



Announced: 1-20-09  
Orders Due: 2-20-09  
ETA: August 2009

# GATC 2600 Airslide



GATC Photo, Frank Peacock Collection

Conceived in the early 1950s, the Airslide® covered hopper design was developed for dry bulk ladings such as flour, starch, sugar and plastics. Prior to the late 1940s, such ladings would have been packaged and shipped in boxcars, even for car load shipments. This added extra labor and time to package, load the containers in the boxcar, unload, and remove the lading from the shipment containers. Beginning in the late 1940s, covered hoppers greatly simplified the process by allowing the bulk material to be loaded in through roof hatches, and dumped out of the hopper bays.

However, dry, powdery commodities such as flour, starch, sugar and plastic granules do not always “flow” easily from a standard hopper bay; they have a tendency to compact and “cake up” in the bay, impeding the unloading process. To solve this problem, the Fuller Company of Catasauqua, PA patented the Airslide® concept. In an Airslide® covered hopper, the bays are formed into two narrow, steep-sided troughs with a layer of an air-permeable fabric material at the bottom. Air is pumped through the material, causing the lading to fluidize and flow easily through the hopper outlets, the air allowing the lading to more easily “slide” out of the car.

Airslide® covered hoppers were built by General American Transportation (GATC), with production commencing in 1953. Originally, there were two configurations - a single-bay, 2,600 cubic foot car, and a two-bay, 3,660 cubic foot car. Both were available with gravity or pneumatic outlets. In later years, as freight car sizes increased, several railroads and private owners had pairs of their single-bay cars joined together with a drawbar, in order to create a larger-capacity car.

The all-new Athearn model is of a single-bay, 2,600 cubic foot car. This initial release is of what is typically referred to as an “early” version Airslide®, the prototype having been built from 1955 to 1965, before major design changes were implemented. Airslide® hoppers proved to be extremely popular cars, selling to numerous railroads throughout the country, as well as private owners. They could be found in the paint schemes of nearly all the major roads, with many seeing additional schemes throughout the years as the result of sales and mergers. They were also leased to many other railroads and private companies by GATC; painted for the lessee, but carrying GACX reporting marks. Operationally, they could be found serving flour mills, sugar refineries, bakeries, and plastic plants, among other industries.