

Chicago & North Western Car No. 7721

In 1929/1930, the Chicago & North Western Railway took delivery of a large fleet of railcars for use in their suburban commuter service. The order included 100 passenger coaches and 20 combination passenger-baggage cars. This equipment, one-third of which was built respectively by the Pullman Car & Manufacturing Corporation, the American Car & Foundry Company, and the Standard Steel Car Company, embodied the latest features in commuter passenger cars.

CNW Car No. 7721, now located at the Oklahoma Railway Museum, is one of those combination passenger-baggage cars, usually called simply “Combines.” It was built by the Standard Steel Car Company which, in spite of its name, made extensive use of aluminum. The resulting decrease in weight of the car had multiple benefits: it allowed for longer trains pulled by the same locomotive compared to all-steel cars; it reduced wear on locomotives, tracks and bridges; and allowed for faster acceleration—a significant factor in stop-and-go commuter service. The car also incorporated Melcher-Hyatt roller bearings for the axles.

The official weight of the car was listed as 96,300 pounds supported on two four-wheel trucks with eight 33-inch diameter wheels. The outside length was almost 81 feet while the inside length was given as over 69 feet, twenty feet of which was reserved for the baggage compartment. Car No. 7721 originally had steam vapor heating and overhead electric lighting. No air conditioning was provided; however, 12 ventilators were installed in the ceiling, and riders could open the windows for fresh air.

The passenger compartment was fitted with 33 double, reversible seats. In addition, a longitudinal seat able to accommodate several commuters was located opposite the salon (dry toilet). Thus, the combine was able to seat 70 passengers, not counting standing riders. To accommodate standing passengers, all seats were fitted with handholds, and metal hand-straps were installed over the longitudinal seat. Basket racks were located overhead to store parcels. Three-foot wide doors lead to enclosed vestibules at each end of the car.

The exterior of Combine Car No. 7721 was painted in the familiar CNW green and yellow scheme. The interior walls were decorated with 2 shades of tan while the ceiling was painted cream. No drapes were installed. And, due to the heavy foot

traffic, there was no carpeting on the Masticoke floors. Although wood floors were used in the baggage compartment, the nearly all-metal construction helped make the car almost fireproof. In addition, heavy vertical end-reinforcing members made it practically impossible for cars to telescope in the event of a wreck.

The last maintenance record on file is given as 10/18/1939. Sometime after that date, the car was taken out of service. It was eventually sold to the Dodge City Ford & Bucklin Railroad (KS). At the DCF&B, Car No. 7721 was renumbered as 136 and repainted in a blue and white color scheme. Later, the car was acquired by the Guthrie (OK) Arts Council, along with three others (137, 138 and 139). In January of 2004, the combine was purchased by the Oklahoma Railway Museum in Oklahoma City. Once at its new home, the exterior of Car No. 7721 was repainted in its original CNW green and yellow colors. Also, provisions were made to accommodate visitors arriving in wheelchairs. In 2019, a crew arrived to film rail operations for their feature, "The Pale Door," in which Combine No. 7721 is featured. Later in the year, the car returned to the maintenance shop for long-overdue refurbishment and repairs in preparation for use in the Polar Express train.

Prepared by Steven Kamm, July 2019

From the Chicago & North Western Historical Society:



The Dodge City Ford & Bucklin RR paint scheme:



At the Oklahoma Railway Museum after repainting:

