

Walthers 'Dual 45' Bethlehem 89' flat car - FT-87

By Thomas Cain

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In March 2007 Walthers released a new 89' Bethlehem flat car that sees a great deal of use in today's intermodal rail traffic. This car was very likely to be seen in almost any Santa Fe intermodal train, with truck trailers on flat cars. Most cars in later years would have been Trailer Train or TTX cars, but the Santa Fe did own a number of these cars. Lloyd Stagner has a picture and some information on this car in his *ATSF Color Guide to Freight and Passenger Equipment* (p. 67). He indicates that there were 486 of these flat cars. They were designated as Ft-87 cars and were built by the Bethlehem Company, now known as Freight Car America. The number series was 296178 to 296663. The new Walthers model resembles this car in a number of ways. The lettering that indicates that this is a "Dual 45" car and other reporting and statistical marking are the same as the picture in the Stagner book. The car number of the individual Walthers model is the same as the car pictured, #296530. Walthers also provides a two-pack version of this car with car numbers of #296644 and #296387. The Walthers car is painted white and the only other color on the car is the rectangular yellow patch that is the background for the car name "Dual 45." It does also have small rectangular reflector markings along the side of the car. This model comes with retractable hitches installed and other hitch parts are included with the model. I believe that the hitches are about 6 scale inches too tall which makes a 45' trailer ride a little high over the hitch. Also included are hitches that are folded flat if you would like to model them in that position. The Walthers car although considered ready to run does provide some additional grab irons to be added to the ends of the car and the other three sides of the car at the ends of the side. The grabs are made from a stainless-steel wire that is so short I found it difficult to attach to the car. The car has some very nice underside detailing complete with air reservoir, triple valve, and brake levers. The handbrake handle, chain, and connecting rod are also provided progressing from the side of the car to the underside. These are nice details but the chain and connecting rods appear to be large and out of scale. These are delicate details and could be replaced with some more durable or rugged brass wire. The car rolls on metal wheels and comes with McHenry coil spring knuckle couplers. The typical Walthers swinging pocket coupler is provided for this long car and I have found this coupler system works very well on cars of this length. The car weighs 5 and ½ ounces, but according to NMRA standards it should weigh 7 ounces due to its length. The addition of a couple 45' trailers would likely accomplish this weight.

The car shown in the Stagner book does not appear white but more of a pale yellow. It is significantly lighter than TTX yellow seen on TTX flat cars. It is my recollection that Santa Fe flat cars were painted white just like this Walther's model, but the Stagner photo and photos taken by Paul W. Brown of a Ft-87 seen in June 1995 are that of a pale yellow. It is possible that both cars were painted white and it just weathered or faded to this shade. Some healthy weathering of the Walthers car could make it to look more like the later pictures of the car. As previously mentioned, the hitches on the Walthers car are retractable which might have been original equipment, but again the hitches on the car in Stagner's book and the photos from Paul W. Brown show a rigid fixed hitch. Since there are no other appliances on either the model or the prototype car, the rigid fixed hitch limits the car to 45' trailers. The Walthers car also provides a single "high rise" handrail on one corner of the flat car near the hand brake lever. The car in the

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Stagner book does not have this higher handrail. The car observed in June of 1995 near 91st Street in Chicago had these "high rise" handrails on all four corners of the car. Since this was the summer of 1995 it would have been the last version of the Ft-87.

Updating the Walthers car to the last version of the Ft-87 would not be that difficult as the only major changes would be to fabricate some taller handrails for all four corners of this car. I accomplished this on an earlier Accurail 89' car by using .012-brass wire. Some soldering was required to make this handrail and it was then super-glued into the sides of the car where .012 holes were drilled. This makes for a much more rugged handrail than the plastic handrails provided on the Walthers model. The trailer hitches need to be replaced with a rigid fixed hitch. The Details West 235-1008 could be used, but I do not believe that it is a perfect match. Santa Fe must have made their own hitch, and what I did on my Accurail model was to scratch build the hitch from stock styrene. These flat cars also have a "curb" down the middle of the car that is designed to hold the trailer tires in place. Both the Stagner and proto photos show sections of this curb removed where the trailer landing gear is parked. This probably facilitated loading of these trailers. Removing this section of the curb with a flat chisel bladed hobby knife would be easy to do but would require some touch up painting. The final change to make on this car would be to really weather this car with some earth tone and rust tone paints. Tire scuff marks should also be added to the deck of the car where the tires would have rested on the car.

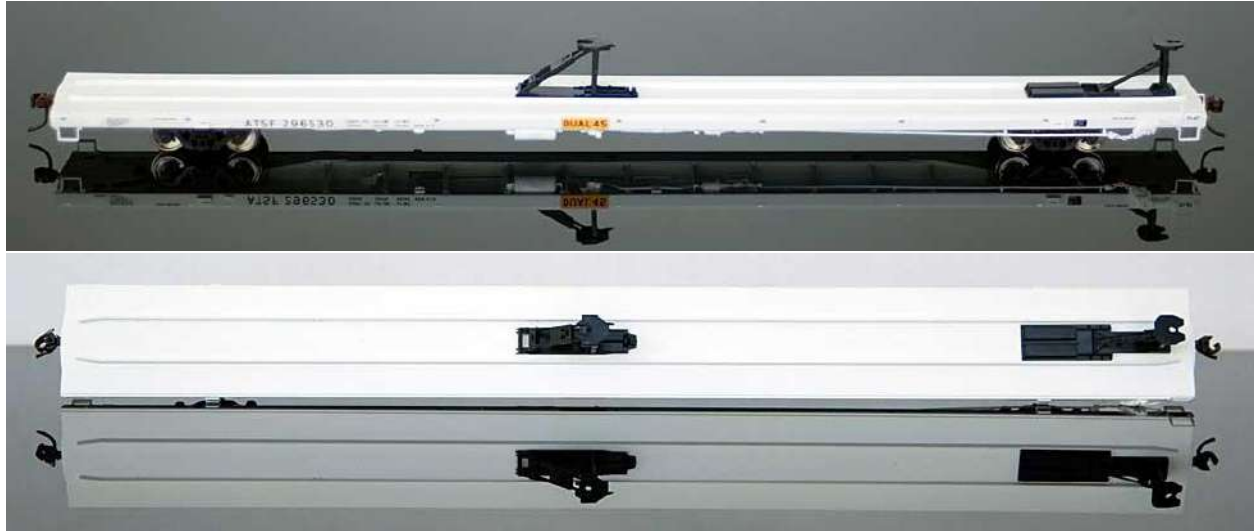
Any modern Santa Fe intermodal train would look super with this car but would more likely need an abundance of TTX "Twin 45" cars also in that train. I like to use the "Front Range/McKean" 45' trailers for flat cars but they are now out of production. I buy them whenever I find them at swap meets and repaint them as needed. The only empty flat cars that I had observed in Santa Fe trains were in "empty table" unit trains of cars being relocated to parts of the country needing flat cars. Hope that you enjoy this model and that it finds a place on your modern intermodal Santa Fe train.

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Paul W. Brown model and prototype photos, Chicago 1995.

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