New CNWHS 2017 Limited Run HO Scale Freight Car Now Available

The Chicago & North Western Historical Society is proud to announce its limited run freight car for 2017—an eye-catching Kadee HO scale model of CNW’s 3987-4141 series “billboard” PS-2 covered hopper cars, available in three road numbers.

The North Western's Billboard- Initialized Freight Cars of 1955

In 1955 the Chicago and North Western changed its standard lettering schemes for freight cars: Gone were slogans promoting passenger service such as “Route of the 400 Streamliners” and “The Overland Route” that had been applied to boxcars since 1940. Replacing the slogans were 48-inch-high “C&NW” initials in white Scotchlite lettering. In addition, the new lettering standard for gondolas and covered hopper cars also used large ”C&NW” initials of various sizes; previously these car types had minimal lettering.

The North Western got off to a fast start adding cars with the new lettering; from September 1955 to early 1956 they acquired over 3,000 cars with billboard initials. Included in those acquisitions were 155 34’ PS-2 covered hoppers (CNW 3987-4141), 750 50’ PS-1 box cars (CNW 4142-4891), 500 41’ gondolas (CNW 5192-5691), 1,575 40’ PS-1 box cars (CNW 6501-9649 odd numbers only), and 65 leased Airslide covered hoppers (GACX 42320-42359, and 42560-42584, the GACX cars were later purchased and renumbered to CNW 69497-69625 odd numbers only).

In addition to these newly built cars, boxcars repainted at this time also received large “C&NW” initials. Note that the new cars were numbered in series regardless of car type (the gaps above were filled by other new or rebuilt cars). This strategy was the continuation of a North Western policy, begun in 1953 with the “spot car” (40’ box CNW 1); that car numbers of new or rebuilt cars should have as few digits as possible, with the idea that writing shorter numbers reduced both clerical labor and chances for error.

Unfortunately, this attention-getting scheme was short lived: new CNW president B. W. Heineman took over on April 1, 1956 after a bitter proxy fight. A drawing dated September 10, 1956 showed several proposed (and austere) lettering arrangements and in November 1956 new 40’ box cars CNW 23000-24099 arrived with only a 36” herald to relieve the expanse of freight car red paint on the car sides. It would take almost 40 years for large “CNW” initials to reappear on freight cars, beginning with the CNW 490000-490999 series covered hoppers built in 1993 and 1994.

Covered Hopper Construction Details

As mentioned previously, the 1955 billboard cars included a group of 155 PS-2 covered hoppers built at Pullman-Standard's Butler, Pa. plant under three production lots with various specialty items:
Lot 8254C, CNW 3987-4016, Equipco hand brake, Apex running board
Lot 8257B, CNW 4017-4041, Universal hand brake, U. S. Gypsum running board
Lot 8258, CNW 4042-4141, Universal hand brake, Apex running board
Items common to all cars:
Capacity—140,000 pounds or 2,003 cubic feet
Trucks—A-3 Ride Control with 6” by 11” plain bearings
Paint—Sherwin-Williams F-44-AC-28 Acid & Alkali Resisting Gray on carbody, underframe, and brake parts; truck sideframes received a fog coat of black paint.
Stencil—Sherwin-Williams F-43-B-3 Black except on monogram and "Safety First" lettering

The mix of specialty items was typical of CNW freight car orders; perhaps one vendor couldn't supply enough to meet production schedules, or there was a desire to use multiple vendors for price competition. All three lots were built in one group with the first car completed on 8-30-55, and the last car on 9-13-55, for an average production of 15.5 cars a day over 10 working days.

**CNW 3987-4141 Covered Hoppers Service History**

These cars joined a fleet of other similar size covered hoppers that were used to haul high density bulk commodities requiring weather protection such as Portland cement, industrial sand, bentonite and roofing granules. More PS-2 covered hoppers were purchased later, and after additions from the Minneapolis & St. Louis and Chicago Great Western, the North Western eventually ended up with about 1,300 of what came to be known as "small-cube" (to distinguish them from larger sized cars) covered hoppers. During the 1970s and 1980s the small-cube covered hoppers were gradually superseded by larger 100-ton-capacity cars. Older pre-PS-2 cars were converted to ballast cars or retired, while most of the newer small-cube cars were assigned to Dacotah Cement at Rapid City, S. D. Weight restrictions on track and bridges east and south of Rapid City prevented the use of larger capacity cars. By that time, the cars had gained a following among freight car enthusiasts. Age, their lower height compared with newer cars, a tendency to run in groups, and most importantly, the wild variety of old and new paint schemes all combined to make them sought-after subjects for railroad photographers.

The small-cube covered hopper’s grand finale occurred in 1993 and early 1994 when long blocks of them, including some still proudly carrying their large “C&NW” initials, shuttled between Rapid City and Denver carrying cement for construction of the new Denver International Airport. For at least one railfan, seeing the vast expanse of concrete runways and taxiways at Denver International is sure to evoke memories of encountering those veteran cars as they helped to create a new chapter in Denver's aviation history.

The end came during 1994 when the remaining 400-odd small-cube covered hoppers were replaced by 300 new 3,000 cubic-foot-capacity, Thrall curved-side covered hoppers (CNW 437000-437299); a 1993 AAR ban on friction bearing trucks in interchange, and ages approaching the FRA-mandated 40-year life, had doomed the older cars. Some survived for a few more years when they were sold to the Dakota Southern, had roofs removed, and were used as ballast cars.

**CNWHS 2017 Limited Run Car Description and Ordering Information**

Our HO scale model of the CNW 3987-4141 series cars uses Kadee’s exquisitely detailed
PS-2 covered hopper. Winner of Model Railroader Magazine’s 2003 Reader’s Choice Award for best new product, the Kadee car is still one of the finest covered hopper models available. Combining finely rendered, accurate details (including opening roof hatches), small parts molded in flexible plastic for durability, sharply printed prototypical lettering that’s legible down to the smallest letters and, of course, Kadee “scale” couplers and HGC trucks (with the correct 5’ 8” wheelbase), this car is a model you will be proud to own.

In addition to the usual Kadee detail and quality, our 2017 Limited Run cars have some noteworthy features of their own. The car numbers offered (CNW 4073, 4115, and 4139) were not chosen randomly. Instead, we selected long-lasting prototype cars which retained their as-built paint scheme (including original weight data) until retirement; CNW 4073 was retired on 9-23-86 (31 years); and CNW 4115 and 4139 were both retired on 12-23-94 (39 years).

More importantly, the car lettering is, in a word, superb. Kadee’s art department (one of the best in the business) used material from the CNWHS Archives, such as the Pullman-Standard stenciling diagram, CNW standard drawings for letters and numbers, car cards, and AFE files, plus photos from many sources, to make the size, shape, and placement of the lettering as accurate as possible. Developing the lettering was a painstaking process; we reviewed and returned proofs three times for corrections before finally approving the artwork. As part of our commitment to accuracy, data on each of the three cars is slightly different, matching its prototype.

Do you like the car but are not a North Western modeler? Records in the CNWHS Archives show that these cars regularly went off-line, sometimes with unfortunate results: CNW 4008 was destroyed May 1, 1971 at Gale, Ill. on the CEI/MP, and CNW 4009 and 4113 were both destroyed July 14, 1980 at Cottage Grove, Ind. on the C&O. Another roaming car, CNW 3998, was reweighed in 1959 on the Canadian Pacific, and reweighed again in 1962 on the Seaboard Air Line. Other railroads reweighing these cars included AA, CBQ, CGW, CRR, GMO, KCS, MILW, MON, MP, NP, NYC, RI, TP (many cars), SOO, SP and UP.

These cars are only available through the CNWHS Company Store, Kadee’s list price is $43.95 but we are selling them for $39.95 each, or $109.95 for a three-pack (a $10 saving). Shipping charges are additional. Visit our website at www.cnwhs.org to order your car today (click on “store”). Quantities of each car number are limited, so don't delay.