

# THE MILWAUKEE ROAD MODELER



ABOVE MILW 33989 was a 40-foot 2SD rib-side XM boxcar, photographed at Othello, Wash., on April 11, 1988. BOB BOELTER COLLECTION

## Creating Large-Scale Rib-Side Boxcars

BY BOB BOELTER

As with any discussion of modeling a railroad in large-scale, compromise is a necessity. Since I'm modeling a 1980s-era Beer Line indoor switching layout, I felt the need to have Milwaukee Road's home-made rib-side boxcars running on the rails, just like the prototype.

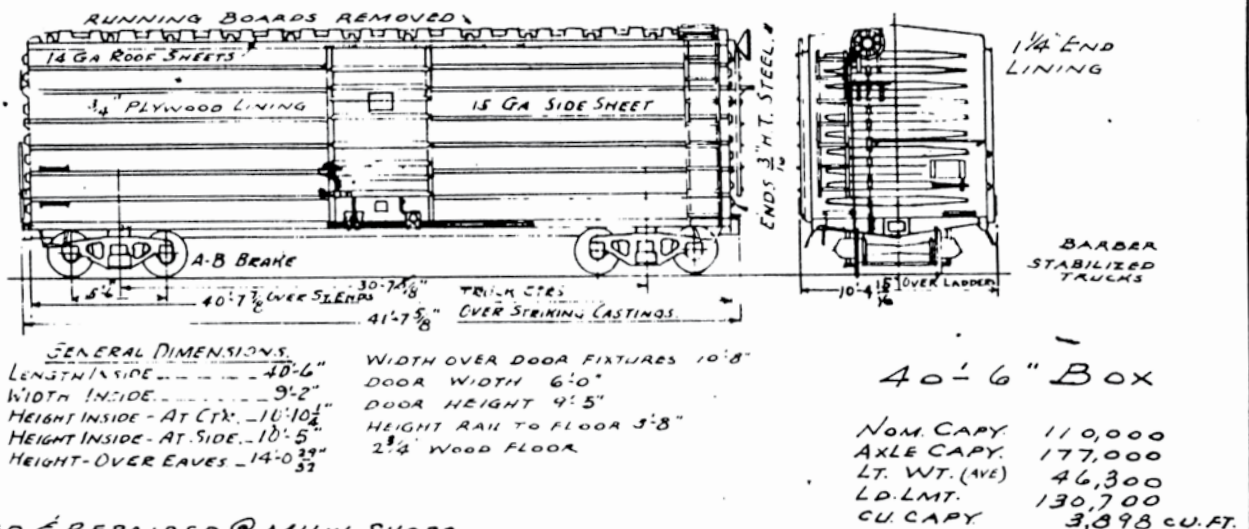
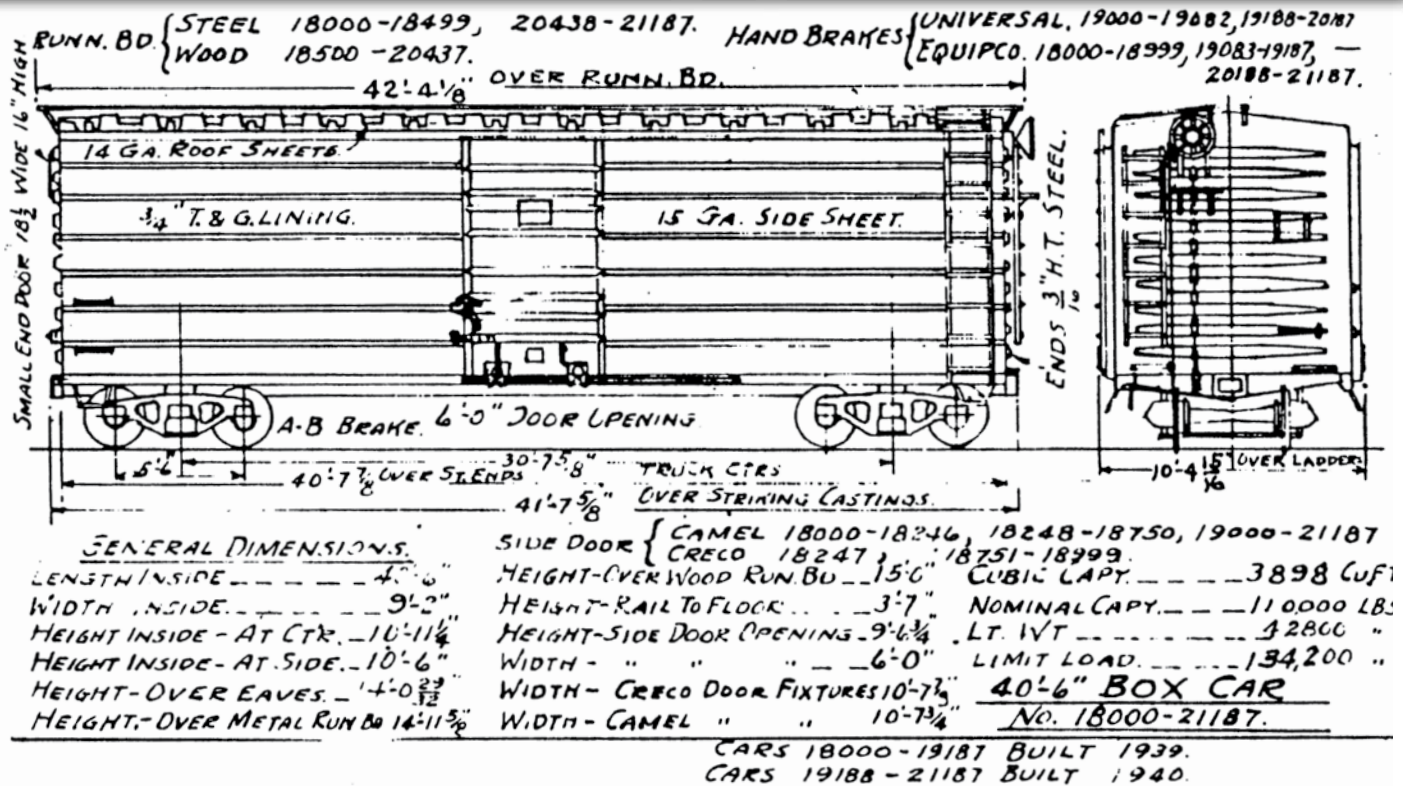
To my knowledge I don't think large-scale rib-side cars have been produced by a manufacturer. I vaguely recall seeing one, though, in a YouTube video from a large-scale show in the Northeast about ten years ago. Realizing I didn't have the time to do truly scratch-built models, I settled for creating look-alikes from existing models.

My models started with a deal I encountered from RLD Hobbies in Albion, Ill. They had a price reduction on 40-foot PS-1 boxcars, made by American Mainline Models (AML) in 1/29 scale. I purchased two that were Norfolk & Western models with metal wheels. The cars were cast in black with white lettering, providing a somewhat easy start.

My references were "A Short History of Rib-Side Boxcars" by George Schmidt in the Fourth Quarter 2014 issue of *TMR*; and the book *MILWAUKEE ROAD COLOR GUIDE TO FREIGHT AND PASSENGER EQUIPMENT*, Volume 2, by Doug Nighswonger. The latter was overwhelming, depicting many variations of rib-side cars and subsequent



ABOVE Bob's two rib-side boxcars caught at Commerce Yard on his Beer Line layout.



REINFORCED & REPAIRED @ MILW. SHOPS

CARS TAKEN FROM 18000-21187 SERIES

1968 M.L.C. A.F.E. 3608-8 (HEAVY REPAIR)

"XM"

rebuilt. In a way, it seems that it's hard not to go wrong. Most of the photos were side views, so identifying the roof and car-end styles were difficult for most specific cars.

The AML cars I received were very well done and finely detailed. Regrettably, I did this project five or six years ago, so I did not take process pictures as I worked. So, I'll describe what happened as I worked on both cars in tandem.

First, I separated the underbodies from the shells. Then, I separated the black-painted metal wheels from the truck side frames. Before I did that, though, I used a steel brush in a motor tool to remove paint from the treads. The job is easier while still in the side frames, because the tool spins the wheels as it's burnishing. After the wheels were removed, I used 1/8-inch masking tape to protect the treads and bits of tape to protect the axle ends while painting.



**ABOVE** Another view of the author's two rib-side boxcars at Commerce Yard on his Beer Line layout.



**ABOVE** Car portrait showing the roof and end of the AML PS-1 cars used for the project. **BELOW** The PS-1 car's underside.



**ABOVE** Decal test on photo paper before printing on white decal film

There were separate painting/weathering sessions. First, were the black underbodies with the brake rigging. I used multiple colors of hardware store spray paints starting with camouflage dark brown. Then I followed with light overcoats of black, medium gray, rust and light earth. The overcoats were done with varying degrees of angles and spray distances to have a coating variation from fine mist to speckles. The hoped-for result is a dirty, gritty finish.

I used a chopped-up cardboard box insert as a tool for wheel painting using the same techniques described above. Then, in a group, I painted the truck side frames, bolsters, and the Kadee 830 coupler boxes.

Next were the car bodies, starting with removing the N&W's logo and reporting marks. I don't recall exactly how it was done but, most likely, a combination of thinner and fine-grain sandpaper.

While doing this job, I discovered a problem. The side panels representing sheets of steel are overlapped creating a series of vertical ridges. I considered for a moment, of sanding them down flat. Then choosing the easy way, I decided this was just a nuisance I'd work around. On the



railroad, the cars look fine, but when photographed it is another story.

Now having two totally black cars, I created a cardstock template with keys to car-side borders. On the template, I drew six parallel lines  $5\frac{1}{4}$  inches long and separated by  $\frac{9}{16}$  inches. The lines represented the short-rib version (early cars had the ribs extending from the center door to the ends of the car). I punched small holes at the end of each line, and with the template in place, I used a white ink pen to create dots for guide points.

I first cut notches in the vertical seams to help the appliques lie flat. Then I put down six 4mm styrene strips 0.4mm thick (or in this case thin) on both the left and right side of the door on each car side. After the strips were down, ribs of styrene 2.5mm half round, were centered on each strip. A pleasant surprise was the doors easily glided over the ribs.



**ABOVE** The right side of the car with large logo car data, universal lube stencil, and ACI label.



**ABOVE AND ABOVE RIGHT** Two views of the left side of the car with reporting marks where the vertical ridge was a bit of a tussle for decals.

The Youngstown-type car doors on the AML models seem appropriate but are wide... scaling out to 8½ feet. Most doors on the 40-foot rib-side cars measured 6 feet. I also decided that I would accept the roof and car ends that came with the models.

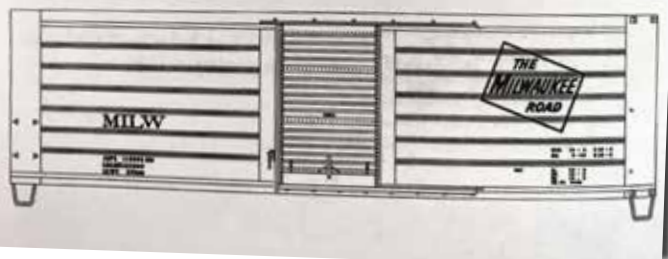
With the ribs in place, the carbody was painted, first in white primer, then in railroad brown. The color was an issue that was hard to resolve because I was going to print my decals with a close color match on white decal film. I tested spray-paint samples with colors from my desktop printer. I hoped to get a close enough match that could be visually masaged by weathering.

The graphics for both cars represented a style for re-builds in the years 1968–74. This group had a large logo on the right-hand side. But unlike most of its predecessors, they did not have the large “Milwaukee Road” lettering on the left side, only the reporting marks. Following the Schmidt article, I chose number 32889 from the 1972 rebuild series (32700-33069) for one car, and 33283 from the 1973 series (33070-33339) for the other.

The decals fit in place except for the large logo. By applying the decal over the ribs, it would stretch out of shape. So, I cut the decal to fit be-

Finally, between 1968 and 1974 these cars were repainted and renumbered. The billboard lettering was eliminated from the left side, and only the large logo on the right remained. The numbers for these cars are as follows :

1968: 39500–39849  
 1969: 32050–32199  
 1970: 32200–32499  
 1971: 32500–32699  
 1972: 32700–33069  
 1973: 33070–33339  
 1974: 40000–40449



**ABOVE** A portion of page 6 from the Schmidt article in *TMR* that was Bob’s guide to era and style of car identification and the pertinent car number series



**ABOVE** Lookin' good! Both cars at Humboldt Yard showing the difference between light and heavy weathering. The cars seldom run together on the Beer Line.

tween the ribs, then did drops of white paint on the ribs to keep a sense of solid white lines.

Other decals for the lower right-hand side represented cars photographed in the late 1970s including black boxes with universal lube stencil, an A.C.I. label, and a small black box with a yellow dot indicating the car was inspected and has steel wheels.

When the time came for weathering, I did it with a light touch on car 32889. Not so on car 33283. I think I overdid it and gambled with an experiment of washes of light gray acrylic paint. My ultimate explanation is that the car spent some time traveling on the railroad's barges over salt water of Washington's Puget Sound.

Realism is the hot concept in model railroading these days, but building a large-scale layout indoors means it is difficult, to impossible, to create realistic scenes. But on my layout, I've tried to make the rolling stock as prototypical as possible.

I'm happy with the result, even though it's an impression, rather than an exact model, of the Milwaukee Road's rib-side box cars. They proudly run the rails of the Beer Line doing the work expected of them. 🚂



**ABOVE** Bob's chopped up cardboard box allowing wheels to be slipped in for painting.