 44 070, 604529; 103 45 070, 604532.

Happy Halloween! One side of the first boxcar in this two pack includes that greeting, in a sense, if you can call a smiling skull in a black hood much of a greeting. I still can't read graffiti but I think there is the word "Spirit" to the right of the door on this same car or some deliberate misspelling of the word. I'm won't even try to interpret what's on the other car, NW 604532.

Instead, I'll "reprint" myself from the previous release of this car (Catalog 102 00 070, Road Number 604531, at right), though the add of conspicuity stripes to this pair would make them "not a reprints" even if the weathering and graffiti weren't present. And speaking of present, that was my call on the ATP last time, which needs an update.



With the major expansion of the N&W in 1964 via the purchase and/or lease of the Nickel Plate, Wabash, etcetera, the road came to serve a number of the big auto assembly plants and a number of their suppliers. The deterioration of the infrastructure of several other railroads in the region caused shipments to literally bounce down the track, arriving at their destination in somewhat less than the perfect condition in which they were sent. This caused shippers to think even more about trucking parts around whenever practical, and as trailers became bigger, more parts could be sent up the Interstate to Detroit rather than down the track. These waffle side cars, which included numerous tie downs and other load restraining devices, help railroads to retain and perhaps recapture some of this business. These two cars were built by Berwick in 1978 according to the **Norfolk and Western Color Guide to Freight and Passenger Equipment**, Page 48. They were numbered 604500 to 604546, the N&W's Class B-139.

The ORER from April 1981 has one of those nice long descriptions for this series 604523 to 604546, AAR Class XP: “Box, Steel, 15 Inch Cushion Underframe, Double Plug Doors Centered, Nailable Steel Floor, 50K, 8 Special Belt Rails, Wood Rub Rails, Rack Retainers on Floor in Doorways, Axle Spacing 5 feet 10 inches, Truck Centers 46 feet 3 inches (Auto Parts).” (For completeness, I’ll note that the first half of the build is in the series 604500 to 604522, with different equipment.) These are listed with a 59 foot 7 inch inside length and a 67 foot 9 inch outside length, with a 16 foot door opening and 162,000 pounds capacity. All 24 cars were out there as of that date, and as of January 1985 also. In October 1991 under Norfolk Southern, we have a change in direction; 16 cars in the group get the excruciatingly detailed listing but eight other cars get sent to three other series described as just “Box, Steel.” But wait! In the October 1996 group the 24 cars are reunited into just one series with all the details returned. All but one remained with that whole big long description into the January 2000 ORER with NW reporting marks while the 24th (road number 604526) was demoted back to just “Box, Steel.” That led us, although not knowing for sure whether that “interesting” white on black paint scheme remained, to more or less declare an ATP running up to “the present” with the first release of this car in November 2000, however, a **Color Guide** photo shows one of these cars repainted into the “Claytor Scheme” of brown with white lettering.

When the reprint of this car was done in October 2013, I reported that there were 18 remaining in the January 2011 Register, as close as I could get to The Present at the time. Without looking at any other ORERs we can get to February 2020 for the 604529 via a bingo photo of it on RailcarPhotos.com... complete with the muddy, rusty look that MTL has depicted here. And we can advance to November 2020 for the 604532, also via a RailcarPhotos.com bingo. That leads me to the latest Equipment Register in the Research Accumulation, October 2020, which shows 13 cars out of the original 24 still in service. Based on other photos online, it does look like most of these were repainted out of the original white on black “runtogether NW” scheme. I’ll provide the “plus or minus” ATP around 2020 when the bingo photos were taken, but after 2005 would also work for a broader Approximate Time Period.



983 05 059, \$101.95, with Jewel Boxes (only, no Foam Nest option).

Reporting Marks: TILX 280650, 280673, and 280721.

TILX Tank Car Three Pack.

Consists of three MTL 110 series 54 Foot General Service Tank Cars.

Base cars are white with mostly black lettering including reporting marks on left (in different typefaces “fonts” on each car). Tank qualification stencils on right; on the 280650 and 280673 these are white on black and on the 280721 these are black. Yellow

conspicuity stripes at six points across the middle of each side. Various scrawl and multicolor graffiti on both sides of each car. Approximate Time Period: December 2005/January 2006

(build dates) to as late as the present. Previous Releases: None. The individual catalog and road numbers are: 110 44 600, 280650; 110 45 600, 280673; 110 46 600, 260721.

These three cars come from two different orders, both fulfilled by TrinityRail according to notes on RailcarPhotos. Well, that would make sense since TILX are the main reporting marks for Trinity Industries Leasing Company... Anyway, the 280650 and 280673 were in the series TILX 280610 to 280679, while the 260721 was in the group TILX 280700 to 280764. Both sets of cars were built in the period December 2005 through January 2006, and how's that for a specific start to the Approximate Time Period.

We go to RRPictureArchives for bingo photos on two of the three cars. Would you like the clean or graffiti-covered version of TILX 280650? Let's do both: with graffiti as of July 2017, then with either some really serious cleaning including rust removal or a brand new white paint job in January 2019. Well, let's go with new paint since that includes a change in the qualification stencil from white on black to black on a brighter white than on the rest of the car. Maybe that's a large decal instead of a stencil, for that matter. Meanwhile, TILX 280721 was seen in Union, New Jersey, in October 2019, and then in Montgomery, New Jersey in July 2020, with more than a little additional decoration. These tank cars must be a magnet for graffiti perpetrators. The spray paint sure stands out against a white canvas. And don't tell me it was just because it was in "Jersey," says this native of the Garden State. (Stop laughing.) Rust appears to be rather a problem for these cars as well, based on photos of other cars in the series, and I'm a little surprised that MTL didn't include some in their renditions of these cars. Just for a little variety, however, we have a shot of TILX 280763 as of September 2006, looking quite new, as it should, and with no spray can output to ruin the finish... at least, not yet.

The ORER for October 2020 has the usual lack of information about these tank cars, as is generally the case for this type of rolling stock. The series TILX 280610 to 280764 takes in all three of these cars and the two separate build orders. The car count was 154, the AAR Car Type Code was T108, the Gross Rail Weight was 286,000 pounds, and the cars were within Plate C dimensions, perhaps illustrating how these diagrams have changed over time. And that's all we've got. An ATP extending into The Present seems reasonable here in general, but mind the repaint of the 280650... or invoke Rule #1 ("It's your railroad").

N SCALE MULTI-PACKS: First, I'll note that the **Norfolk Southern Ribbon Rail Multi-Packs** are confirmed as available, as I saw them listed online just after "press time" of the August UMTRR, which also has the individual catalog and road numbers. They are Three Pack #1: 983 02 220, \$107.95, with Jewel Boxes; 993 02 220, \$95.95, with Foam Nest; Three Pack #2: 983 02 221, \$107.95, with Jewel Boxes; 993 02 221, \$95.95, with Foam Nest; and Center Car Two Pack: 983 02 222, \$73.95, with Jewel Boxes; 993 02 222, \$64.95, with Foam Nest.



Confirmed as available at this writing through online listings is the **Burlington Northern Four Car Runner Pack** of two bay Center Flows, also known as Runner Pack #215 (983 00 215, \$144.95, with Jewel Boxes; 993 00 215, \$129.95, with Foam Nest). UMTRR pre-order coverage was in the April 2023 issue. The individual catalog and road numbers are: 092 51 590, 419183; 092 52 590, 419246; 092 53 590, 419305; and 092 54 590, 491332. These are the first through fourth

numbers for this item, which hasn't been previously released.

The rest of this month's arrivals are all targeted for mid-month, and there are five of them... well, maybe...



First in catalog number sequence is the **Southern Pacific Weathered Trailer Four Pack** (983 02 224, \$124.95, with Jewel Boxes; 993 02 224, \$109.95, with Foam Nest). UMTRR pre-order coverage was in the March 2023 issue. The individual catalog and road numbers are: 451 44 330, 250115; 451 45 330, 250066; 451 46 330, 250070; and 451 47 330, 250082. This was changed to "Coming Soon" on the MTL website just before "Press Time."

Next is the **Southern Pacific Clean (Unweathered) Trailer Four Pack** (983 02 228, \$114.95, with Jewel Boxes; 993 02 228, \$104.95, with Foam Nest). UMTRR pre-order coverage was in the April 2023 issue. The individual catalog and road numbers are: 451 51 330, 250072; 451 52 330, 250098; 451 53 330, 250134; and 451 54 330, 250176. I've seen this item available online.



Taken together, these are the first through eighth numbers for this item, which hasn't been previously released.



Staying with the Southern Pacific, we have the SP Maintenance of Way Two Pack (**983 02 229, \$70.95, with Jewel Boxes; 993 02 229, \$61.95, with Foam Nest**). UMTRR pre-order coverage was in the April 2023 issue. The individual catalog and road numbers are: 118 51 060, 4520 and 118 52 060, 4521. I've seen this item for sale online.

And also seen for sale online is the SP Maintenance of Way Three Pack (**983 02 230, \$106.95, with Jewel Boxes; 993 02 230, \$94.95, with Foam Nest**). UMTRR pre-order coverage was in the April 2023 issue. The individual catalog and road numbers are: 146 51 520, Diner MW 1044; 142 52 520, 12-1 Sleeper MW 7183; and 149 53 520, Horse Car MW 5984. Note that I'm using the 142 prefix for the Sleeper which would be correct for the body style; the MTL Excel worksheet has 146 as the prefix which I think isn't correct.



Finally for the month, there was the Chicago and North Western Hospital Car Two Pack (**983 02 231, \$70.95, with Jewel Boxes; 993 02 231, \$61.95, with Foam Nest**), however just before "Press Time" this was changed to "Coming Soon" on the MTL website. UMTRR pre-order coverage was in the April 2023 issue.

The individual catalog and car names of the two 12-1 Heavyweight Sleepers are: 142 51 530, "Joseph Lister"; 142 52 530, "Ephraim McDowell."

*In addition to the above, the following is in pre-order at present and is NOT currently available. Scheduled delivery is as noted below. UMTRR coverage is being provided ahead of the actual release in order to facilitate pre-order decisions; pre-orders close **September 30**.*



Targeted Delivery February 2024:

983 00 220, \$134.95, with Jewel Box Packaging.

993 00 220, \$119.95, with Foam Nest Packaging.

Reporting Marks: CSXT 143212, 143225, 143237, and 143247.

CSX Four Boxcar Runner Pack (Runner Pack #220).

Scheduled to consist of four MTL 180 series 50 Foot Steel Boxcars, Single 10 Foot Youngstown Door, No Running Board, Low

Brake Wheel. Dark blue with aluminum roof. Mostly yellow lettering including reporting marks on left and underlined CSX monogram on right. Red and yellow “Ease Up!” stencil on left and right. White on black COTS panel below “C” in “CSX” on right. Approximate Time Period: mid-1990s to early decade of the 2000s. Previous Releases: None. Micro-Trains artwork is preliminary; actual product may vary.

When I think of CSX boxcars, earlier interior post cars like this are not what comes to mind — the later exterior post boxcars, sometimes referred to as “Railbox” cars because there were so many built to that design — are what dominated their roster. But CSXT did have some of the earlier boxcars, however briefly, and they’ll be modeled by MTL in this forthcoming Runner Pack. What makes this set even more intriguing — to me, anyway — is that MTL notes in its car copy that they came from the Atlantic and Western. I remember seeing their ivory (really!) colored forty foot boxcars with “XF” designation featured prominently on freight trains running up and down the Northeast Corridor in the days when through freight and passenger service still co-existed there, which is to say the Previous Century. An example of this from 1978 is ATW 2028, on *Fallen Flags* (www.rr-fallenflags.org). So the idea that they also had fifty foot boxcars of this type... well, let’s just say I’d better get into the research.

And since I’m on *Fallen Flags* anyway, how about a shot of a possible predecessor paint scheme, ATW 15020, which certainly is a fifty foot boxcar, and in the same ivory paint scheme? (Note to Micro-Trains: Hint. I mean, as long as you’re going to make a bunch of 180 body style cars anyway...) Then on the same site, there are several cars in the Atlantic and Western 25000 series, including 25012, captured in 1981, which have been “topped off” vertically resulting in an unusual looking car. Could those be the source for these cars?

The answer appears to be Yes. Moving over to *RRPictureArchives*, we have a bingo on CSXT 143212, captured in service in February 1996. And how about this: it’s captioned as the former ATW 25012. It’s also noted that the cars were built in 1961 and rebuilt in November 1989. In CSX dark blue paint, the vertical extension of this car isn’t quite as easy to notice as it is in the light blue that the Atlantic and Western used (possibly they figured out that ivory paint doesn’t wear well), but it’s still visible. The asymmetric placement of the “Ease Up!” stencils as shown on the MTL artwork is prototypical. CSX must have replaced the door since the car was photographed as ATW 25012. No, it’s not an exact match for the MTL 180 body style, but I

doubt that you'll get a precise model of these car in a widely available release, unless you count 3-D printing, perhaps. Also on RRPictureArchives are bingo photos for the other three cars coming in this Runner Pack: a scan of a photo with an unknown date of the 143225 (ex-ATW 25006); the 143327 (formerly ATW 25039) in New Orleans in October 1997; two shots from December 1999 of the 143247 (ex-ATW 25049); and as a bonus an image of CSXT 143203, formerly ATW 25003, as of March 1999.

The first ORER in which I see these cars is April 1995. The main series was 143200 to 143389, with several subsets within that group varying by weight capacity. The other key dimensions were the same: inside length 50 feet 6 inches, inside width 9 feet 4 inches, inside height 10 feet 6 inches, outside length 57 feet 10 inches, extreme height 15 feet 3 inches, door opening 10 feet, and capacity 5022 cubic feet. These were called just "Box, Steel" but had the AAR Designation XL. The total car count was 97 at the time, but it was up to 187 in the January 2000 Equipment Register. There are no conspicuity stripes on the cars as depicted in the Micro-Trains artwork, and for good reason: there are just two cars left in the truncated series 143261 to 143345 in the October 2004 ORER.



Targeted Delivery February 2024:

983 02 239, \$144.95, with Jewel Box Packaging.

993 02 239, \$129.95, with Foam Nest Packaging.

Reporting Marks: SOO LINE 60809, 60825, 60839, and 60867.

Soo Line Three Bay Hoppers with Tarps Four Pack.

Scheduled to consist of four MTL 108 series three bay open hoppers. Brown with white lettering (not shown in MTL artwork but **may** be the same as Catalog 108 00 560 from July 2023, see below). Set comes with multi-

media kit representing tarps to cover hoppers for protection against cold weather; these tarps have spray painted reporting marks only. Approximate Time Period: 1973 (build date) through the decade of the 2000s. MTL artwork is preliminary; actual product may vary.

Okay, how do I review this one? I guess I'll start by noting that two of these cars, 60839 and 60867, fit into the same prototype series as the July 2023 single release of a Soo Line hopper, Catalog 108 00 560 (at right). These cars were built by Maxson in 1973 in the series of fifty cars numbered 60831 to 60929, odd numbers only, and equipped with Maxson air-operated doors for ballast service, which don't look that much different to me than what's on the Micro-Trains car. The 60809 and 60825 are from a series 60731 to 60829, odd numbers only, built in 1971 by Darby Corporation. (No, I haven't heard of that company either.) These were also fourteen panel three bay open hoppers. A photo of the 60819 is on the same page, 105, of the book **Soo**



Line Freight Equipment and Cabooses has the bingo to 60841 car above. One lettering difference here is that the large SOO LINE roadname starts on the fifth panel from the left, not the fourth, giving an offset appearance to the car. A quick look at the ORERs has the larger series 60633 to 60829 in service through at least the start of the 2010s: 50 cars in January 2011, but just one in April 2013). That's a little longer than the 60831 to 60929 set which had just one car left in January 2011.

Now, for the tarps. I have two questions on this: first, will there be full Soo Line lettering on the cars, or is it assumed that the cars will only be run with the tarps? Second, how is MTL going to model these tarps? It is noted that they are multimedia kits, so that's a hint. If you're asking "why tarps" in the first place, I'll just quote from the MTL copy here: "During the winter season railroads had to produce ways to keep loads in open hoppers from getting wet and freezing over during storms. One way was to cover the car sides... Once the car was empty, the tarps could be folded and stored inside the hopper for the next loading operation." I didn't find any bingo photos of Soo Line hoppers covered by tarps but I think the MTL artwork fairly represents what such a cover would look like. I suspect that the degree to which tie-downs will be depicted will depend on the modeler.



Targeted Delivery February 2024:

983 02 240, \$111.95, with Jewel Box Packaging.

993 02 240, \$ 99.95, with Foam Nest Packaging.

Northern Pacific Log Gondola with Flat Car and Log Loads Three Pack.

Scheduled to consist of the following:

- Two MTL 107 series 65 Foot Mill Gondolas with Drop Ends, Reporting Marks NP 56059 and 56060. Black with white lettering including reporting marks on left and large road name across car. White on black double COTS panel on right, covering the "C" in "Pacific" in the road name.

- One MTL 045 series 50 Foot Fishbelly Side Flat Car, Reporting Marks NP 62785. Black with white lettering including reporting marks on left and roadname on right.

Also includes multi-media kit for a log load which will extend past one end of each of the gondolas, as shown in the above artwork.

All three cars have moderate to heavy weathering. Gondolas have white scrawl graffiti in several places. Flat car has patched and restenciled dimensional data. Approximate Time Period: for the set, 1967 (build date) to the early decade of the 2000s. Previous Releases: None for the gondolas, also technically none for the flat car, see below. Micro-Trains artwork is preliminary; actual product may vary.

An aspect I've overlooked thus far of the appeal of the 65 Foot Mill Gondola for N Scalers – and, no doubt, for MTL as well – is the ability to include loads with the cars. This is an example, which brings to mind a couple of N Scale Collector/N Scale Enthusiast Special Runs. Those offerings didn't have a Micro-Trains Mill Gondola available at the time, however!

From there we go to Page 80 of the **NP Color Guide to Freight and Passenger Equipment**, to find a bingo photo of a different kind: the arrangement of gondolas with pole loads bookending a flat car used for spacing, just like the MTL artwork shown above. The photo was taken at Blossburg, Montana on July 26, 1986, as the trio of cars was crossing the Continental Divide at 5548 feet above sea level – as noted on the sign adjacent to the right of way. The gondola closest to the camera is NP 56060, with the “C” in the roadname obscured by the COTS panel, again just like the MTL artwork. We can’t read the road numbers of the flat car and other gondola, but the placement of the poles strongly suggests to me that this photo was the inspiration for this three pack. I think that means that the weathering-obscured road number on one of the gondolas to be modeled is 56060.

There aren’t that many road numbers from which to choose: The two cars in the photo in the **Color Guide** were part of the short series NP 56050 to 56074. The cars were built by Ortner in 1967 and had a capacity of 1,777 cubic feet. This size is the same as the Santa Fe gondolas built by General American that are the basis for the MTL 107 body style built thirty-seven years earlier. It’s noted in the **Color Guide** that the primary purpose of these gondolas on the NP



was hauling poles. The large gothic lettering was the “as delivered” paint scheme, which is how Micro-Trains is depicting them (artwork at left).

In the October 1969 ORER, we have all 25 cars in place with these dimensions: inside length 65 feet 6 inches, inside width 7 feet 9 inches, inside height 3 feet 5 inches, outside length 70 feet 8 inches, extreme height 7 feet 3 inches, and weight capacity 150,000 pounds. For a little variety, the width of the end door opening is also given, but that’s shown as both 7 feet and 6 feet 10 inches. I’m not exactly sure of the distinction here and there’s no end note for explanation.

Moving to the flat car, this looks like a “not a reprint” of the previous two NP fishbelly side flat cars (not to be confused with the two straight side flat cars, Catalog Number 44020, from April 1979 and April 1990). At right we have the official MTL photo of the second of the two releases, from November 2010.



And here’s the MTL artwork for the flat car that will be in this three pack. Note that (under the weathering!) the roadname is higher up on the

car, with the lettering split by the stake pockets. Page 67 of the **NP Color Guide to Freight and Passenger Equipment** has a photo of sister car 62718, which is also a bingo to the first Micro-Trains release in February 2003.

These cars belonged to the series 62700 to 62949, built by the railroad in 1967 using General Steel Industries castings. They had an end mount brake wheel versus the side mount brake wheel of the MTL 045 body style... which might have been an interesting obstacle to loads that extended out over the flat car from a mill gondola! The ORER for October 1969 has the

dimensional data: inside length 53 feet 6 inches, outside length 57 feet 11 inches, extreme height 5 feet 3 inches, and capacity 154,000 pounds. All 250 cars were shown, as expected only two years after they were built. What I find interesting is that while the car lettering includes that it has a cushion underframe, which is not mentioned in the ORER description.

We're in the unusual position of having all three cars built in the same year, so the ATP start is common at 1967. Now, to determine the end of the ATP... From the previous UMTRR coverage of the flat cars, I know that six of them made it to the January 1996 ORER. Those same six are in the April 1998 ORER, working for the Burlington Northern Santa Fe – and by then the 10 inch travel cushion underframe is part of the description. The last one listed was NP 62722, which remained in the October 2004 Equipment Register.

As for the gondolas, fourteen of them were in the Burlington Northern Santa Fe listing in the April 1998 ORER. They lasted longer, with eight in the July 2007 ORER – hey, that's long enough for them to get conspicuity stripes! – and seven in the January 2011 Register, six in April 2013, four in October 2014, and, amazingly, two in January 2018. No, we're not going to "the present" here! All former Northern Pacific rolling stock was gone by the October 2020 ORER. I suppose that if these "mill gondolas" were used mostly for carrying logs and poles, they wouldn't have taken the same beating than if they were loaded with steel. All that having been said, I'll keep the ATP end earlier in the 2000s to account for the flat cars being gone first.

N SCALE SPECIAL EDITION RELEASES: Happy Halloween... a little early...



102 00 270, \$28.95.

2023 Halloween Car.

Multicolor graphics featuring Micro-Mouse and a "monster" with "Happy Halloween" in center. No reporting marks or road number.

"It's Alive!" was proclaimed by one Victor Frankenstein before it was shouted by one Micro-Mouse, if not in the original 1818 novel by Mary Shelley, certainly in one or more of the film adaptations. According to the Wikipedians, the novel was the result of a contest among several authors to see who could write the best ghost story during the "Year Without A Summer" of 1816. Mary Shelley's entry was this one, more properly titled **Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus**. It was first published anonymously; in 1820 her name was added to the second edition. Fun fact: the monster is not named "Frankenstein," in fact it doesn't actually have a name. The reference is to the scientist who created it, not the creation, which can more properly be called "Frankenstein's Monster." Or in this case, I guess, "Micro-Mouse's Monster." How's that for alliteration.

And remember, if it's Victor's grandson Frederick to whom we refer, it's pronounced "Fronkensteen." Look it up, kids.



In addition to the above, **Car #7 in the “War of the Worlds” (139 00 032, \$28.95)** has been released. This car, USA 2467, includes a multi-media kit for two small tanks (assembly and painting needed). UMTRR pre-order coverage was in the September 2022 issue.

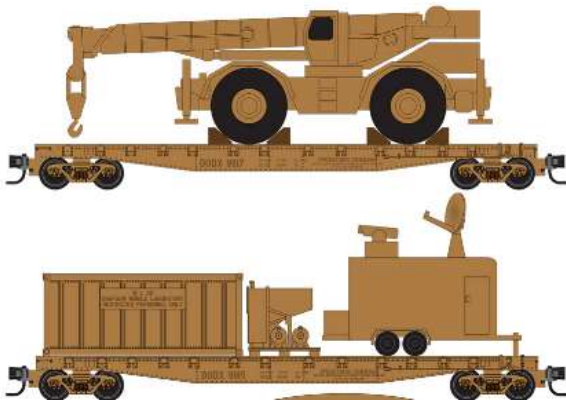


The **Buffalo and Pittsburgh 35th Anniversary Boxcar (102 00 230, \$29.95, Reporting Marks BPRR 8823)** scheduled to be released mid-August, is confirmed available (and possibly already sold out). UMTRR pre-order coverage was in the May 2023 issue.



The next two Medford, Talent and Lakecreek “70s/80s” items are scheduled to arrive mid-month. These are the **Southern Oregon Orchard Co-Op 51 Foot Rib Side Mechanical Refrigerator Car (070 00 090, \$29.95, Reporting Marks SOOC 70452)** and the **Rogue Valley Wine Company General Service Tank Car (110 00 580, \$34.95, Reporting Marks MTL 2532)**. UMTRR pre-order coverage was in the April 2023 issue. I’ve seen the tank car for sale online.

*In addition to the above, the following is in pre-order at present and is NOT currently available. Scheduled delivery is as noted below. UMTRR coverage is being provided ahead of the actual release in order to facilitate pre-order decisions; pre-orders close **September 30**.*



Targeted Delivery January 2024:

983 02 238, \$154.95, with Jewel Box Packaging.

993 02 238, \$139.95, with Foam Nest Packaging.

Area 51 Four Pack.

Scheduled to consist of:

- Two MTL 045 series 50 Foot Fishbelly Side Flat Cars, Reporting Marks DODX 9915 and 9917. Light brown with dark brown lettering including reporting marks on left and “Operations Command” on right. The 9915 will have a “Mobile Laboratory” container, portable power supply (at least, that’s what I think it is), and communications trailer. The 9917 will have a large crane with wheel chocks.



- One MTL 045 series DODX Flat Car with Six Wheel Trucks, Reporting Marks DODX 9927. Light brown with dark brown lettering including reporting marks on left and “Operations Command” on right.

Brown lettering “Restricted Personnel Only / Use of Force Authorized” warning with yellow dashed border on far left. Will come with a tarped load with multicolor placard “Do Not Approach / Ionizing Radiation Hazard” and a large undisclosed (!) machine mounted on a pedestal.



- One MTL 181 series 50 Foot Boxcar with Plug Door and Low Brake Wheel without Running Board, Reporting Marks DODX 9932. Light and dark brown paint and lettering in a camouflage pattern. Lettering includes reporting marks on left

and “Cryogenic Transport Car / Non-Human Biologics” on right, also brown lettering “Restricted Personnel Only / Use of Force Authorized” warning with yellow dashed border at top left and top right. Black on yellow “Oxygen” warning placard on door.

Approximate Time Period: Classified. MTL artwork is preliminary; actual product may vary.

Here’s a fun fact: Officially, UFOs are no longer called UFOs, but UAPs, which stands for Unidentified Anomalous Phenomena. This term was coined by the United States Department of Defense, and isn’t limited to flying objects, also including object under water or in space or that “travel between domains.” OK, I guess...

You might have read or heard about a recent report issued by NASA, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, on the topic of UFOs... oops, UAPs. You can read the report, or just look at the cool pictures, via this direct link: science.nasa.gov/science-pink/s3fs-public/atoms/files/UAP%20Independent%20Study%20Team%20-%20Final%20Report_0.pdf . The popular press drew the conclusion that there is no evidence to support extraterrestrial origins for any UFOs...oops, UAPs... but that NASA couldn’t conclude that alien life forms don’t exist, either. That’s not quite what I took away from the report, which was more like NASA noting that there really isn’t yet a rigorous scientific approach to studying such things and that NASA can help with that. Here’s an excerpt from the actual report, start quote:

Science is a process that reveals reality rather than sculpts it—no matter how unsatisfying or confusing that reality might be.

That includes the question of whether UAP have an extraterrestrial origin. There is an intellectual continuum between hypothesizing that faraway extraterrestrial civilizations might produce detectable technologies, and looking for those technologies closer to home. But in the search for life beyond Earth, extraterrestrial life itself must be the hypothesis of last resort—the answer we turn to only after ruling out all other possibilities. As Sherlock Holmes said, “Once you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains, no matter how improbable, must be the truth.”

To date, in the peer-reviewed scientific literature, there is no conclusive evidence suggesting an extraterrestrial origin for UAP. When it comes to UAP, the challenge we have is that the data needed to explain these anomalous sightings often do not exist; this includes eyewitness reports, which on their own can be interesting and compelling, but aren't reproducible and usually lack the information needed to make any definitive conclusions about a phenomenon's provenance.

End quote. Well, George, you've just taken all the fun out of the latest MTL Special Editions pre-order announcement, now haven't you. Not really! My feeling is that it's very hard to prove the absence of something, including Other Life Forms Out There. Besides, if we're really the only sentient inhabitants in all the universe, that's going to make those missions led by Captains Kirk, Pike, Picard, Archer, Lorca, Burnham, Freeman, and Janeway rather boring, now isn't it? (Well, Captain Freeman is stuck with some pretty boring missions anyway.)

Anyway, there are some folks out there (pun not intended) who believe that aliens not only exist, but they've already been here and might still be co-habiting with us. Perhaps one of the locations where they are being held is the now-legendary "Area 51." MTL's copy for this pre-order plays right along: "Of course, these are just conspiracy theories, right?" An observer of this cut of cars wonders what's under the tarp, protected by the "Restricted Personnel Only / Use of Force Authorized" warning on the heavy duty flat car. Of course, I would be different, and ask what that machine is next to the tarp...

The United States Government isn't helping much with transparency here. The existence of what is officially called Homey Airport wasn't even acknowledged until June 2013 following a Freedom of Information request. The Wikipedians have compiled information on this location, including that all research and occurrences in Area 51 are Top Secret/Sensitive Compartmented Information... which is a pretty high security classification. Which reminds me... what exactly is in that boxcar in this forthcoming set? And do I really want to know... (**Twilight Zone** theme up and under...)

Z SCALE: One new and one pre-order Special Edition or two this month... but no pre-orders or other items.



507 00 730, \$28.95.

2023 Halloween Car.

Multicolor graphics featuring Micro-Mouse and a "monster" with "Happy Halloween" in center. No reporting marks or road number.

Please see the commentary on the N Scale release above (102 00 270).



In addition to the above, **Car #7 in the “War of the Worlds” (525 00 182, \$28.95)** has been released. This car, USA 2467, includes a multi-media kit for a small tank. UMTRR pre-order coverage was in the September 2022 issue.

MTL ANNOUNCEMENTS: The Sherman Tank load that was recently featured with three sets of flat cars is now available as a separate item. These are 3-D printed items, two in the pack for \$12.95, Catalog Number 499 45 013.



And oops... I think I missed the release of the **Special Permit Transformer Load Two Pack (499 43 817, \$14.95)** last month. This was a pre-order item that would work with the QTTX Depressed Center Flat Cars which were also announced for pre-orders in March, or any other DC Flats for that matter.

DISCONTINUED ALERT: We begin the bye-bye board in N Scale with the Western Pacific Centerbeam Flat Car (053 00 063, June), simply because it’s the first item that came up in my review of 2023 items. (You don’t want to know about this process, trust me.) But perhaps I should have started with last month’s first number of the Santa Fe 65 Foot Mill Gondola (107 00 011), which has the “Contact Dealer” banner displayed, or the Ribbon Rail single flat car (045 44 670), or both versions of the Canadian National “Manitoba” “Buffalo Boxcars” (983/993 00 214). Also gone from 2023 releases are: Runner Pack #211 of three Pemex Tank Cars (983 00 211, April, Jewel Boxes Only); the Foam Nest version of the Blue Comet Heavyweight Five Pack (993 02 215, July) which closes out that release; both versions of the B&O Flat Car Three Pack with Tanks (983 / 993 02 218, June); the Foam Nest version of the Squaw Creek Weathered Hopper Two Pack (993 05 034, February); and the MT&L 70s/80s Version FT-A Diesel (987 01 812, August).

Turning the calendar back to 2022 – which is as far as we need to go this time-- these N Scale items have left the building: the Southern Railway Boxcar (024 00 500, May), the CSX Depressed Center Flat Car (109 00 180, December); the Foam Nest Version of the Milwaukee Road Weathered Two Pack of Airslide Covered Hoppers (993 05 024, August, Jewel Box Version already gone); and both versions of the Maine Central (Guilford) Weathered Boxcar Two Pack (983 / 993 05 039, December).

Moving over to Z Scale, War of the Worlds Car #2 is outta here (518 00 841, April 2023), as is the 2023 Father’s Day Car (548 00 160, June 2023) – and without so much as an official photo! “There are no products to list” in the Z Scale Locomotives category on the MTL website, which means that the Norfolk and Western diesels have rolled away (980 01 341 and 342, July 2023). The first number of the Baltimore and Ohio stock car has sold out (520 00 203, April 2022), as has the first number of the CSX Bulkhead Flat car (527 00 181, October 2019, second number already gone).

And this programming note: the virtual two pack of Z Scale Burlington Northern x-post boxcar reprints (511 00 123 and 124) are now officially shown on the MTL website as having been released in June 2023, not December 2022 as originally posted by the folks in Talent. I've adjusted the 2022 Release Table on the UMTRR Website to reflect this. Also, the Western Pacific Weathered Boxcar Two Pack in both versions (994 / 983 05 284, November 2022) is shown as available again; it was previously shown with the "Contact Dealer" banner. While I don't usually pull the Dreaded "D" from items in the Release Tables, but I'll make an exception here. Now watch what happens to them next month...

INCREMENTAL INFORMATION DEPARTMENT: A long time UMTRR Gang Member, who shall remain nameless, remarked to me: "I was just reading your August newsletter (I know, I'm late). But a nitpick...not about you, but MTL. I read the article about their War of the Worlds caboose with a smile on my face. It is marked with a medical emblem and carries a gun. You wouldn't have both on the same vehicle, a gun makes it a legitimate target for the enemy."

I haven't noticed until now that there's a new page on the MTL website, "New Product Features," accessible via the "Products" menu on the left side of the home page. Clicking there reveals photos of the "exploded" view of the 095 series PS-2 Covered Hopper and the 123 series NSC 60 Foot X-Post Double Plug Door High Cube Boxcar (what I call the "TBOX" car) as well as several views of the Hydra-Cushion Underframe as installed on the 181 00 291 Cotton Belt 50 Foot Boxcar. Each of the "exploded" views can be further "exploded" to a larger image.

OOPS PATROL: OK, so maybe Thanksgiving Turkeys can't fly, but Alex Postpischil reminds us that Wild Turkeys **can** fly. I was thinking specifically of the iconic episode of **WKRP in Cincinnati** titled "Turkeys Away" in which those birds absolutely could not fly. Oh, the humanity! On the other hand, I don't think Wild Turkeys taste like Domestic Turkey... or like chicken, for that matter...

Runner Pack #219 (993/983 00 219) will consist of **four** Pacific Fruit Express wood refrigerator cars... I described all four, gave all four road numbers, but also wrote "scheduled to consist of *three*..." Remember, folks, be careful when you copy and paste...

FINALLY, WHAT DOES 'ACCURATE' MEAN... Here is a reference that is too good to pass up, which comes from Southern Pacific expert and overall Freight Car Historian Tony Thompson (also known as Anthony S. Thompson in his role as author or co-author of numerous books). He has an impressive blog called "Modeling the SP" which includes a recent rejoinder to criticism of a model on an SP boxcar in another scale from another manufacturer (which will remain nameless here but is named in his writeup). Thompson's post is titled "Standards for commercial freight cars" and deals with the question, "Now what exactly is an 'accurate' model?" His answer might surprise you... and an accompanying photo of a "box" car made me laugh out loud. I'll recommend it to you and see if you have the same reaction I did:

modelingthesp.blogspot.com/2023/08/standards-for-commercial-freight-cars.html

Thompson's thoughts also made me consider the review and commentary you're "holding" right now... particularly how he had been previously dissuaded from using the word "wrong" in model reviews he'd written for a major magazine. I have a feeling that if I searched for that word in my archives, I would find it an uncomfortable number of times in back issues of this publication. It's a pretty strong term, and perhaps I'll take its use more under advisement. Except for Oops Patrol, that is, where I will **definitely** state that **I** got something "wrong."

Until next time, do the best you can!

Cheers,
George

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