

Con-Cor PCC Review – July 23, 2010

Rich Allman, East Penn Traction Club

The newly released Con-Cor PCC was inspected, dissected, road-tested, and partially corrected and now is reviewed. Con-Cor is to be commended for its effort and risk taking; trolley modeling is, to put it mildly, a niche market. Anything available is welcome to our small fraternity. Although some outstanding custom kits are available, what is commercially available in ready-to-run format is rather limited and new products are always welcome. Comparables are the Bowser F Line cars, the Bachmann Spectrum Baltimore Peter Witt, and less prototypical, the Bachmann PCC, an inexpensive entry level model. It appears that Con-Cor has taken a generic pre-war St. Louis Car Company shell and made a one-size-fits-all car with different company paint schemes. This will require some reworking for the trolley purists, to which as a disclaimer, these reviewers belong.

Now to the particulars:

As a general matter, the car was modeled most specifically on the Los Angeles Railways car and should be compared to that. The following are noted: the front is acceptable, but the rear is somewhat wide at the bottom. Prototypically, the widest part of an air-electric PCC should be at the belt rail looking at the car from the ends. This is understandably difficult to do in a casting. The rear window tops are somewhat higher than prototypical. Additionally, the arc of the upper outer aspect of the rear windows should be somewhat broader. Some right sided roof mats are missing but with some black decaling, should be easily correctable. The windows could have been slightly improved in their fit and concealment, the press-in seams being somewhat visible. Operationally, the drive is peppy and climbed the 7% grade on Bob Dietrich's layout without a hitch. It easily navigated a 9 inch radius. The car can be easily fitted with a DCC decoder for modelers so inclined. It has an interior into which can be placed seated passengers. Reflecting longitudinal pieces surround the location for the decoder, which is a creative touch, but a potential source for operational grief. An operator is seated in the right spot. The track brake assembly details are very nicely done, as are the wheel details. They and the fender need to be weathered for prototypical accuracy. The car has a very accurate trolley pole hook, a small detail not always provided by other manufacturers.

Out of the box, the first car we saw was a Pittsburgh Railways as-delivered 1100 car. The packaging was professional, and the right side of the car was eye-pleasing. The front is acceptable, but a few caveats are due. The paint scheme was the later hour glass configuration and by the time that was applied, the full anticlimber had replaced the short one. The left side of the model has a company decal that was not present on the prototype cars; this can be carefully painted over. Additionally, the same anticlimber issue applies to the rear as in the front. The car should have rear roof mounted whisker lights. For Pittsburgh, the side destination sign should be in the window in front of the center door, not the window behind the front door. The front destination sign should have been slightly recessed on this car and on all of the other versions. A side vent under the

motorman's window is missing, but a thin piece of painted styrene cut to size can easily be cemented in the proper location. The pole retriever should be above the rear windows rather than on the belt rail. With some significant modifications, this car could also represent the Pittsburgh 1200, 1400, 1500, or 1600 series PCC.

In as much as a generic shell has been produced, albeit with particular prototype company liveries, for each series, the meticulous trolley modeler will need to make some changes in the quest for accuracy. These revisions presume delivery of the model with correct paint schemes.

Baltimore Transit Company: The Con-Cor web page shows a car in the original colors, which could be very nicely done. Rear roof whisker lights are needed. A small drill hole above the rear windows can accomplish this with some painted plastic tubing for non-working whisker lights. A divided front destination sign is needed. This can be done by painting or possibly with a Sharpie.

Boston Elevated Railway: The pole catcher should be above the rear windows and not on the belt rail. A Next Car light above the headlight is needed. The front destination sign should be divided. The only correct car number is 3001. Rear whisker lights are needed.

Brooklyn and Queens Transit: Rear whisker lights are needed. The destination sign should be divided. The pole catcher should be above the windows, though some were later relocated to the mid belt rail. A Next Car light over the headlight is needed.

Philadelphia Transportation Company: The car needs full anticlimbers front and back. It needs whisker lights front and back. If other than the cream cheese color scheme offered, the only accurate ones are the PTC schemes with either the plain cream above the belt rail, or the cream above the belt rail and the gray roof and letter board with the one inch red striping on the letter board area. Care must be taken to assure that the PTC logos are in the proper place. No cars of this series (2001-2020) were ever in the SEPTA paint schemes as they were all scrapped 8 years before SEPTA was created, so the modeler should understand that if he or she acquires a car in the SEPTA "Gulf Oil" paint scheme, it is not prototypical.

Pittsburgh Railways: The issues to be addressed have been discussed above.

Toronto Transit Commission: This model of the A1 series 4000-4139 will be distributed exclusively by George's Trains in Toronto, an old, reputable and respected retail establishment. Unlike the other cars which carry a list price of \$159.98, the TTC version lists for Canadian \$179.00 (U.S. \$172.85). This is a premium price for a plastic model but if done accurately, is easily justifiable. George's web site has a photo of the prototype at Halton Radial Railway trolley museum in Ontario, with a disclaimer that it is a prototype and not a model photo. For a TTC car, a large number of distinctive details will be necessary. These include: front dash lights and roof mounted Next Car light (which need not be working, in our opinion); a transverse bar over the front and rear skirting; a divided front destination sign; the "diving board" over the rear roof-sort of an

extension of the trolley boards; the side destination sign in the second from the front side window; rear “bull’s eye” type marker lights above the rear windows, full anticlimbers, the proper decals and striping. If these details are included, the model is something special, but if the car is merely the as-is generic shell painted in TTC colors, the serious trolley modeler might well question whether he needs this model unless he is ready to make some major revisions.

Specific details for US cars (not Canadian) are available in The PCC Planbook published by East Penn Traction Club.

The Con-Cor internet web site shows upcoming cars from Washington DC, Pacific Electric, Johnstown, and San Francisco. The modeler should be aware that none of these are prototypical representations. Washington cars were shorter, Pacific Electric never had single ended cars, Johnstown had only all-electric cars with standee windows, and San Francisco never had cars of this type. However if a fan is a “true believer” in these systems, he might tolerate the unreality.

Some savvy aftermarket trolley parts manufacturer-if such an entity exists!-could do well and provide a useful service and product were he or she to make a sprue with the needed anticlimbers, whisker lights, and other needed details to make the cars prototypically accurate. Con-Cor can benefit as well if it provides this (of course for a charge) along with specific directions for needed modifications.

One of us (Bob Dietrich) dissected the car and is working on improving the turning radius and the pole bushing; this will be reported in a companion piece shortly. It will include the experience in taking apart and reassembling the car, with illustrations of the recommended technique. Also to be provided is how to ground all wheels for optimal overhead operation.

Some final comparisons with other available marketed HO trolley models that are also sold as ready-to-run are offered: Con-Cor has presented a product which while not perfect is a nice model that with some alteration can be made to be a very presentable, fun-to-run car. The Bowser San Francisco F-Line cars can be obtained for around \$90-100 and with some work on the trolley pole can be taken out of the box and placed on the tracks. The prototypical accuracy of the F-Line cars is indisputable, and the Bowser drive is legendary for its smooth operation and reliability; it’s a great buy. The Bachmann Spectrum Baltimore Peter Witt is often found for \$75-85, needs some work to accommodate our trolley radii of sometimes less than 6 inches, and needs the pole bushing and pole replaced. The only accurate paint scheme marketed by Bachmann is the as-delivered Baltimore version, though both of us have acquired unpainted cars and then painted them in the final 1950’s version. The Con-Cor car is more expensive, though we do not yet know what the secondary market of sales at train shows and discount internet outfits will bring. Some fans will not choose between these various offerings but instead will get one or more of each. For someone who wants a ready-to-run model for two rail operation on broad curves, the Con-Cor car will fit the bill. For the ambitious and demanding trolley modeler willing to undertake some work, it is a most welcome

addition to the menu and we thank Con-Cor and wish them well with this project. Hopefully its success will encourage improvements and new ventures by them and other manufacturers.

Note: The statements and opinions made in this document are solely those of the individual involved and not necessarily those of the East Penn Traction Club.