

THE LONG ISLAND RAIL ROAD MODELER
BY MIKE BOLAND

***THIS MONTH'S FEATURE: MODELING P54 STEAM-TYPE COACHES WITH CON-COR'S
NEW mP54 PASSENGER CARS IN HO SCALE
PART 3***

Happy New Year and welcome back to our continuing series on the Long Island Rail Road's fleet of P54 steam-type coaches. Last time we stopped at car 389, a class P54F car that was used as club car Nassau and later converted to a coach. There was also car 391, which was club car Oyster Bay and built in 1916 by American Car and Foundry; it, too, was converted to a coach in 1917. Notice how the commuter club cars were originally P54 class cars and they later became larger and longer cars, ultimately landing up as ex-Pullman cars that the LIRR converted to private commuter club cars.

It's also interesting to note that the LIRR abandoned the flat or clerestory roof style on its car when the next group of cars was built in 1921. By this time the arch roof was being used in the construction of cars and this was used on a lot of P54C cars built by the Standard Steel Company. These cars were numbered 392 through 421 and they were later converted to trailers for use in MU train service, keeping their car numbers but having their class changed to T54A.

The railroad elected to purchase a small group of steam-type cars in 1923 along with a number of trailers. Strangely enough, the trailers all had an arch roof but the steam cars returned to the clerestory roof with a twist. The deck sash along the sides of the roof was eliminated and had three utility vents take their place. This made the cars look very similar to the PRR mP54 cars and the LIRR MP54A1c 1100-series cars (later renumbered into the 4100-series). The LIRR would purchase a group of 40 cars in the P54 class a few years later but we are getting ahead of ourselves. These cars were numbered 452 through 461, were classed as P54E and rode on type 2C3 trucks; the builder was ACF. They were built in October 1923. These cars were interesting in that they did not have the riveted truck used on earlier cars, both steam and MU, but a later cast model used on LIRR arch roof MUs.

That would be all for flat-roof P54s until 1930 when the railroad decided to converted a number of P54D arch-roof "pings" to MU service as control motors. These cars, 51 through 90, became class MP54D1c (1944 through 1983) and the railroad needed replacements for them so it turned to the PRR and bought 40 cars. These are believed to be class P54—that's how they are listed in Ed Koehler's LIRR roster—and that is how we will list them. The cars were numbered between 21 and 739 due to the PRR's practice policy of using different blocks of numbers to use for passenger cars. The LIRR numbered their "new" cars from 139 to 179 and these cars are easy to identify with their three box vents on the roof and cast trucks, rather than the riveted style. The riveted style was referred to as 2C1.

The PRR continued to build these cars into the 1930s and also sold these cars to a number of railroads in addition to the LIRR. Other railroads that purchased these cars were the Norfolk and Western, Boston and Maine, Erie, Susquehanna and surprisingly enough, the Santa Fe. The Santa Fe! Yes, we did say Santa Fe! The ATSF used two of the ex-PRR P54 coaches behind a couple of doodlebugs used for service in Texas.

The LIRR P54A cars had seats for 69 passengers with reversible 2/2 plush seating. Each car had a toilet, water cooler, baggage racks, window screens for use in summer and double sliding doors leading to the vestibule. Later cars—these were class P54B and numbered 371 through 388—had seats for 68, two toilets at the diagonally opposite ends of the car and used truck type 2C6. The last group of flat-roof cars, known as class P54E had seats for 72 passengers.

Collision posts for the cars got wider as later classes were built. The P54A cars had 5-inch collision posts and the posts eventually were made 9 inches in thickness. The thin 5-inch collision posts got the P54A cars banned from the ends of trains after the 1950 Kew Gardens crash and the cars were all scrapped in 1952 and 1956.

Class P54B cars lasted in service until 1956 although several cars went on and operated until 1969; one car, 379, lasted until 1970. Cars 374 and 376 were on the roster until 1969. In the last group of cars, two P54E coaches were modernized with 3/2 vinyl seating installed. These two cars, 455 and 456 were renumbered to 7455 and 7456. Car 455 was modernized in June 1955 and car 456 was modernized in December 1957. Their seating capacity was increased from 72 to 88 passengers. The cars also received recessed ceiling lighting, five electric fans, electric marker lights and modified heating.

Now let's get back to the PRR mP54. This was the original flat-roof suburban car for the Pennsylvania Railroad. The mP54s were made surplus by the electrification of the PRR Philadelphia area trackage. The PRR cars had hinged side doors and sat 68 commuters in 2/2 seating with many of the features similar to the LIRR cars, including baseboard and underseat heating.

The Con-Cor model is an extremely nice model and a very beautiful one but it doesn't quite represent the LIRR's own fleet of P54A and P54B cars, or even the P54E series (the trucks and vents are incorrect). The Con-Cor car does resemble the PRR mP54 class of cars but with some small modifications, you can more closely replicate the LIRR model. That's what we hope to do with the remainder of this feature series on these cars. We'll have to overlook the riveted truck, which Con-Cor did, too. (Maybe we can get Railworks to make of run of these...not a bad idea. Let's see...)

We're very thankful that Con-Cor brought these cars out but as Dr. Bruce Smith, well-known modeler and a PRRTHS member who worked with them to bring out this car in an accurate manner, told us: when the two cars differed, Con-Cor went with the PRR feature. So that's why we're here and we'll work on making an outstanding LIRR model in all classes. We also are planning to make MU versions with these cars, much as the prototype roads did. We'll finally be able to make a great express train of headend MU mail cars but more about that later...we're just thankful we took lots of photos and measurements of that MBM62 at Riverhead before it was cut up.

So here are some of our early observations about the cars: Both sets of cars on the LIRR had diaphragms, which the Con-Cor models lack. The vertical grabirons have to be removed to put the diaphragms on. The side doors on the car need some work, depending on what style of door you want to model. LIRR cars did not have end doors so they will need to be removed, along with the safety chains that go across the opening. The Con-Cor car has a double battery box on each side of the car; LIRR cars only had them on one side. The position of the seats—in the middle of the car window—seem to be off. As for portholes, very early photos show that the portholes were of glass, no doubt used by LIRR crews as were portholes in T54 MU cars. Sometime later, the

portholes were plated over, painted over or replaced with steel inserts. For a short time, too, the LIRR removed the entire porthole and replaced it with sheets of steel. This practice was done only to a few cars—pings too—before it was stopped. And most importantly, some of the car numbers are incorrect. (We did provide the correct information to Dr. Smith, who sent it to Con-Cor; it must have got lost between here and China, where the cars are made. Hopefully Con-Cor will correct the numbers in the next run.)

So now that we've covered the cars and provided as much information as we could, let's go through a timeline of these cars through the years and how to model them for specific time frames and eras. We'll put the cars into two groups, the LIRR cars and the ex-PRR cars...and that's how we will refer to them when we continue our feature with part 4.

Until then, we're off to West Springfield, Mass. for the Amherst Train Show. We'll give a full report soon. Happy modeling!