

GACX Express Reefer - HO Models
A Comparison of Walthers and Broadway Limited Cars
Also Includes Precision Scale Brass Car
By Steve Sandifer

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All photos September 2005 by J. Stephen Sandifer

Updated 10/8/05

No one can model the ATSF Fast Mail or other head end heavy passenger trains without REA express reefers. Once there were few options, and fewer of quality pieces. However, in the last few years Walthers has produced riveted cars, wood side cars, converted troop kitchens and soon converted troop sleepers. Branchline has produced the welded cars, and Broadway Limited the wood side cars. We are finally spoiled for choice, and all are needed.

The question is asked as to how the Walthers GACX wood side express reefer and the Broadway Limited version of the same car stack up against each other and against the original. (Sorry that the PFE car was used above, but the REA car is the same color 932-5485, 932-25485.)

My references are the photos in the *Railway Prototype Cyclopedia* #7 and #9. Thank You Ed Hawkins and Pat Wider. I am also modeling the early 1950s, so my interest is in the prototype for that time frame. J. S. Horvath reports that "scale drawings of the prototype for these models were apparently published in the 1931 "Car Builder's Cyclopedia" and reproduced in 1972 in issue No. 3 of Newton K. Gregg's reprint of same in the "Train Shed Cyclopedia" series." I do not have access to those for measurements.

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The first two things you will notice beyond 3' are the differences in Pullman Green between the two cars and the size of the roof hatches. Other details take side by side comparison to determine. In all photos, the darker car is the BLI.

The BLI car comes with all **grabs** installed. Walthers makes you drill and install them yourself, even though they are included. I have not installed grabs on the Walthers car in the photos, so don't be critical of the lack of grabs. +1 for BLI.

The **steps** also appear to be more delicate on the BLI. +1 for BLI

The BLI car comes with **end hose details**, a steam hose and two brake/signal hoses. Walthers has none. +1 for BLI.



In the photo above, left to right, top to bottom are: Rivarossi, Walthers, Branchline, Broadway Limited, and Walthers versions of **Pullman Green**. The BLI car is the darkest I have seen. Walthers has a lighter Pullman Green which matches their heavyweight cars. It is close, but slightly darker than the old Rivarossi Pullman Green. The new Branchline Blueprint 50' Welded Express Reefers are Hunter Green. So, if you want your cars to match, paint them yourself or be heavy with the weathering. The Walthers car also has a flat finish, while the BLI is a semi-gloss paint. That glossy finish makes the car harder to photograph. +1 for Walthers.

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Pat Wider further added, "I obtained a sample of "original" Pullman Green from St. Carvan at the Museum of Transportation. I got it from the inside of the vestibule where it was protected from wind, rain, and sun light. I then compared it to a UPS truck sitting in sun light. They were really close if not an exact match. The BLI model appears "closer" to pristine paint. Also keep in mind that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. As far as I can determine, by 1947, these cars were no longer painted Pullman Green. They were Dupont #83-4474 Dark Green or equivalent."



Dulux Gold **lettering** is crisp on both cars. However, the BLI car includes additional end lettering which certainly was there in the early days. Photos dated 1940 show that lettering. However, late photos seem to indicate that only the reporting marks and number (as on the Walthers car) were used toward the end of their lives. Maybe someone can clarify this. If this is correct, the BLI car is better for the 30s-WWII, and the Walthers lettering is post WWII. No points here.

While we are looking at the end, notice the buffer. BLI has Walthers on this one. +1 BLI

Both cars have the coupler extended too far out.

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The **roof hatches** are totally different. The Walthers hatches are 27" x 34". BLI scales out at 35" x 36" and appear oversize at a glance. The approximate measurements of the prototype's roof hatches provided by Pat Wider are 28.7" long by 33.4" wide. +1 for Walthers. At least some roads (MP) had additional running boards around the roof hatch.



The appearance of the **running board** is probably a matter of taste, though I think the Walthers car is better. BLI has three distinct boards with a visible gap between them. You can see the

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individual roof walk supports between the slats. In the 1:1 world, you could stump a toe on that gap. Pat Wider noted that "the running boards on the car should measure 6" wide by 1-1/4" high with a 1/2" space between them." No points on this one.

There are some triangular **reinforcement pieces** at the corners of the roof. BLI seems to capture that detail better. Walthers has the detail, but it gets lost in the flat paint finish. Photos also show it as being a thick piece, so I give +1 to BLI. Overall BLI exaggerates such details.

Since these are wood cars, the sides have a **wood scribed** appearance. The BLI car has deeper and wider cuts for an exaggerated effect. I prefer the less obvious Walthers car. A flat finish might improve this detail on the BLI car. +1 for Walthers.

The Walthers door scales at 4'10" wide. I did not scale the BLI, but the photo above clearly shows it to be wider than Walthers. I assume 5' is correct.

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The **ladders** on these cars appear to be wide in photos. BLI has ladders that are 20" wide with 16" between rungs. On the Walthers, they are 19" wide with 14" between rungs. I don't know which is correct, but the BLI looks more like photos I have seen. +1 for BLI.

Near each end is a vertical line of **rivets** which connect to bulkhead for the ice bunker on the inside. Walthers has captured these well at 53" from the end of the car. BLI has them much to close at 39", which combined with BLI oversize roof hatches makes the ice bunker an impossibility. However, the photos in RPC#7 show the rivets to be unevenly spaced as on the BLI car but in the location as on the Walthers car. Pat Wider noted, "the former ART cars did not have these interior bulkheads and thus lacked these bolt heads." No points on this.

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The **end detail** differs substantially on the B end. The Walthers car has the brake wheel where it ought to be, up near the roofline. The BLI car has it much lower, and of course the platform is much lower too. +1 for Walthers.

Gene Green reports that the Walthers car has an Equipco 3160 hand brake and E-369 hand wheel which appeared on some of these cars.

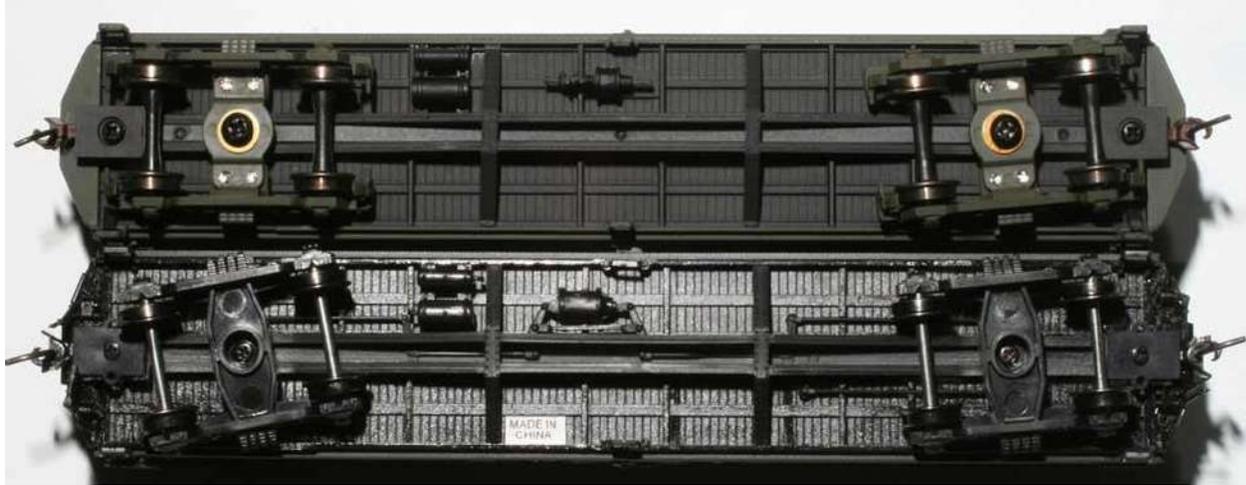
Pat Wider added "Note that some of these cars also had Miner Ideal Safety Chain Type (ratchet) hand brakes."

Looking at REX 5171 on p. 63 of RPC#7 one can see a brake wheel much like the BLI but with 6 spokes, not 5. REX 1420 on p. 62 has a totally different wheel than either model. RPC#9 p. 81 clearly shows the Milner brake on MP 3205. It also has extra running boards around the ice hatch.

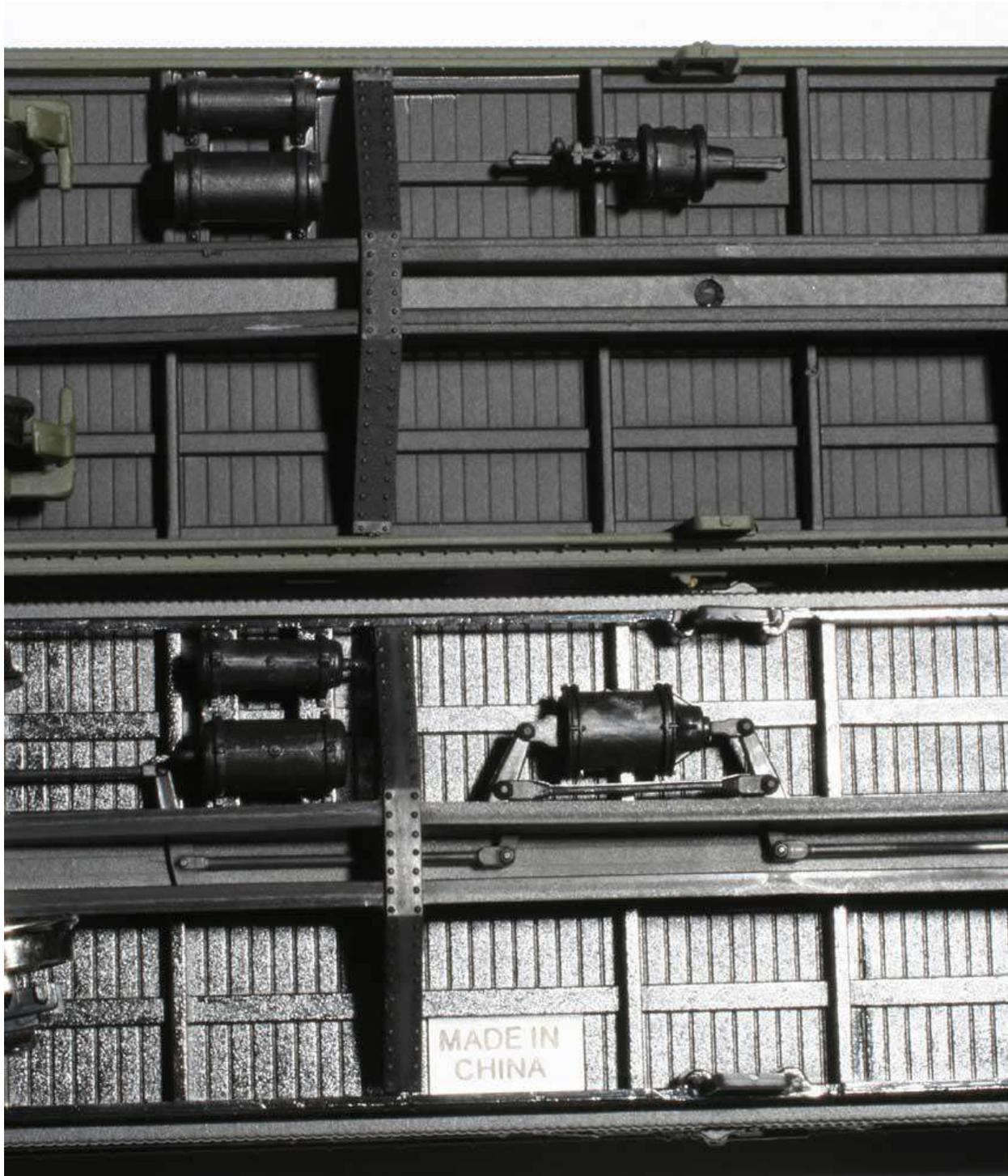
Also, the **roof radius** appears to be sharper on the Walthers car than on the BLI. I don't know which is correct, and you must look closely to tell the difference. No points here.

The Walthers car comes with McHenry **couplers**, BLI with Kadee, including Kadee boxes. +1 for BLI.

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Turn the car over and look at **underbody detail**. Walthers has two air tanks and the brake cylinder mounted on a nice-looking undercarriage. The BLI car has that plus brake rigging and pipes. +1 for BLI.

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However, Pat Wider reports that "These cars were equipped with Westinghouse LN-schedule air brakes. Consequently, they had type "N" brake cylinders with an integral L Triple Valve and slack adjuster. The Walthers model has a fairly good representation of this arrangement, the BLI model does not." +1 for Walthers.



Trucks: Here are apples and oranges. At a glance, you would swear that the Walthers truck is larger with a longer wheelbase. However, they both have the 8' wheelbase and 33" wheels. Walthers is actually 32." Both roll smoothly. The Walthers trucks are constructed just like their passenger cars. The Walthers car uses the GSC High-speed trucks with separate bolted-on pedestals. It comes with outer brake shoes, however very few photos show these trucks with those shoes. *RPC9* p81 shows MP3205 with outer brake shoes. You can easily clip them off if you don't want them. These trucks also had diagonal braces where the brake shoes are located.

The BLI car comes with General Steel Castings Corp. "Commonwealth" four-wheel swing motion trucks. The molded-on coil springs on that truck seem too small.

Pat Wider adds, "The Walthers' models are available with two different trucks, Commonwealth with bolted-on pedestals and a more modern Commonwealth BX design with integral pedestals. The clasp brakes on the former would be appropriate for the 50 (900-949) former ART cars that were subsequently leased to MP (3201? - 3230?) and Wabash (950-974) . It appears all other General American cars did not have clasp brakes."

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So, what is my opinion: BLI 8 points, Walthers 5. BUT (you knew that was coming) because of the highly visible size of the roof hatches and darkness of the color of the BLI car, I believe those are real negatives, causing me to prefer the Walthers car. I think it would be easier to correct the problems with the Walthers car than to change those on the BLI car. The cost at my dealer is exactly the same.

I hope I will have a flood of good information from other modelers to update and correct this site.

Precision Scale Model

To add to this discussion, Phil Morrow reports concerning the Precision Scale brass model released in late 2004. Tim O'Conner has posted four photos on the Steam Freight Car Yahoo list. Phil Morrow (from France) has provided the photos seen on this page.

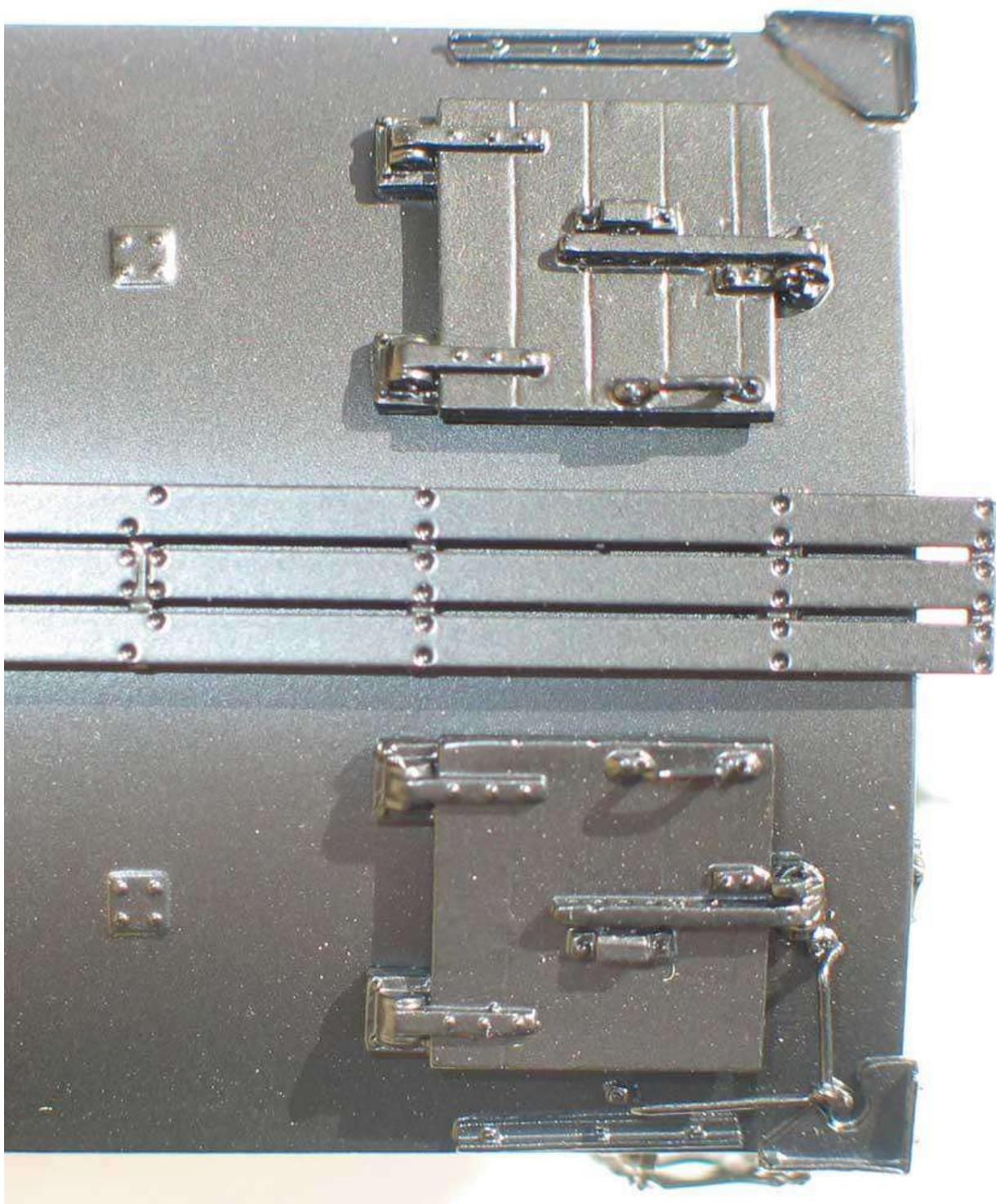
"Precision Scale Co also released two versions of these cars. They have dropped the info from their website now, but the cars were delivered late 2004 and I acquired a WP version in February this year. The versions released differed as I recall, in the brake appliance details.

"Last night I sat down with a print of Steve's report and compared that with my WP#250 car which is described by PSC as being: BR Class 53'6" reefer with miner brake system.

"The PSC car has a semi-gloss finish also and the lettering is very crisp. The extra lettering applied to the BLI car is not present on the PSC car. It only has W.P. 250 on the ends.

"As you might expect of a brass model, there is excellent buffer detail with rivets and raised buffer plate.

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"The ice hatches on the PSC car scale about 35" L x 34" W. The hatches on the BLI car are very similar in size and placement to the PSC car. The PSC car also has the small corner details that are somewhat pentagonal in shape with recesses for bolt detail.

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"The roof walks are 3 distinct boards with bolt and plank detail and there is a gap between the boards of about 2" scale. Yes, the BLI car is similar and while it may be un-prototypically wide, it looks quite OK on the PSC car.

"The scribed siding on the PSC car scales about 2 1/2" maybe 3".



"The ladder rungs scale 19" wide with rungs at 16-17".

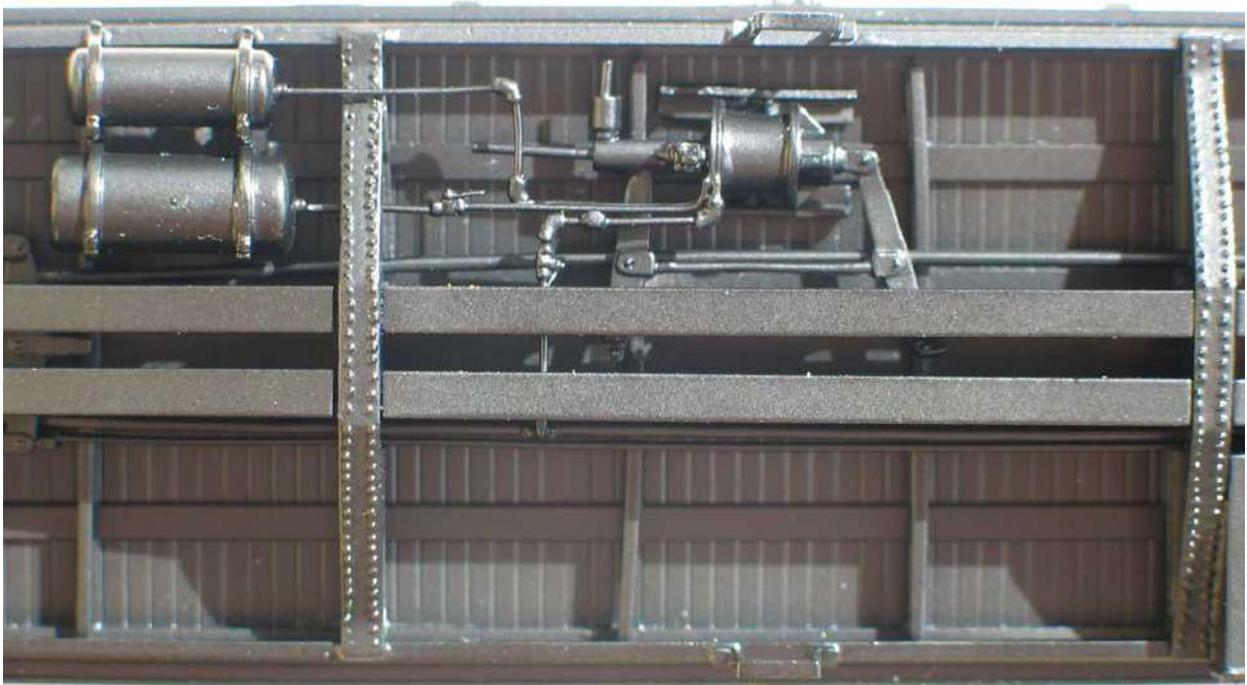
"The vertical line of rivets are about 58" from the end and there are 6 rivets at an uneven spacing that seems to relate to framing of the ice bunks. The BLI car has a similar spacing of the rivet detail even if it's much closer to the end of the car. The Walthers rivet detail just appears evenly spaced down the side of the car which is probably not prototypical.

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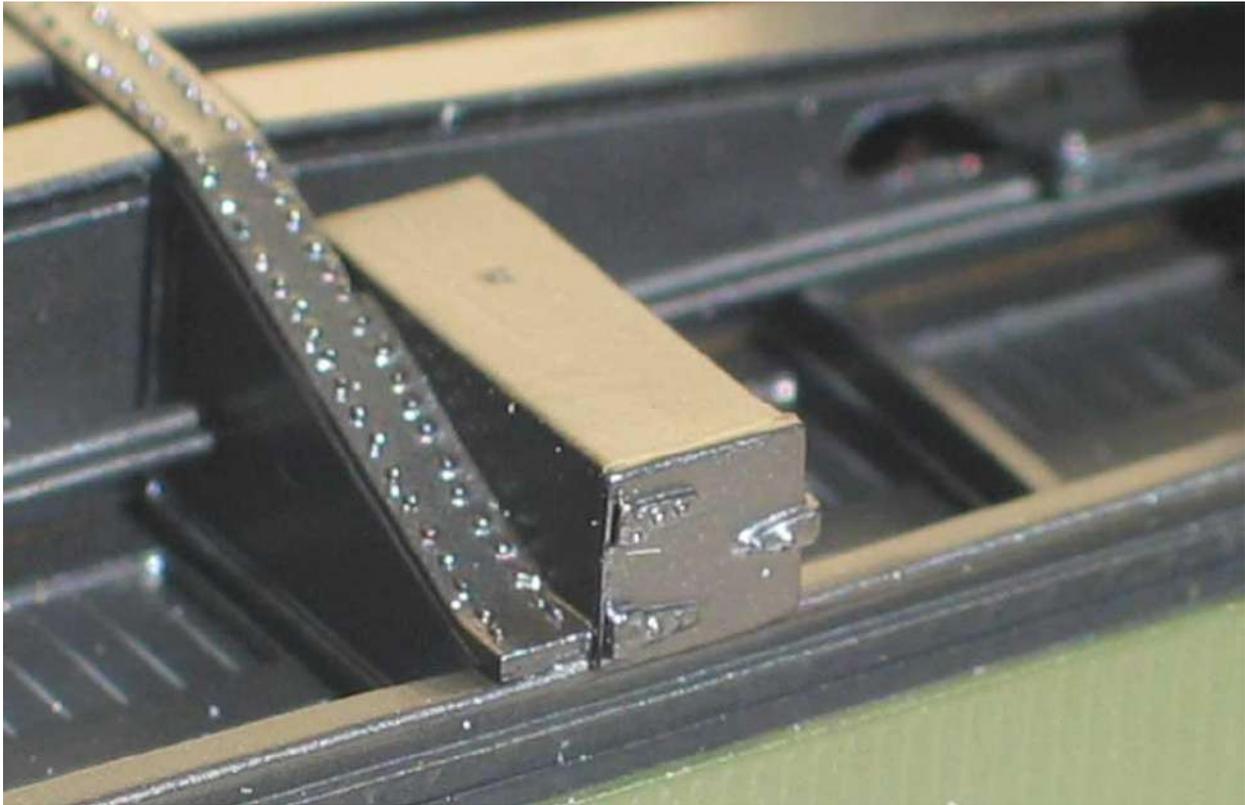
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"On the PSC car I have, the B end brake lever detail is very different from the BLI and Walthers cars. PSC have a lever actuated ratchet device mounted about 36" above the end buffer plate. Hand grab and end ladder detail is the same on the B end as it is on the A end. There is no elevated platform. This strikes me as being more typical for a car that is being used with passenger service than with freight service. (Not that I would necessarily know).

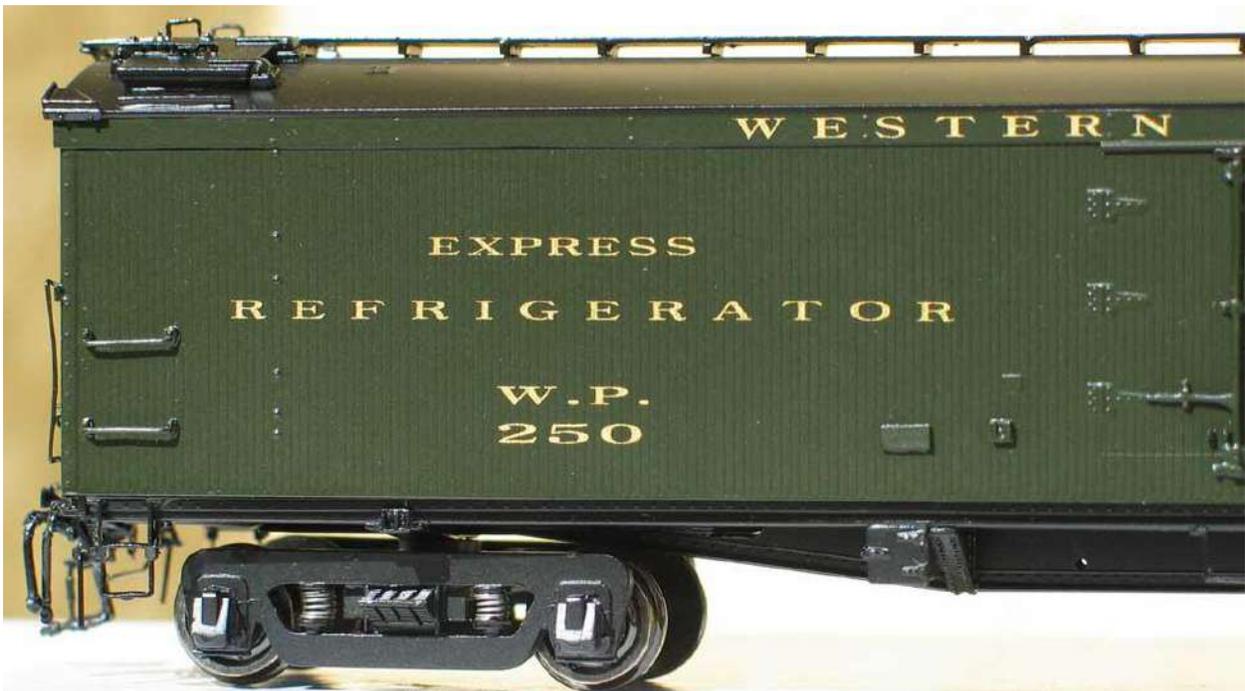


"The underframe of the PSC car is well detailed and contains most all of the individual piping and brake lever detail. The brake cylinder used on the Walthers car is similar to that on the PSC car and it's in about the same position. Pity that it lacks additional detail. It's probably easier to change the brake cylinder out of the BLI car and add a little more specific piping detail.

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"The PSC car also has a tool box mounted under the frame on the side and end opposite the air tanks. Neither the BLI nor Walthers car has this detail.



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"The trucks on the BLI car are similar to those supplied with the PSC car, but of course have less detail. The molded springs on the BLI trucks appear similar in size to the size of the operating springs on the PSC trucks.

"I won't draw any overall conclusions between the cars. I'll leave that to your personal choices. But I will comment that I do have a pair of the BLI cars on order, and I'm comfortable that they will look pretty well right beside my PSC model, and that any differences could be passed off as being those that you might expect between similar cars after years of maintenance."

John Miller added, "I have a pair of the BLI cars and like them but it interesting on how close it is to the PSC car. Importers have been known to use a brass model as the "blue print" and tell the manufacture (China) to just copy it. Not saying this was done with the GACX reefers just that it has been done in the past! Brass has a general reputation for being correct because of the price but in reality, the price of brass has nothing to do with accuracy!"

Steve Sandifer