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Questions and Answers

Team tracks

Q. I know just about any type of car can show up at a team track sooner or later. But how common was it for covered hoppers to be unloaded at a team track in the mid '60s? What kind of off-line industry would use a team track in this way? What would have been the typical kind of load going in or out? And how would the hopper have been loaded or unloaded?

—pldvlk

A. David Husman: A team track doesn't really get every type of car. It can, but the purpose of a team track was to allow customers that did not have a private siding to ship and receive goods. A team track would only get the cars the customers in the area shipped or received and could load and unload.

To unload a covered hopper at a team track you would basically have to dump the commodity on the ground under the hopper

MRH QUESTIONS, ANSWERS, AND TIPS

and then auger/conveyor it up into a truck or whatever. Coal was unloaded all the time; grain wouldn't be a problem. Cement you would have to auger since it would blow away or be exposed to humidity on an open conveyor. Carbon black would be a huge mess, and flour would risk contamination.

Covered hoppers in the 1960s were still uncommon cars, especially lighter commodities like grain and plastic in the higher capacity cars (100 ton). They would have mostly been newer and expensive cars, which means the railroad would want to maximize their utilization. A

1. This is a well-equipped team track with lighting and a concrete ramp. Some are as basic as a layer of compacted crushed rock. *Vander Borght Jean-Pierre photo*

single car shipment to a team track might not be the best utilization. Also, a covered hopper is a "specially equipped" car, not a general service car. A customer just can't load it if it's empty; the railroad has control over who gets to use it and where it goes.

One of the reasons that general service boxcars lasted so long was that many of the grain shippers and receivers did not have facilities that could load or unload a covered hopper. Grain was shipped to Mexico in boxcars until the 1980s because some Mexican destinations had facilities that could only unload a boxcar. Grain was shipped in boxcars in Canada and parts of the U.S. because track on many of the rural grain lines could not support a heavy covered hopper. In the 1960s, if you sent the customer a covered hopper, would they even have the capability to unload it? That was a real question.

I model the 1900 era so I have to do a lot of research to find stuff. That means looking at a lot of charts and data from other eras and working backwards.

One thing I have found is that industries changed names regularly, and tracks had different industries. Every 10-20 years, about half the smaller industries would be different or be under a different name. The bigger industries may turn over every 25-50 years. In the last 50 years or so, not only have the names been changing but the tracks and buildings have outright been disappearing.

Remember that a team track is for ALL the industries that do not have a private track. A team track can serve 100 different industries. If you lease the team track to a private company, then it's no longer a public track. It now serves just that one industry.

sbird426: As a kid, I saw sand cars being unloaded on team tracks near my home in Georgia. Southern would shove in a couple of

cars at a time, and the trucks would park beside the cars, and the sand would be augered or conveyored up into the trucks.

I don't recall seeing grain cars being unloaded on a team track, but in the '70s I saw it being loaded on a team track. The process I saw was almost the reverse of the sand above. Trucks would come in from a local elevator that had lost its rail service. The trucks unloaded the cars onto the ground and the grain was then augered up into the railcars. I'm not sure how long this continued, but I know this took place for at least a couple of seasons.

Graham Line: In addition to team tracks, railroads will lease a spur track to a company for loading and unloading. Occasionally the railroad will provide a ramp or other facilities, but usually the lessee brings in the needed hoppers, conveyors, ramps etc.

Because the leases change or lapse periodically, a modeler can have hoppers unloading agricultural chemicals for several months, followed by a lumber reload, followed by an equipment dealer or whatever strikes their fancy. Unlike a team track, the leased spur is available to a single customer at a time.

In the '80s, for example, the Union Pacific was leasing a spur along its mainline in north Portland OR to an outfit unloading potash using a wheeled portable auger.

Charlie Duckworth: It was a seasonal move but I saw salt coming into team tracks in the Midwest where it was used on icy roads. Also saw a regular move of Christmas trees into St. Louis in boxcars from Canada billed to team track consignees.

Moe Line: In addition to cement, I have seen lime unloaded from covered hoppers into trucks with a conveyor.

Dave Branum: About the only thing unloaded regularly at the team track near me in the '60s was lumber and other building

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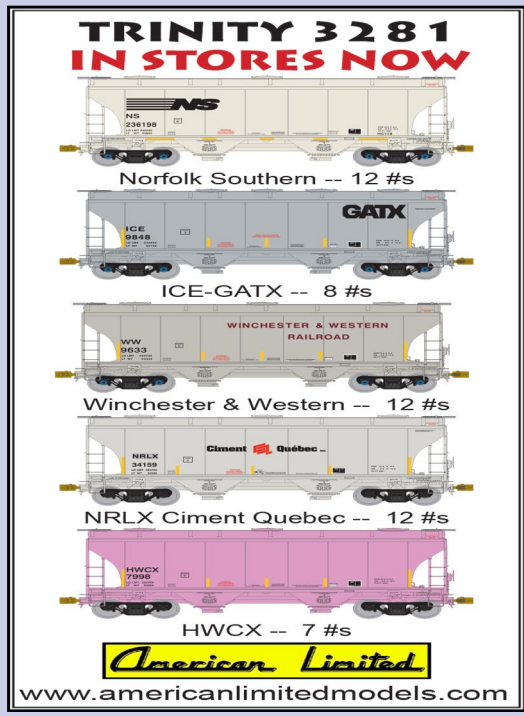

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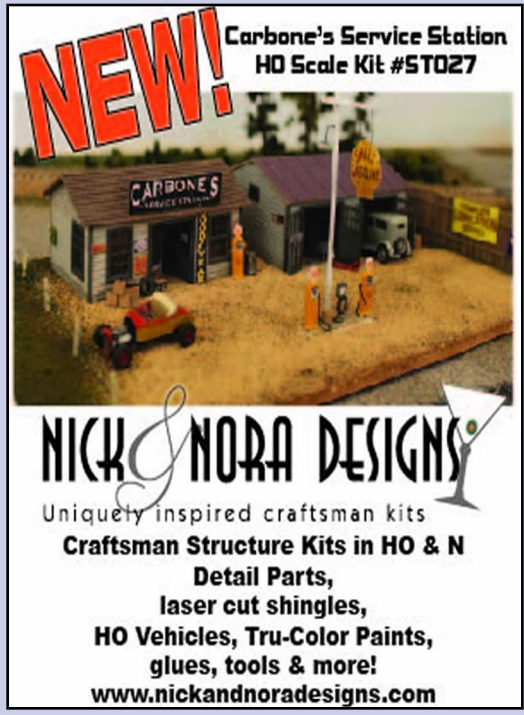

products from boxcars or flat cars, some with end bulkheads and some regular flats. Occasionally there would be a load of machinery or other industrial stuff but not very often.

Some of the eastern roads shipped cement in canister-equipped gondolas, and I've seen photos of them unloading at team tracks. The trucks hooked up large hoses and sucked the cement out. I don't know if this still happened in the mid '60s or if they had switched to covered hoppers by then.

Rustman: Until last year or so, Cambridge, MD had a track that served a plastics manufacturer located off-line a few hundred feet away in a nearby industrial park. They had plastic piping underground that came up at the team track to offload pellets.

In Strasburg, PA there is a team track operated by the Strasburg RR. They have equipment to unload grain or corn of some sort using a purpose-built conveyor from this company www.rbtsi.com/MobileConveyors.asp .

Read the whole team track discussion at mrhmag.com/node/27583.

Bells, bells, bells

Q. My operations crew is driving me crazy with their sound-equipped locomotives. They have the whistle rules down pretty well and there aren't many grade crossings, but the bells go on and on. What are the rules?

A. Barry K.: Having retired as a locomotive engineer and railroad safety officer, here is generally what the bell is used for in the US.

When an engine/group of engines is moved after sitting for a period, the bell is rung to alert all that a movement is beginning. The bell is also used while moving to alert people that

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