

She Sure is a Butte (Montana Humor Implied)

Hope everyone had a nice Holiday. Let's find out if any of you have some Christmas money to burn. Robby... have you been good or bad this year? Anyway, I finally got around to making this definitive MRL woodchip hopper, having promised to do it for several years now. Notice I said **making** and not simply building or weathering. Just semantics, you say? Not this time. Being that the only model out there suitable for this prototype was the wimpy old LBF chip car – with underdeveloped ribs – I decided that a major reworking was in order. But first, one thing that never needs a good working over is, of course...



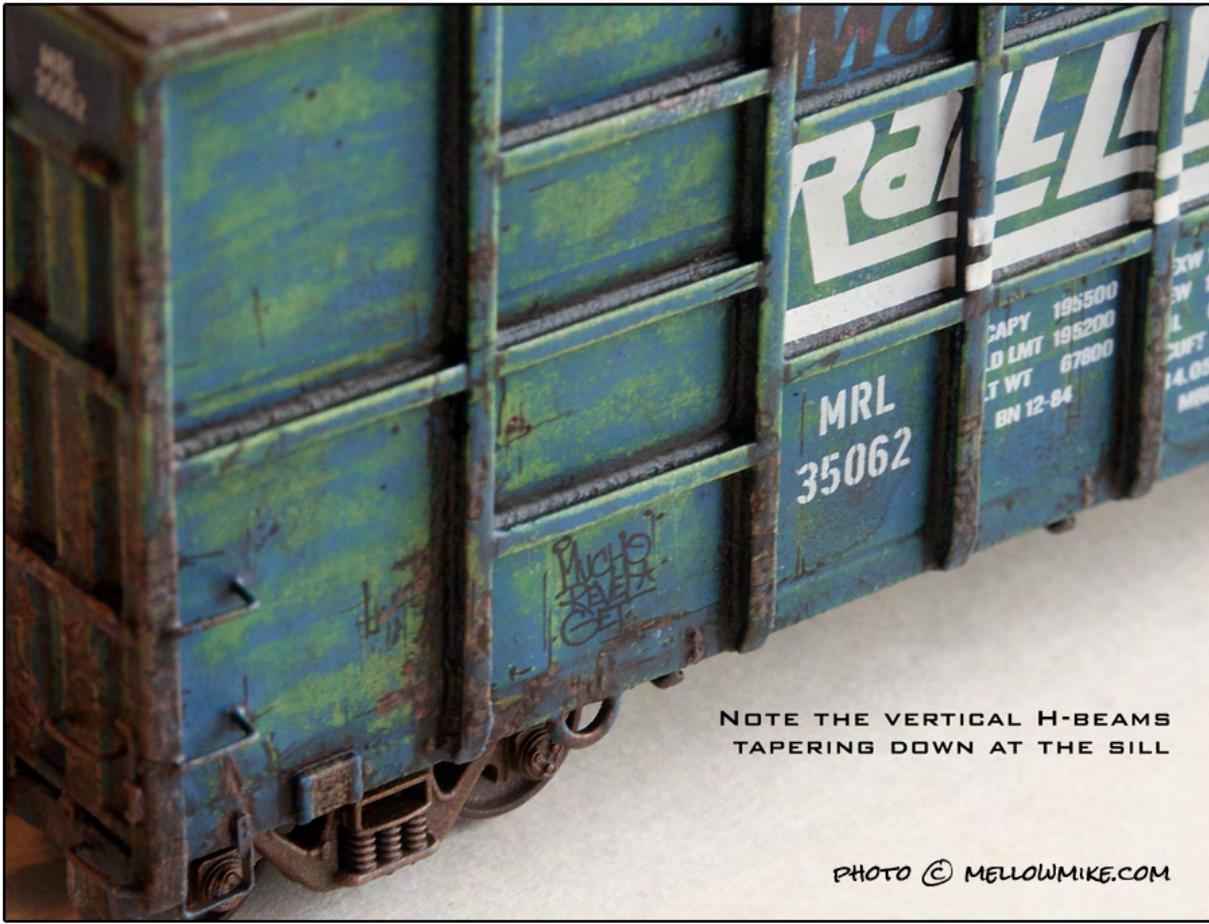
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YOUR DOSE OF CLOSE:



Taking the LBF Kit to its Bitter Roots

Ouch. As I mentioned, the LBF car needed some steroid help. The worn MRL hoppers in real life feature varying degrees of green BN paint and markings bleeding through what's left of any blue overspray. As I am an intricate sort of weatherer, this entails multiple layering of paint and clear coats, which would rise up to the rib level easily on an LBF model. Not only that – but the actual ribs on the prototype are more like a narrow H-beam girder. A detail the model lacked. The horizontal ribs are a bit skinnier, being more like an I-beam. Using the smallest Evergreen shaped styrene strips of this type, I totally constructed replacement sides for the car. They stand out sufficiently from the surface to allow several weathering layers, even at high tide.



NOTE THE VERTICAL H-BEAMS
TAPERING DOWN AT THE SILL

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As you can see above, I have drawn your attention to the tapered bottom ends of the vertical ribs. Not a big deal if this were a factory model, right? I'm no professional tooler by any stretch – but tapering these H-beams required taking out a pie-sliced wedge from each tip – and bending the surface to a slope. Had this been a solid strip, you just sand it to a taper. Not here. I speak like I know a little something – but that's only because I have been around real chip cars of this type – and noted the construction. I toyed with the prospect of doing some pulled-up and damaged ribs, as a few cars have, but with shipping and subsequent handling of the car, it would be like a hangnail in a sweater pocket. Static model – plausible – but not an operational one! Therefore I just banged them up instead.

Getting Down to the Grizzly Bare Ends

Body-wise, all I retained were the LBF ends. Mostly as a time saver. Plus with a little upgrade, they would blend in fine. Bear in mind (no pun) that the ladders are not from the kit. I rummaged through the parts cabinet and found some that were somewhat thinner. However, with the paint and gloss coat action leading up to the decaling, they naturally increased in thickness. The little details like the door lift pull (homemade) and the lock bars were added to the nondescript surface. As were the horizontal straps. I shot one MRL car a few years ago that had some ravaged ends. I feel this is indicative of many of them. Possibly the cars are pushed with the unloading tractor, I don't know. But it certainly made for a wild contrast to the sides. So here we go:



The resulting look is that both the blue and green paint layers are worn off, and there is a plethora of dings, gouges, and rusty scrapes. In case it wasn't all that evident! One end has the netting tray along the top. But the netting is no longer there. Some day, I'd love to do a car with the netting across the top, but there is nothing available to scale. Cheesecloth or gauze is still too large. And pantyhose doesn't drape over the sides well enough to look realistic. It is also too perfect in pattern. But I digress.



The underframe came from an old Greenville 60' boxcar which I cut up and rearranged. The LBF car was clearly minimalist in that regard, so what I've done is a serious improvement. I used the Kadee draft gear boxes that were supplied with the 158 whisker couplers. They tucked in perfectly! I screwed them in place, instead of gluing them, in the event you want to pull the whole box out in favor of (gasp) Sergeants. Your call. These 158's swing effortlessly in their respective boxes, though. Trucks are Walthers and the wheels are the Intermountain 36-inch metal variety. Oh... I guess now would be a good time to verify if the couplers are the right height off the rails... huh. Cross your fingers folks. Drum roll please...



What do you think? Damn right I nailed it. Pretty good for an amateur builder!

The LBF models have some raised brake apparatus – but not very pronounced. I pirated a suitable setup from a TOFC kit, rearranged it to suit, and added a bit of linkage. I also put on the little thing for the thing... the car tracking sensor. There below the COTS label.



For the first time in doing these 60-foot chip cars, I added the support bars inside. They keep the sides from flexing out when fully loaded. In observing the prototypes from bridges here in town, I can safely say that there is no set style or amount. Some break off. I went with four - but one conspicuously missing – for variety. The real ones rarely stay perfectly straight, and I have given mine subtle bends and tweaks to match. You can't do this easily with plastic – so I've used thick wire. The interior of the MRL cars were left original. Meaning not painted blue like the exterior body. So I've recreated a typical worn green and bare metal surface seen on the real thing.

DETAILS OF THIS MODEL INCLUDE:

- Represents a worn MRL wood chip hopper, with BN bleed-thru

- Sides are entirely scratch-built, using H and I beams
- Painted and weathered in layers, emulating real cars
 - 36" IM metal wheelsets as an upgrade
 - Walthers trucks as replacements
 - Kadee 158 couplers and boxes
 - Separate ladders and grabs
 - Brake apparatus upgrade
 - Scale wood chip load
 - Custom data decals
 - Custom tagging



The car has two slabs of weight on the floor instead of the usual single. The reason for this is maintaining a low center of gravity, in spite of the height and load. The load of chips is not full to the bottom. It is faked. Basically a shallow load sitting on a permanent shelf near the top of the car. Because of the neat little braces this time, I did not wish to do the oft-seen peaked ridge above the side level. In looking at numerous MRL photos online of loaded cars, not all of them were “topped off”. Thus, this one is full – but not heaping full. And viewers can see the bars better.



Yes, there sure is an abundance of photos in this listing. But I wanted readers to see all the nuances of this special project. This took me almost a month to complete. It is not the rattiest MRL chip car replica, but it is up there near the top. Lovers of MRL bleed-thru cars know about the degrees of the word **Montana**. It will range from precise to a blurry mess. Why do the Rail Link letters and chevron hold up better by contrast...? I can't say. Perhaps the red paint is cheap and the white isn't. I just go by what I see in pictures. There is a bit of translucence to my red lettering if you look close. Mimicking the white NORTHERN showing through behind it look of the prototypes. You can't do that with a Microscale decal. I had to custom print a partially transparent red Montana.

The reason you don't see these MRL chip cars done very often, is that they are a bear (pun intended this time) to recreate convincingly. It all depends on your standards. You might find an LBF model decorated for BN with some blue paint thrown on and MRL decals added. But you won't have the raised detail of this car. And you certainly won't find anyone who can do the typical MRL bleeds the way I do them. It's a love affair. And if someone were to come close – they haven't got the rusty worn metal and scrape diligence you see in my work. I mean, honestly. This car epitomizes what I do. If you like having the best in your collection - look no further. This is a one-time limited offering never to be repeated in HO. Based on the custom build AND the painting and weathering, I feel the need to warrant a **reserve price** this time. I really don't like doing that... but in light of the holiday week listing... and being short on MRL fans lately... I can't have this baby going for a pittance. Hopefully you understand. I won't divulge what the reserve is, but if you follow my sales, it is in accordance with my better cars. Nowhere near the price the MRL centerflow went for, so you can breathe easy!