



Western Pacific Box Car Paint Schemes

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This list provides HO scale modelers with a list of reasonably accurate Western Pacific freight cars. The cars suggested here are at least close to WP prototypes, and may be used as-is with a minimum of apology, or improved with some detail changes to make truly accurate models.

The list is limited to what may be currently available, or what has been in recent production and might still be found on dealers' shelves or the used market.

Not included are cars that could be built by major modifications to currently produced models.

Most of the cars cited here are only those in use between 1950 and 1958.

BOXCAR PAINT SCHEMES

White Square Herald Scheme -- From about 1930 to 1949 most WP boxcars were painted mineral red, with white gothic lettering and a rectangular black-and-white "Feather River" herald. On wooden boxcars the herald was painted on the upper half of the doors. An enameled metal plate was bolted to corrugated steel doors on single-sheathed auto cars. On all-steel cars the herald was painted on the car side to the right of the doors. The paint was described as "aluminum", however, this referred only to the pigment, not the visual color which was WHITE.

Silver Square Herald Scheme -- Silver lettering was standard between mid-1949 and late 1955. Silver also replaced white in the herald. Otherwise, lettering was similar to the "White Square Herald Scheme".

Feather River Route Scheme -- Between late 1955 and 1959, most new cars were delivered with yellow lettering. The herald was replaced by the "Feather River Route" slogan in Gothic lettering to the right of the door, all minor lettering was also yellow Gothic with "Western Pacific" in extended railroad Roman was to the left of the door. Some earlier steel cars were repainted in this way between 1955 and 1959.

Most steel WP boxcars built or repainted before mid-decade had black ends and roofs. This actually was not paint, but black car cement, a thick sealant similar to automobile rust proofing. Photo evidence from Jim Eager's WESTERN PACIFIC COLOR GUIDE TO FREIGHT AND PASSENGER EQUIPMENT (Scotch Plains, N.J.: Morning Sun, 2001) suggests this was used on only a few cars purchased after 1955. Some repaints after that date also had black ends, but others did not. This gunk was difficult to remove, and it was often left in place during repainting. It is also hard to tell from photos whether a car with dark ends was treated, or if that was just road grunge.

The WP was very parsimonious about repainting their cars. Before 1960, most cars would not likely have been repainted in newer schemes unless rebuilt due to wreck damage. Some boxcars built as early as 1945 were still wearing original paint in MW service at the time of the UP merger. Repaints into the "Silver Square Herald Scheme" were very rare, as few steel boxcars would have needed repainting during the 1949-1955 period. Repaints into the "Feather River Route Scheme" beginning in 1955 were more common, and even included a few 1951-built PS-1s.

The WP applied many special schemes to cars with cushioned underframes or load restrainers. There were many variations, many shown in Eager's book. Here are some of the better-known types which can be modeled with decals:

Silver With Giant Orange Feather Scheme -- Applied new to 19501-19520 in 1951, and as repaints with existing black ends and roof on 19521-19542 in 1953. This scheme denoted cars with Pullman-Standard "Compartmentizers", but without cushion underframes.

Orange with Giant Silver Feather Scheme -- Applied new to 1961-1970 and 3011-3050. These cars were orange (black ends and roofs on 3011-3050), with black lettering, and a giant silver feather which ran the length of the car. This scheme was used cars with Pullman-Standard cushioned underframes. Evans Damage Free load restrainers were applied to 3011-3050, and these cars were marked "DF + CU" in black to the right of the door.

DF Silver Feather with Rectangular Herald Scheme -- Applied new to 3001-3010 and 3801-3818. These were 50-foot PS-1 double-door boxcars equipped with Damage Free load restrainers, but without cushioned underframes. They were freight car red with a silver feather overlaid by an orange "DF" to the right of their doors, and also had a rectangular black-and-silver herald on the left.

Medium Orange Feather Scheme -- Applied new to WP RBLs 55951-56001, 56001-56100; TS 601-610, 611-620, 801-840; plus repaints of WP boxcars 19501-19542, 3011-3050 and 1961-1970 beginning in 1956. These cars carried a medium-sized orange feather to the right of the door. Below this was the slogan "Rides like a Feather" in a yellow script. To the left of the door was "Western Pacific" in orange extended railroad Roman. Most other lettering was yellow. There was some variation in the minor lettering on these cars, depending upon special equipment, and the doors of RBLs featured an orange "DF" or yellow "CP". Some regular boxcars wore metal plates on their doors with "DF" or "DF-2" in yellow.

Decal notes: Champ HB-327 contains decals for the "Medium Orange Feather Scheme", and includes data for both 40 and 50-foot boxcars. This lettering is also useful for the 1955-1959 "Feather River Route Scheme". However, the "Western Pacific" road name in HB-327 is orange, versus yellow in the "Feather River Route Scheme". The yellow "Western Pacific" is found in Champ HN-31Y. Road name decals for the "White Square Herald Scheme" are still sold by Champ as set HN-31, but finding matching Gothic dimensional data is a challenge. Champ also offers the "Silver Square Herald Scheme" as their set HB-169.

Detail Associates has a small line of little-known WP boxcar decals. Their 9002 offers the "Silver Square Herald Scheme", and has many more goodies than the rather spartan Champ set. Set 9003 represents the "Feather River Route Scheme". Some other sets are for later 1960s schemes, but include minor lettering like loader descriptions which are useful for 50' PS-1s in the "Feather River Route Scheme".

Microscale's set 87-438 has several types of large feathers and other lettering for loader-equipped boxcars. Also note their set MC-4266 with white lettering for the 50' single-sheathed cars can also be used on other equipment.

Clover House (P.O. Box 62, Sebastopol, Ca 95473-0062: mail order only) offers several useful dry transfer sets. Their 8370-01 will letter series 20001-20200 in the "Feather River Route Scheme". Set 8725-02 has the correct lettering and arched road name for SN wooden boxcars. Set 8725-03 will letter SN's 1955 50' PS-1 boxcars.

Please Note:

Several of the decal manufactures have gone out of business or been merger with other companies. Please see our other document on WP Freight Cars.

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