CB&Q 86ft Box Cars

The Burlington had a small fleet of 86ft High Cube box cars for domestic US assembly parts movements. They were built by Thrall car in 1964 and assigned to Ford Motor Company and the Chevrolet and Oldsmobile Divisions of General Motors. The Ford cars were CBQ 15000-15014 and assigned to cover movements to Milpitas/San Jose, CA. The Chevrolet cars were CBQ 15100-15103 for movements from Flint, MI on the GTW to Warm Springs/Fremont CA. The Oldsmobile cars were 15104-15105 and assigned at Lansing, MI also on the GTW for movements to South Gate, CA.

These cars were used to handle “stampings” (hoods, fenders, doors, etc.) which were bulky and do not weigh much. The cars were designed to handle a maximum lading weight of only 140,000lbs.

This traffic had formerly moved in standard size 50ft box cars but the way rates (prices) were set at that time the auto companies figured out that they were paying to move “air” as they could not even load to the minimum weight. At this time the railroads were even a more essential part of the “assembly” line than they are now. All of the destinations shown above are now closed except Fremont which GM closed and then became a Toyota/GM operation for a few years and closed again. Now it is the location of the Tesla plant. And Oldsmobile is gone in another General Motors reorganization.

Everything was OK for several years and things started to change. At GM they were worried that they were going to be broken up in an anti-trust suit so they decided to combine the logistics operation (amongst other things) into one to make it more difficult to do. Prior this each Division had their own traffic group. In 20/20 hindsight I think it was just a way to eliminate jobs. Also the auto industry became concerned with in-transit inventory and warehouse costs which led to the “Just-in-Time” philosophy and eventually to running “unit” trains of autos and parts. This effort took at least two years. Ford developed the Ford “FAST” train to Milpitas and GM’s was the “ARRO” train to Fremont amongst other destinations. The CB&Q was not included but it wasn’t for the lack of trying. I thought we had a shot with Ford with the DRGW-WP but it was not to be. The UP wanted the ARRO to move via the Rock Island between Chicago and Council Bluffs as they had lent/given the RI money assuming they were going to merge with it. The BN merger was not a major factor.

We let Ford move their cars around as they needed to their various stamping plants. The Chevy and Olds cars stayed at Flint and Lansing respectively. These cars were in “pools” which means the shipper could load a car to any destination. The CB&Q cars did not have to move via the Burlington. It is hypnotically possible a Q owned car never made a revenue trip over the Q. We kept track of the traffic with our monthly computer reports and manually watching the daily “new loads” report.

The 50ft cars that these cars replaced were returned to the owners and generally placed back into general service. Some of the CB&Q 86ft cars were sold/leased to other carriers and some were returned to (by this time) BN. I did see that some surplus 86ft cars were being loaded in Washington State with hay destined to the race track at Hialeah Florida.

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