

What if the Chicago Great Western Had NE-6 Cabooses?

By Tony J. Bowen

A friend of mine was getting ready to celebrate a birthday and the one thing he wanted were some NE-5 Chicago Great Western cabooses. Now for myself I primarily model the Rock Island Railroad, but always found the Chicago Great Western to be an interesting railroad. After listening to my friend talk about his plans for his railroad and his need for cabooses I thought this might be a fun project.

The first Chicago Great Western Northeast (NE-5) cabooses rolled out of the Pullman-Standard Worcester, Massachusetts's plant in 1946 and were placed right into road service. Most of the NE series cabooses stayed in the region they served, in this case the Northeast part of the United States. However, this was not true for the Chicago Great Western (CGW) Railroad, which order 25 of the NE-5 model cabooses, which were numbered 600 to 624.



April 18, 1946 outside Pullman-Standard's Worcester, Massachusetts's plant. This exterior photo shows the original paint with an open window next to the coal stove. In time the window would be taken out and replaced with a yield plate of steel going over the opening. (Photo from the IRM Archives)

When this new fleet of cabooses arrived to the CGW they were in the plain oxide brown paint scheme with black roofs and the "Corn Belt Route" herald was placed between the two side windows with 12 inches numbers below. The lettering on the herald and the numbers were painted white. At this same time the President of the CGW Railroad, William Deramus was trying to revitalize the railroad and felt that this new fleet of NE-5 cabooses looked too much like the fleet of wooden cabooses that they were replacing.

Once the F-7's were delivered in the fall of 1947 in the bright maroon, red and yellow-gold stripping the NE-5 caboose were soon sent to Kansas City to be repainted. When the cabooses rolled out of the Kansas City paint shop they matched the F units stripping. The cabooses had two red-banded stripes with small deluxe yellow-gold stripes at the top and bottom of them. The handrails also received the deluxe yellow-gold paint to make them more visible for train crews. At the same time the Corn Belt Route herald was being replaced with the circular "Lucky Strike" herald.



Prior to the Corn Belt Route herald was the Maple Leaf herald that was used from 1892 to 1912 (not pictured). The Corn Belt Route herald was used from 1912 to about 1947. The Lucky Strike herald was used from 1947 until the Chicago & Northwestern merger absorbed the CGW in 1968.

Over the next few years the NE-5 cabooses would go through some other modified paint changes. Some of the changes were dropping one of the banded stripes on the caboose. A few years later both stripes on the cabooses were dropped altogether and a larger 36" Lucky Strike herald appeared on the sides of the cabooses. However some of the cabooses still carried only the 24" herald. Most likely this was done by whatever the painting crew may have had on hand at the time. The handrails that were once painted in the deluxe yellow-gold were also modified.



RRPictureArchives.NET Image Contributed by Jim Sands

CGW Caboose #609 painted in the bright red awaits its next assignment in Kansas City. The caboose continues to wear the CGW paint scheme even after the July 1, 1968 merger with the Chicago & Northwestern when this photograph was taken in 1970. (Photo used with permission from rrpicturearchives.net and Jim Sands)

By 1954 the CGW was painting anything and everything in a basic maroon / red at the Oelwein, Iowa shops. The NE-5 cabooses now reaching 8 years old were also sent to Oelwein to receive the basic maroon / red paint scheme. At this same time any of the older wooden cabooses that were in service were either put into branch line service or worked local jobs, many were also retired. In 1955 the CGW would order 10 new bay window cabooses numbered 625 to 634 by the International Car Company. Then in 1963 five more bay window cabooses would be ordered with their road numbers being 635 to 639.

After the merger with the Chicago & Northwestern many of these NE-5 series cabooses were able to survive either being part of Maintenance of Way equipment for the Chicago & Northwestern, now Union Pacific. One of the CGW NE-5 cabooses is also being restored at the Illinois Railway Museum in Union, IL.



In 1999 we see a CGW heritage caboose, which was put into M.O.W. service by the Chicago & Northwestern. The CNW herald has been painted out as the caboose is now under the ownership of the Union Pacific. However, through it all the caboose managed to keep its CGW reporting marks. Note the welded steel plates over the cupola windows and the end windows on either side of the door. (Photo from Dan Sorce collection)



In October 2004 restoration work is well underway on CGW #601 at the Illinois Railway Museum in Union, IL. Progress continues towards restoring this caboose to its original appearance. (Photo from Illinois Railway Museum volunteer Rich Witt)

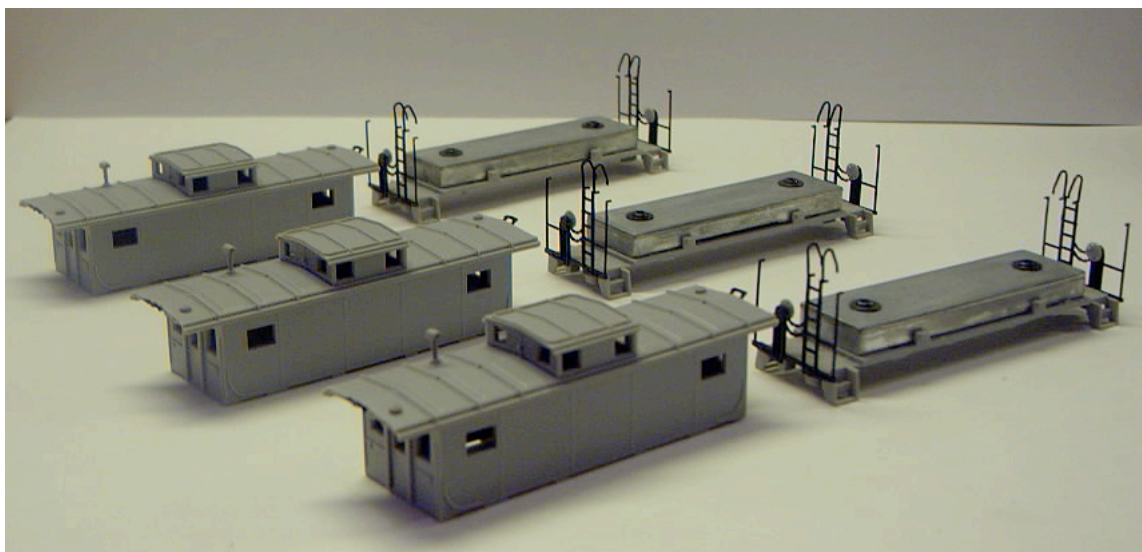
After getting a history lesson on the CGW NE-5 caboose I started the research to see what I could find out there for N scale NE-5 caboose shells. It didn't take too long and I found Father Nature Model Railroad Specialties, who manufacture NE-5 caboose shells for the New Haven Railroad. The New Haven shell was a match to what could be used for a CGW NE-5 caboose. After contacting the company though, I found out that the shells have not been manufactured for some time. Not really wanting to hear that and not having much time to scratch build an NE-5 caboose for my friend's birthday I started to look for anything that might be close.

I checked out the Browser NE style caboose and they would work except for the steps and handrails. I looked at the Kato NE-6 caboose they had done in the CNW paint scheme with the CGW reporting marking. However the Kato NE-6 version did not look proportioned correctly.

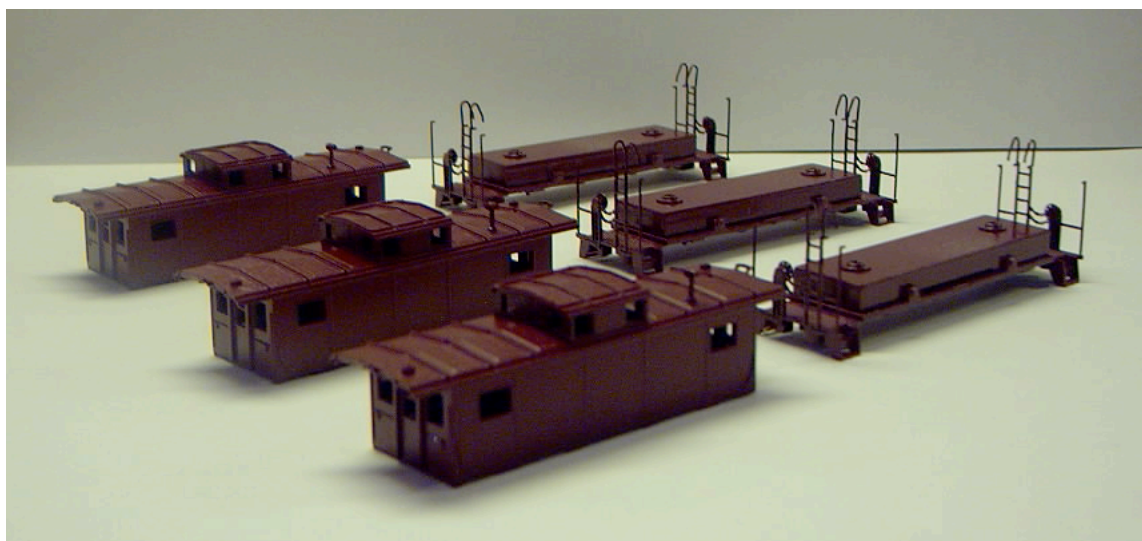


Kato's out of the box version of a NE style caboose painted in the CGW / CNW paint scheme. The caboose itself looks nice with crisp lettering and paint, but the overall length of the caboose is a little short.

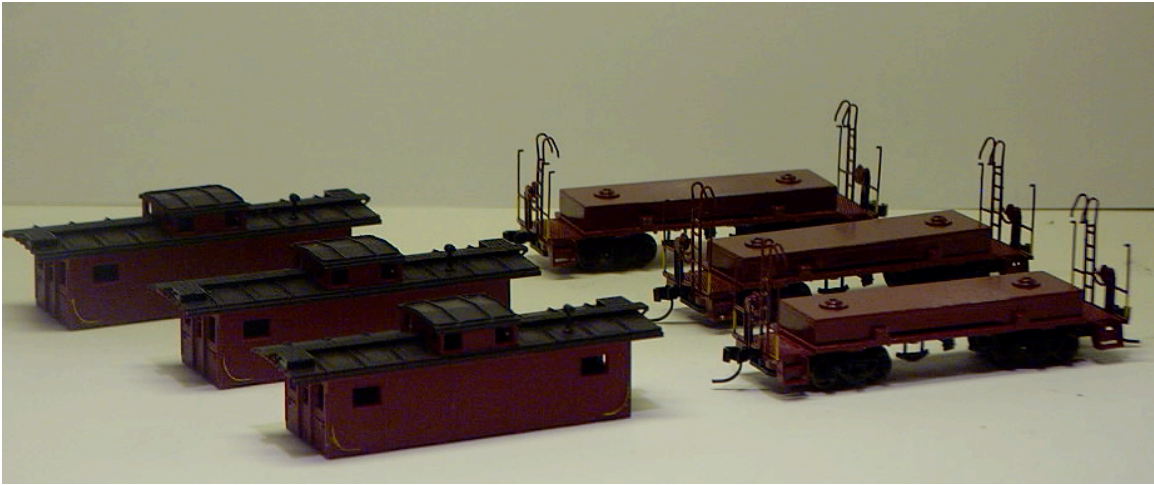
I looked at the Atlas NE-6 caboose, and thought now that may be the closest I can get without scratch building the caboose. The caboose seemed to be proportioned better than the Kato caboose. However, some of the overall features were different on the NE-6 cabooses as compared to the NE-5 cabooses. The NE-5 caboose has a smooth roof whereas the NE-6 had a ribbed style roof. The car sides were also different. The NE-5 had more seams down the sides where the NE-6 had wider side panels, which resulted in fewer seams. In a round about way I found out that if I used a NE-6 caboose for this project it would be close enough, so I pushed ahead with the project.



I ordered three Atlas NE-6 undecorated cabooses, which I disassembled and prepared for cleaning and priming. I usually use two coats of primer as each coat is done pretty light with the airbrush not to cover up any of the details.



A few days after the primer had cured I applied two coats of Poly S caboose red with a few drops of black to give it more of a maroon color tone. I have found from photos that there was not one true color that represented the CGW maroon. In my research I found some photos of the cabooses where they look almost black, some where they look maroon, and other photos where it look like a basic red.



The next task was masking off the caboose so that I could paint the roofs black. While the roofs were drying I painted the deluxe yellow-gold handrails and put the details parts and trucks back on the under frames. When the roofs of the cabooses were dry I put the roof walks back on which I painted separately.



The three cabooses had been treated with a coat of dulcoat before the decals were applied. The cabooses are numbered from left to right are #624, #612, and # 604.



CGW #624 sits temporarily on its under frame. The windows, handrails and ladders will be installed in place once the caboose it treats again with another coat of dulcoat. I had to settle on the 24" CGW Lucky Strike heralds, as the 36" diameter were not readily available in N scale.



Once the final coat of dulcoat dried I assembled the cabooses by putting the windows back into place and made sure the ladders were secured to the caboose.



One of the three completed Chicago Great Western cabooses in tow behind a freight train gets ready to leave the yard making its first trip. I applied just a light weathering with chalks to play down some of the areas that looked new. In time I could do a heavier weathering, but for now I still wanted the caboose to look somewhat new.

Since completing this project I have been on the look out for a true NE-5 caboose shell. However for now my friend has enjoyed the CGW NE-6 caboose he received as a birthday gift and feels it serves the it's purpose quite well.

