

More Garden Varnish

Piko's Drover Caboose and Baggage Car

Review and Photos by David Otte

Piko America G-scale

D&RGW Wood Drovers Caboose
#38602, MSRP: \$159.99

D&RGW Wood Baggage Car
#38603, MSRP: \$104.99

American Wood Passenger Cars
Interior Light
#36135, MSRP: \$39.99

Drover Caboose - Interior Light
#36136, MSRP: \$39.99

Metal Wheelset
30mm, Plated, 2-pieces
#36164, MSRP: \$19.99

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AS FIRST reviewed in the May 2014 issue of *Model Railroad News*, Piko's introduction of American style wood passenger cars was a welcomed addition to the garden – especially when coupled behind the company's well received 2-6-0 Mogul steam locomo-



tives. Besides the coach and combine described in that article, the Germany based manufacturer has since delivered two more cars to add to the growing consist: a drover caboose and baggage car. Supplementing these new releases, interior LED lighting kits are also being offered for both the coach and combine as well as for the drover car. While the baggage car is pretty straightforward in its design, the drover caboose has some additional features worth showcasing, which, along with the quick installation of a light kit, makes for a noteworthy addition to the G gauge passenger car roster.

American Style Wood Passenger Car Series

I will refer you back to the previous review in *MRRN's* May 2014 issue for a brief history of the wooden-era passenger car. It is however worth repeating that the new G gauge wood cars by Piko are very good representations of how cars were built in the late decades of the 19th century. In particular, the series appears to have been patterned after several of the narrow gauge cars used by Denver & Rio Grande Western (D&RGW) from the 1880s through the late 1960s, as well as currently on



The famous narrow gauge Pagosa Springs branchline combine started out as coach No. 20 built in 1879 by Billmeyer & Small. Rebuilt with a baggage compartment in 1887, it would later receive its famous cupola, roofwalk, rooftop handrail, and end ladders

after beginning service to Pagosa Springs. Typical of Piko's new American wood passenger car series, the so-called drover caboose displays a clerestory roof, bullnose or crescent style ends, open-end platforms, and a simulated wooden sill configuration.



D&RGW No. 125 was built by the railroad back in 1883 as No. 26 for the tidy sum of \$2,220.19. It would be renumbered to 125 only two years later, served on the San Juan and Shavano narrow gauge passenger trains, and was later sold to the National

Railways of Mexico in 1942. Resembling the Rio Grande prototype, the Piko offering features sliding baggage doors, separately applied handholds, endrail and brakewheels, truss rods and queen posts, and rides on appropriate composite style four wheel trucks.

the Durango & Silverton line running between Durango and Silverton, Colorado. Both the baggage car and drover caboose continue the stubby appearance trend of the earlier cars, each measuring 14.25 inches long over the endbeams. As such, the Piko cars scale out (assuming 1:29 scale like the Piko Mogul) to be only 34 feet 5 inches long with 18 feet 9 inches between truck centers - unlike the 40-plus foot long D&RGW narrow gauge cars, yet have a more prototypical width of 10 feet and height above the rails of almost 14 feet. While this combination of dimensions was not totally unheard of in the annals of wood-constructed passenger cars, the proportions of these models are really designed simply to match the size and operating parameters of the manufacturer's standard gauge Mogul steamers. In other words, they are perfect for operation on typical G gauge R-1 600-millimeter (23.25 inches) radius curves.

Both of the new car, made in Germany, also continue to exhibit the same construction of the series with one-piece UV-resistant ABS plastic bodies, separate plastic roof and chassis assemblies, and molded-in tongue-and-groove board construction complete with wood grain. Numerous add-on details include: durable plastic hand holds and end railings, door knobs, sliding baggage doors, vertical staff brake wheels, safety chain, truss rods and queen posts, plastic trucks with hook-and-loop couplers, and clear glaz-

ing in the side windows and clerestory windows. The baggage car simply displays flooring with wood-grained planks and a couple black pot belly stoves to keep lading from freezing inside. The drover caboose, however, features eight comfortable looking benches molded in brown plastic for the passengers and seats above in the cupola for the crew, and a lavatory in the rear complete with frosted window glass, toilet, and sink, and, finally. Two pot belly stoves keep the caboose's occupants warm.

Drover Caboose or Combine

Of the two new cars however, the drover caboose is of special interest on several counts. First up is the prototype on which the Piko rendering is loosely based. Perhaps you are even wondering exactly what a drover caboose is anyway. Well, to start with, a drover is an individual who is involved in droving or the movement of livestock by foot usually over long distances. They are often referred to in the States as cowhands, cowboys, herders, or cattlemen. Railroads became involved in moving livestock to market early on and many roads, especially those out West, owned hundreds of stock cars as well as operated special consists during roundup season. The problem with moving animals by rail is that they need to be fed and watered on

a regular basis. This required drovers to accompany the livestock, so the railroads created special cars that combined the need of a caboose with accommodations for the drovers as well - thus the drover caboose. The cars, which were often rebuilt from old coaches with the

addition of a cupola or bay windows, were usually larger than a standard caboose in order to maintain quarters for the train crew as well as ample seating for the cowboys. In some cases, side doors were incorporated too for LCL (less than carload) freight.

While the Piko model easily represents a drover caboose, it actually resembles another prototype as well that was never used in quite the same capacity. Returning once again to the Rio Grande heritage of the series, this offering appears to be specifically based on D&RGW's narrow gauge combine No. 215, which was known for its use on the Pagosa Springs Branch. This 31 mile long line ran from Pagosa Junction, Colorado (formally known as Gato), on the narrow gauge San Juan Extension north to the town of Pagosa Springs, where the railroad served the small communities of the area and its logging interests. A mixed train ran daily (except Sundays) with combine No. 215 bringing up the tail with passengers, LCL freight, and the mail. In 1928, at the sugges-

Great looking and excellent operation to boot, the new drover and baggage cars only add to Piko's passenger train craze.



This view of the B end of the drover caboose affords us a view of the detailed end platform, non-opening end doors, cupola and rooftop hardware, the operating end of train lanterns, and sliding baggage door. Beautifully finished in the D&RGW's Rio Grande Gold paint with black stripes, Piko's No. 215 "Pagosa Springs" carries the familiar Moffat Tunnel - Royal Gorge herald, which was instituted in 1936 following the inauguration of the opening of the famous Moffat Tunnel route on June 15, 1934.

tion of the branchline's conductor, a cupola was added to the car along with roofwalks, handrail, and ladders, in an effort to provide the train crew with a better view of and access to the consist. After the Pagosa Springs Branch was abandoned in 1934, No. 215 continued in service elsewhere on the narrow gauge lines and eventually had its cupola and the other rooftop hardware removed between 1941 and the end of the decade. Renumbered 212, the combine worked the Silverton Branch for many years and today is operated by the Durango & Silverton tourist line as a concession car.

Piko has done a nice job copying the prototype, albeit 10 scale feet shorter. Along with the properly curved roof cupola, the roofwalk, handrail, and end ladders are all present. While our baggage car and drover caboose samples exhibited the same high quality and eye-catching Grand Gold and black paint job of the previously reviewed cars, baggage cars are also available decorated to match Southern Railway, Pennsylvania, and Santa Fe passenger equipment previously cataloged and the drover cabooses come painted up for Santa Fe, Southern Pacific, and Pennsy.

Let's Throw Some Light on the Subject

Best of all, and the second highlight of this model, the drover caboose includes metal wheelsets, in lieu of the plastic wheels found on the other cars, and comes pre-wired for an interior lighting kit. In fact, Piko has factory outfitted its drover car with working



With a little careful effort, the roof on Piko's cars will snap off yielding access to the interior for the addition of figures or one of the manufacturer's LED light kits. As the drover cabooses come factory equipped with metal wheels and wire leads, its associated lighting PCBs can be installed in the car's roof in under 20 minutes. The tiny LEDs give off a warm, but bright yellowish glow that can be easily seen in a normally lit room.

LED-equipped lanterns on the B end of the car, which correctly display red lenses to the rear and green to the front and sides. The traditional railroad-style lanterns even display separate wire handles just like the real deal.

An interior lighting kit, No. 36136, also accompanied *MRN's* sample, which consisted of three pre-wired printed circuit boards with LED lights and a bag of screws. An easy 20 minute project, after unsnapping the roof from the carbody, the PCBs just needed to be fastened to the appropriate location on the underside of the combine and cupola roof sections using the molded-in bosses and included Phillips-head screws. Once accomplished, the factory-installed wiring simply gets plugged into the outer PCBs with the modeler needing to take note of the separate color-coded terminals for either DC analog or DCC operation. Once completed, the Large-scaler will enjoy a nicely lit interior just requiring the addition of some seated passengers and a conductor in the cupola to bring up the end of a mixed train or a pure passenger consist.

Finally, the interior lighting kit (No. 36135) being offered for the coach and combine will also require the purchase of metal wheelsets (No. 36164 X 2) and a bit more patience to complete. Unlike the drover caboose, installation of the axle wiper electrical pickups and



The installation of the new lighting kit for the previously reviewed Piko coach and combine is a bit more involved than that of the drover caboose. Two sets of metal wheel sets will also need to be purchased in addition to fitting the axle wiper style electrical pickups on the trucks, running the wiring up through the car body, and attaching the PCB to the underside of the roof. However, the results are worth the effort!

associated wiring is left for the modeler to handle, as well as the attachment of the PCB to the inside of the roof.

Piko's Passenger Train Craze

Perhaps the most prolific large scale manufacturer in the industry today, Piko has to be given credit for meeting both the needs of its European customers as well as those of us on this side of the pond – the many offerings reviewed here on the pages of *Model*

Railroad News throughout the past two years are a sure testament to that fact. Whether you are operating a small tabletop G gauge pike in the spare bedroom or a large empire out in the garden, Piko's American-style wood passenger car series will not disappoint. Great looking and excellent operation to boot, the new drover and baggage cars only add to Piko's passenger train craze. Add in the associated interior lighting kits also available and you'll easily enhance the experience. 