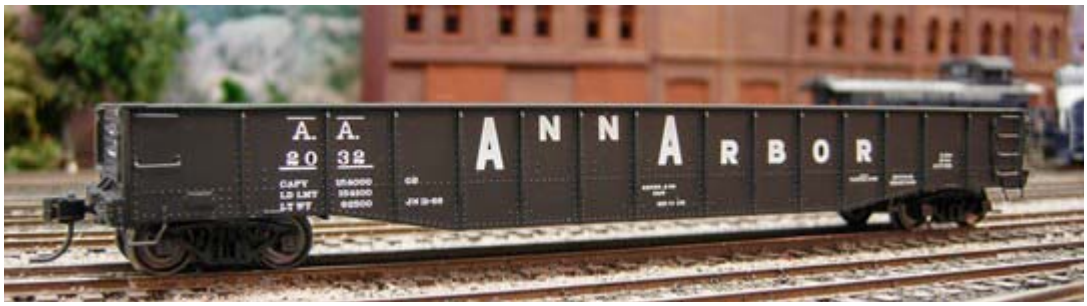
A Good Gondola Gone Bad

Weathering with Oils, Part 2

Text and Photos by EID Member Steve Malcolm

I have a tendency, like many Model Railroaders, towards purchasing rolling stock for no particular reason other than, “that’s neat”. Which would explain how a modeler with modern preferences ends up with three CB&Q GP-7’s from the 50’s and early 60’s era. This affliction also led to the eventual acquisition of a number of Proto 2000 - 52’6” Drop End Mill Gondolas. Seven, to be exact. Why seven? I don’t know. So, what’s guy to do with seven gondolas? Well, I decided to beat them up a bit by using the oil paint techniques that I described back in November and adding some dents to the car sides.

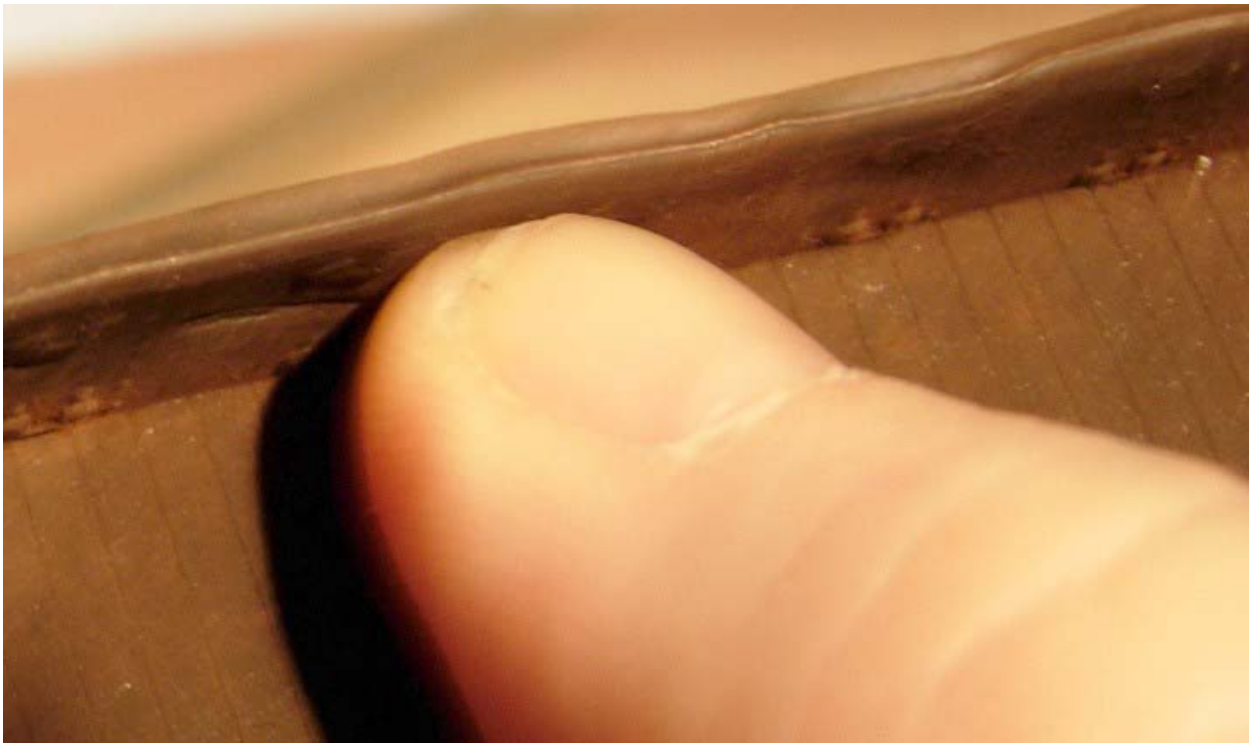


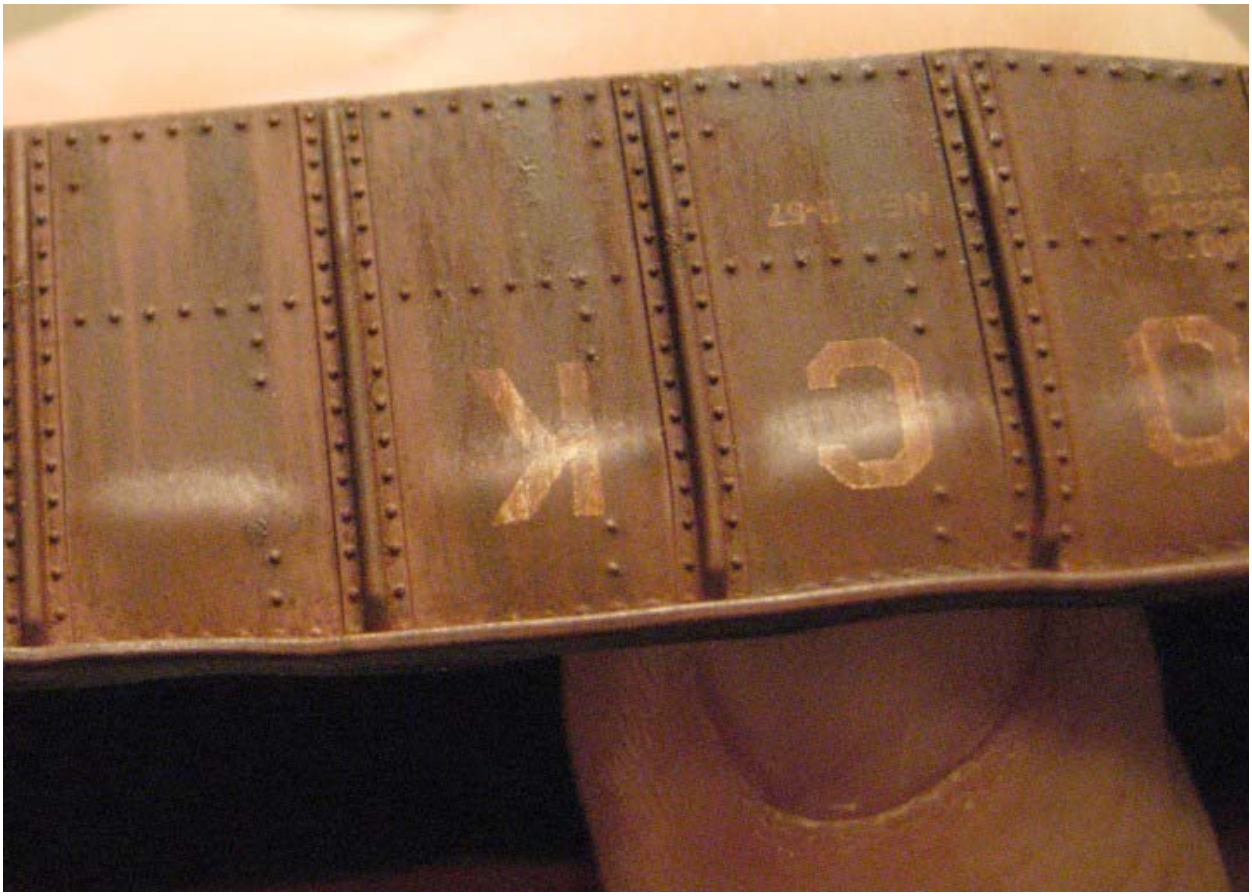
New and Old

My first step in demoralizing these cars was to add the dents. I borrowed a trick, from my teenage days when I spent time building WWII armored models, of using a candle to soften up the plastic. Using a candle allows you great control. Heat can be applied to a relatively small area, and controlled by the distance from the flame. I start by securing my candle to a small ceramic dinner plate. Light the candle and drip several drops of wax onto the plate, then before it sets, push the base of the candle into the wax. It’ll hold pretty darn well.

Typically, I'll hold the model parts about 2"- 3" above the tip of the candle flame for a couple of seconds at a time and test how fast the plastic becomes soft. This is an important thing to test, as different models will have different thicknesses, and types of plastics. Another important thing to consider is which side to heat from. Never hold the finished side of a model over the flame. Heat it from the backside. The candle will distort lettering, melt fine details, and maybe leave some soot marks. Which in itself can be pretty cool.

To make the dents in the gondola car sides, I gradually heated the car sides from the inside, and then pushed outward between the outside bracing, with my thumb and held it in place while the plastic cooled. It will take considerable force to make the dent. I found that making one dented panel per applied heat worked best. To speed the process, I would apply heat, make a dent, and then re-start the process at the opposite end of the car. This would allow the previous spot to cool. I worked my way around the car in this fashion until the car was sufficiently beat up.

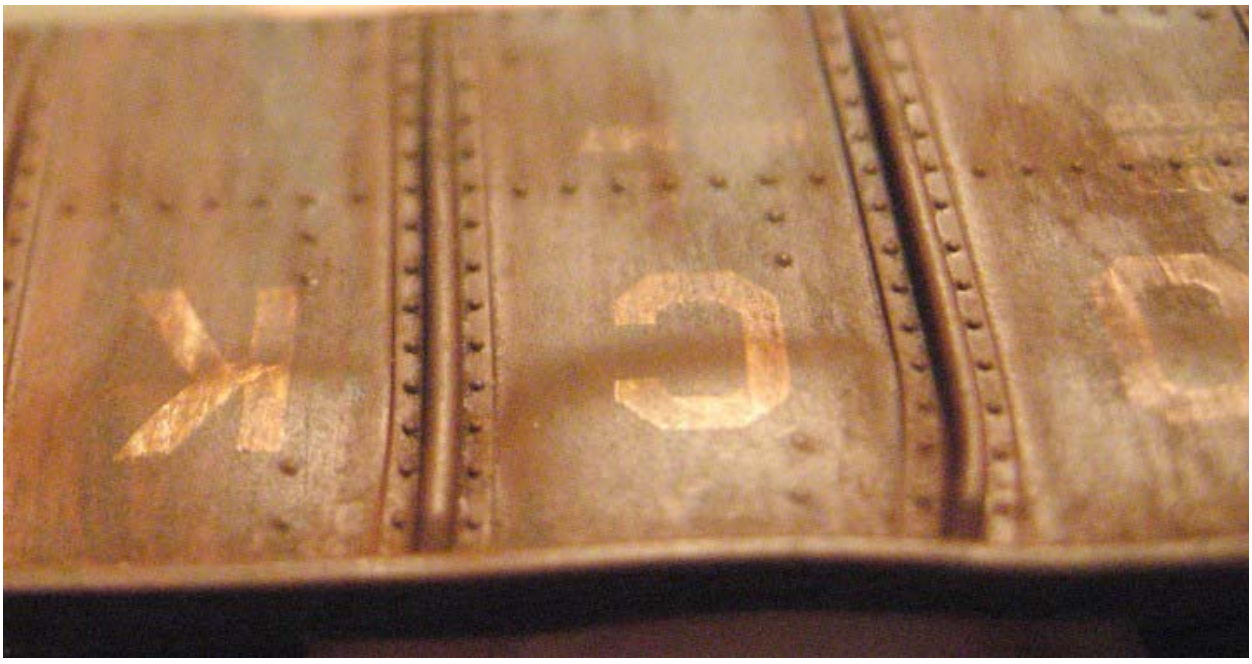




The key to this whole process is figuring out how much heat to apply. As a general guide, if my thumb couldn't take the temperature of the plastic then it was too hot. If you're creating smoke and soot, its way too hot. Remember, the goal is to soften the plastic, not melt it.

After the dents were finished it was time to apply an oil based wash to the cars. At this time I removed the wheel sets for painting. This wash is a two-step process. First I applied a heavy wash of Raw Umber, thinned with pure gum mineral spirits, to the inside of the gondola. After a dry time of approximately 24 hrs I came back and applied a lighter wash to the outside of the car. When this had been allowed to dry I sealed the car with a layer of Dullcote.

The final step in the whole process was to dust the car with a coating of AIM (Adventures In Miniature) powders. I chose to use the "dark rust" color from their selections. There are a couple of lessons that I've learned when using the AIM powders. First, the powders are not good to breathe and after a couple sore throats I've taken to wearing a particle respirator. The other issue is that the powders stain. My computer keyboard, in fact, is now slightly rust colored. To remedy this I starting using a shallow box in which I perform all my powder work. One advantage I've discovered in using the box is the ability to retain all of the powders, and the resulting mixture produces a really neat grimy color.



I hope you'll give these methods a try. They're easier than you might think, and the results are well worth the effort.