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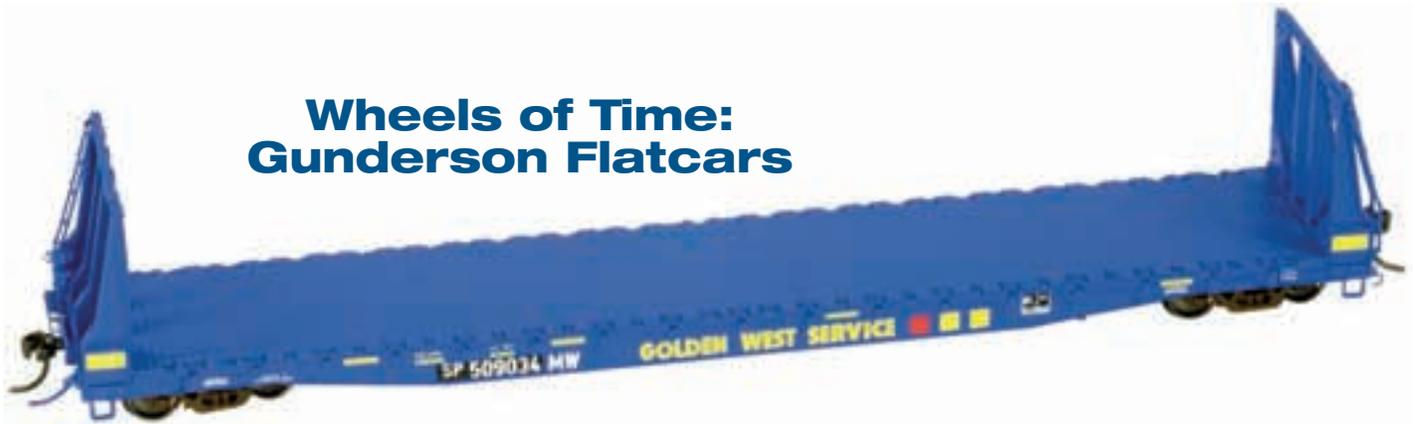
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Wheels of Time: Gunderson Flatcars



HO — Wheels of Time expands its HO-scale offerings with its first freight cars. This manufacturer is a relative newcomer in the hobby. Started by Matthew Young in 1995, Wheels of Time has made a name for itself with a series of high-quality releases, mostly in N scale. The first major HO offering was the intricate Piggypacker a couple of years ago. Now, Wheels of Time shows it can play with the high-end makers of 1/87th-size models, as well as those for the 1:160th market. Gunderson's 62-foot flatcar is Wheels of Time's first HO freight car subject.

Development of this prototype came at the request of Southern Pacific (SP) in the mid-1960s. SP was looking to maximize 70-ton capacity on a flatcar by having bulkheads applied to each end. This provided a secure 57-foot stretch on the flatcar bed to haul loads up to the car's limit. Demand for Pacific Northwest lumber-related building ma-

terials helped fuel the need for a fleet of modern flatcars. The result was a 1965 order from SP to Gunderson for a new, longer 62-foot flatcar (previous models ran 53-feet, 6-inches) in two variations. Split evenly, the 250 cars came half with bulkheads and half as traditional flatbed examples. Gunderson delivered this group to SP during the spring of 1966. The cars came in brown with white lettering. Southern Pacific classified these flatcars as its F-70-43. The bulkhead cars included 509000-series numbering; the regular deck flats received 580000 numbers.

Wheels of Time demonstrates with this new HO-scale flatcar release that it is up to the challenges of producing a freight car able to compete with the best in the hobby. This is a truly excellent effort. *Railroad Model Craftsman's* Golden West bulkhead example weighed in at 4.15-ounces. For its 62-foot length, this model without load is roughly an

ounce shy of NMRA recommended practice but operated fine during evaluation. I put the model through tests on Bachmann Code 100 E-Z Track and Kato's Code 83 Unitrack and various turnouts, and observed no derailments or other issues.

The model includes a number of separately applied details. The flatcar frame and deck are plastic with a metal weight included under the deck running between the trucks. Stirrup steps, ladders, and grab irons are all very scale in appearance and add to the realistic appearance of this release. Wheels of Time includes coupler cut levers and trainline hoses on the ends, plus brake line detail on the underbody. Couplers are Kadee No. 58 scale-head metal knuckles body-mounted in narrow pockets secured by a small Phillips screw. The trucks include excellent sideframe detail and smooth-rolling metal wheels.

Wheels of Time provides two wood-plank panels for its bulkhead release. Decorated in matching color to the model, the panels include a white vertical stripe denoting the car's center for loading guidance. The design of the panel provides two small rounded bumps in the upper top corners of the bulkhead and single locating points in the lower outer corners. The wood-plank panel includes recessed areas that line up to these locators on the bulkhead. I used a very tiny amount of glue applied directly to the tips of the locators on the bulkhead and gently pressed the panel in place. The decision to leave the vertical wood plank panels on the inside of the bulkheads as a separate user-applied part had to do with the varying condition of prototypes. Matthew Young related to *RMC* that, when developing



this model, he observed these panels in various stages of disintegration on frequent examples. To allow the hobbyist freedom to conjure up these panels in realistic-looking rough condition, the model release went with providing pristine panels separately to keep options on this area open.

Paint and lettering are excellent on this model. The shade of blue looks true to Southern Pacific's Golden West Service color. The decoration provides Golden West Service spelled out in thick yellow sans-serif typeface and includes the single red dot and pair of yellow dots, all as per the prototype. This Golden West Service model presents a bulkhead in maintenance-of-way service with a black patched section for SP reporting marks, car number, and "MW" labeling. Accurate decoration details include a side-by-side with single panel below COTS on the SP maintenance example. The SP flatcar and bulkheads include multi-color ACI labels.

Given the use the prototypes experienced and the miles and distances they traveled, this model is a candidate for inclusion by a wide range of modelers. Whether you are operating them in as-delivered SP for 1960s–1980s setting in lumber service or 1990s and later in Golden West blue paint, there is much utility to be had for this great-looking HO model.

The first production included SP-lettered regular-deck flatcars and bulkheads in a dozen road numbers for each style. Wearing Golden West's blue scheme, Wheels of Time also included three road numbers for patched with SP Maintenance-of-Way (MW) reporting marks. Wheels of Time packages its new HO flatcars in a cardboard window box. The model, wrapped in thin clear protective film, arrives in a clamshell clear plastic inner liner. For its bulkhead release, the fully decorated pair of bulkhead panels come sealed in a bag. Wheels of Time's 62-foot standard-deck flatcar model also received a limited-run of unlettered brown examples (#40028, MSRP: \$35.95). A brown with white data (Railroad Roman typeface) bulkhead flatcar (#40033, MSRP: \$38.95) also came in the first release. These models are popular, and as of press time, Wheels of Time's website



shows many selections sold out of most of its original run. Check with your hobby dealer or do some searching online or at swap meets to locate examples from this run.

Southern Pacific paid \$10,000 for its flatcars and a little more than \$12,000 for examples fitted with bulkheads. Replicating nearly all the features of the prototype, except its asking price, Wheels of Time provides its HO models for \$35.95 and \$38.95, respectively. Wheels of Time promotes its products as, "the real thing in HO & N," and I find this SP flatcar lives up to that slo-

gan. Look for an announcement in the very near future for a second run of these flatcars. Wheels of Time shared with RMC plans for additional SP models with new road numbers, as well as Cotton Belt and Golden West Service offerings. Similar to Southern Pacific's experience, the HO modeler will enjoy and benefit for owning and operating examples of this 62-foot flatcar in either version. — **TONY COOK**

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