

BR CONTAINER TYPE 'B' No. B 55867 B

The "Big Four" railway companies, produced their own containers which could be transhipped onto company carts or motor vehicles for local collection/delivery. Containers became standardised between the companies with the introduction of Railway Clearing House (RCH) standard dimensions, the most common being the "B" type which could be carried on or in a standard railway wagon.

After Nationalisation the Railway Executive saw containers as detachable wagon bodies. As such they were, thereafter, included in the wagon lot scheme for orders. They even created a separate Containers diagram book. The only difference was that containers had their own numbering scheme. The prefix had one, two or three letters and the suffix letter generally related to the builder with 'B' relating to BR Workshops.

British Railways (BR) attempted to develop container use to retain and recover certain business by running dedicated container trains in certain parts of the country and regularly shipping containers to and from Northern Ireland. Container stocks rose from around 20,000 in 1948 to more than 50,000 containers at the end of the 1950s. As recently as 1967, stocks were still more than 50% greater than on 1st January 1948.

In 1958 BR ordered fifty type 'B' containers, made from a light alloy, from Park Royal in 1958. They were constructed under BR Lot Number 3174 using Design Diagram 3/047. This batch was numbered B 55850 to B55899 but had the 'B' suffix despite them being built by Park Royal Vehicles Ltd in Abbey Road, West London. This was during a period when BR were experimenting with different materials. Earlier, BR had ordered 325 'B' containers, to diagram 3/049, which were constructed to a traditional wooden (plywood) design.

The 'B' type container was, effectively, a double-length 'A' type being 16ft long (16ft 5½ins over lower corner bump stops) with a bottom flap below hinged two doors to allow loading and unloading at one end. The doors and flap gave an opening width of 6ft with an operational height of 6ft 3¾ins.

B 55867 B has the usual plywood panelling inside with interior dimensions were 7ft 3¾ins high, along the centre line; length 15ft 10ins and width 6ft 7¾ins. 'B' containers had a capacity of 724 cu ft and could carry up to 5 tons. When empty they weighed around 1 ton 14cwt.

The original livery of B 55867 B would more than likely have been plain BR Crimson Lake and lettered in yellow. It is possible that might have been repainted into BR Railfreight Door-to-Door bauxite livery from the 1960s but a green colour is currently applied.

The original type 'A' containers were 7ft 6ins long and had doors at one end only. They were a general purpose container carrying up to 5 tons. Two could be carried on a 'Conflat A' wagon although it was more common to see just a single 'A' type container sitting in the middle of the wagon.

'AF' containers were small containers designed to carry frozen food. The 'AFP' was a slightly longer variant, with the 'P' indicating that the food would be loaded on pallets. 136 wooden insulated containers were built in 1958 and 1959 with 6 experimental fibreglass

containers added to BR stock in 1961. 'AFP' containers were an obscure size that could only be carried, in pairs, on a 'Conflat B' wagon. 'Conflat A' wagons were limited to one.

A variation of the 'B' was the 'BC' container. They were, essentially, a 'B' type but with the addition of racking to carry up to 76 bicycles. 351 of these were built between 1951 and 1957 to two similar designs. Diagram 3/100 (285 containers) had plywood sides with pressed steel ends, while diagram 3/101 (66 containers) had plywood sides and ends. Cycle manufacturer Raleigh was a famous Nottingham firm and the use of 'BC' containers centred around that city to all parts of the UK.

The most numerous container type of all was the 'BD'. This was basically a 'B' type container but with the addition of side doors. These were found to be most useful, when loading or unloading, as the container could remain on the wagon. The 'BD' became the most numerous container type with almost 10,000 examples being built between 1949 and 1958.

The 'BK' type containers were again similar to the 'B' container, but were designed specifically to carry furniture. They were provided with internal laths to which the loads could be secured. Some 1,435 were built to three very similar designs and were of all-plywood construction.

All containers were fitted with label clips holding labels (approx. 5ins x 4ins) giving information on the origin, destination, consignee and weight of the container's contents. These traffic labels for both loaded and empty containers were, in general, similar to those for freight wagons.

The example on the Swanage Railway is not 'operational' and is awaiting a decision on its future.

A 'B' container diagram can be found on: <http://www.conflat.co.uk/diagrams/3-049.jpg>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

www.conflat.co.uk

AF 65970 B container details on: <https://www.nnrailway.co.uk/portfolio-items/br-l3t-conflat-b502824/>

A 40147 B container details on: <https://watercressline.co.uk/40147b-br-a-container/>

BD 49908 B container details: <https://www.bluebell-railway.co.uk/bluebell/wagon/container/bd49908b.html>

Information compiled by Peter Sykes 25th March 2023