

ACF PD3500

FLEXI FLO COVERED HOPPER

THANK YOU FOR PURCHASING this HO Scale PD3500 Flexi Flo covered hopper! We're really proud of this thing because it's just as unique in the rail world as Rapido is in the model world. Not that we'd ever admit we're different or anything like that.

For many years, anyone wanting to run this unique type of rolling stock was limited to either brass or a very early production model that lacked a lot of the finer details that model railroaders come to appreciate today.

Before putting your hopper on the rails, we recommend you do a quick tune-up. We've made thousands of these things,

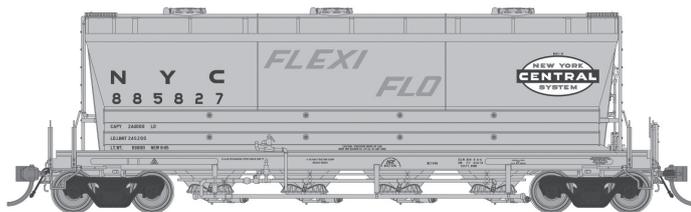
and there is always the possibility of gremlins getting into yours. Check that the wheelsets are in gauge. If any wheelsets are out of gauge, they can be tightened or widened by twisting the wheels. Check that the coupler trip pin is not too low (bend it up if it is) and that the coupler spring hasn't popped out in shipping. That should do it! Just add a metric tonnnne of good ole' grime and dust weathering to the thing and it's ready for service!

We would love to see photos of your beaten-up and weathered hopper models. Please send them along by email or on our Facebook page:
[facebook.com/rapidotrains/](https://www.facebook.com/rapidotrains/)

Many thanks to Bryan Busséy and Brian Marsh for their help with this project.

Your PD3500 Flexi Flo covered hopper comes with a limited lifetime warranty. If there are any factory defects or if you (or your grandkids) run this amazingly-detailed car straight off the edge of the layout to the basement floor, and then your dog decides its their next chew toy, then we will do our very best to repair or replace it, subject to the availability of replacements and/or spare parts. Please give us a holler by phone 1-855-LRC-6917 or through our website:
[rapidotrains.com/contact-us/](https://www.rapidotrains.com/contact-us/)

Our model has been scaled from manufacturer drawings and includes alternative parts and bodies allowing us to represent all three versions of the PD3500 built between 1964 and 1966. But that's not a lot of detail on this unique car, so here's a full history on their service ...

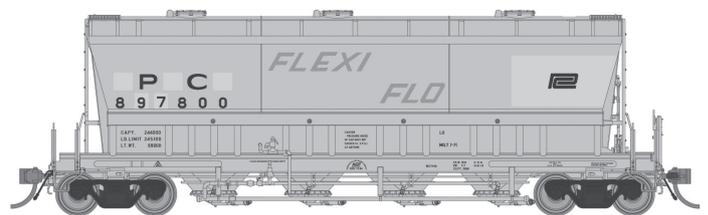


Built between August 1964 and June 1966 by the American Car & Foundry (ACF), this unique 3500 cu. ft. covered hopper was an early innovator in pressure differential unloading and a marketing master-class thanks to the "Flexi Flo" tag coined by the car's biggest customer, the New York Central railroad.

Other than seven cars built for Shippers Car Line (SHPX), a subsidiary of ACF, the NYC was the only purchaser of the PD3500. They made up for it in quantities, with a total of 220 cars rolling off the Milton, Pennsylvania, production line in just a short (almost) 2 year time-frame.

Even though production was limited to just over 220 cars over a 22 month production, there were three unique carbodies designed and built during that time.

The inaugural design was the 941-H type, which is the most unique among the three designs with its series of triple vertical ribs along the bottom of the carbody and 100-ton trucks. Second came the 963-H type, which featured a redesigned carbody structure with an additional robust horizontal rib replacing the short vertical ribs, enlarged roof-top loading hatches and new 125-ton trucks, all the while maintaining the three-panel carbody construction. The third and final variant was the 996-H type, which was largely unchanged from the 963-H except for the very visible difference of having a six-panel carbody instead of the earlier three-panel carbody.



Still new at the time of the Penn Central merger in 1968, many cars were simply patched with PC prefix and logo and renumbered. However, plenty made it through those turbulent years with their full NYC paint unspoiled. Come the era of Conrail and many cars were patched again, making them a rolling north-eastern railroad history lesson as patches faded over time showing both PC and NYC logos beneath the famous "canopener"! Many others were repainted, with Conrail applying at least three different schemes.



If there is any lingering feeling that these cars were captive to the north east, then the 1980 and 1990s should dispel that misconception. The fleet quickly spread their wings, first through the transfer of many cars to Conrail's Merchants Despatch Transportation Co. (MDTX) subsidiary, and then the later sale of cars to GE Rail Services (NAHX) for Lafarge and United States Systems Inc. (SXSX/SYSX) for use in Arizona, California and the south west, all gaining new paint schemes in the process.

By 2000, an explosion of patchouts had taken place with a plethora of different reporting marks popping up and no part of the USA off limits. They were became more common in many parts of Canada as well!

Many were still in use well into the mid 2010s, but the majority of the fleet were retired from service in the mid-2010s as they fell foul of the 50 year service rule.



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