The Operators

Andy Sperandeo

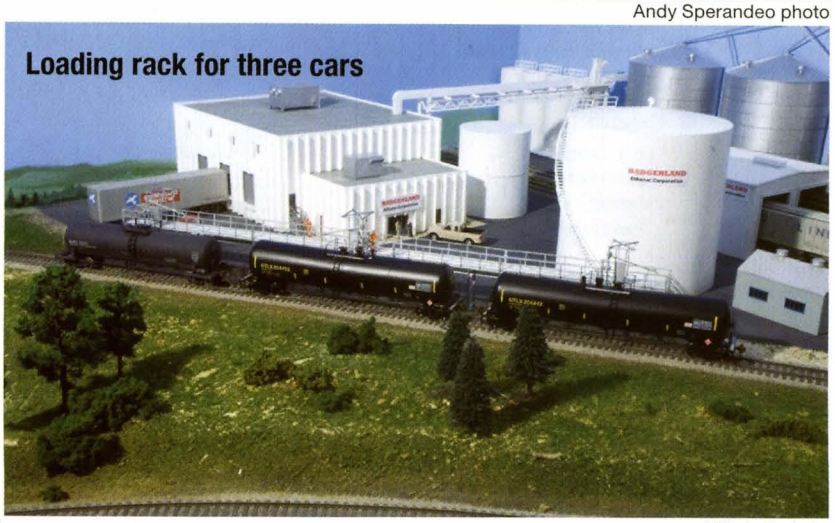
Sure spots for switching fun

Andy Sperandeo photo

"Sure spot" is a term some railroads use for placing cars at specific track locations, not just anywhere near the customer's building. Shippers and receivers usually need cars placed precisely, as at numbered doors, for loading or unloading. For us this can add to the fun by requiring additional switching to line up and spot cars as specified on waybill cards or switch lists. Here on *Model Railroader*'s HO scale Beer Line layout, a Milwaukee Road boxcar is being delivered to door 8 at the freight house.

Andy Sperandeo photo

When industries have multiple tracks, each track usually serves a particular purpose and the customer wants certain cars placed on certain tracks. At the Schlitz warehouse on the Beer Line, the switch list orders cars to be placed on either track 1, 2, or 3 (from left to right). The switch crew usually sorts cars for like tracks together so that each track's cars can be spotted with one shove. Making the fewest possible movements inside the building is generally safest for both railroaders and warehouse workers.



MR staff photo

At the ethanol plant on MR's Wisconsin & Southern layout, each tank car is uncoupled to be spotted at a filler point along the loading rack. Only three cars can be spotted at a time, and any extra empty cars will be left "off spot." That means leaving them on the plant lead off to the right, or on a nearby storage track, to be placed the next "day" (operating session) after the loaded cars are pulled. The left-most spot also serves for unloading the gasoline used to denature the ethanol. When, as in this photo, a gasoline car is spotted for unloading, only two ethanol cars can be loaded at a time.