

## **BR 14T CONTAINER FLAT A ADB 502826**

British Railways (BR) 'Conflat A' wagons were developed from a Great Western Railway (GWR) design and became one of the standard BR wagon types for general container traffic. They could carry one type 'B', or two type 'A', containers, and was by far the most common in traffic. They were constructed on a standard four-wheel 10 ft chassis.

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 containers were built in 1958 and 1959 with 6 experimental fibreglass containers added to BR stock in 1961. 'AFP' containers were an obscure size and could only be carried, in pairs, on a 'Conflat B' wagon with 'Conflat A' wagons limited to one.

The 'B' type container was, effectively, a double-length 'A' type. It was 16ft long with doors still only at one end. 325 'B' containers to diagram 3/049 were constructed to a traditional wooden (plywood) design. In 1958, BR ordered a further fifty examples, made from a light alloy, from Park Royal in 1958. This was during a period when BR were experimenting with different materials.

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

The most numerous container was the type 'BD'. This was a 'B' type container 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 built between 1949 and 1958.

The 'BK' 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.

The 'Conflat B' wagon could carry two AFP containers easily even though they were slightly wider than the standard AF containers. The larger 'Conflat L' could carry three smaller containers for bulk powders and was also produced in large numbers - although nowhere near as many as the smaller 'Conflat A'.

One of the major loads for the 'Conflat L' wagons were 'L' containers. These were somewhat strange-looking being intended to convey limestone powder and were designed for top-loading and bottom-discharge. Three 'L' containers could be carried on a single 'Conflat L' wagon. This traffic ceased sometime during the 1980s when it went to road

transport.

Incidentally, 'Conflat' was the telegraphic code within the GWR's coding for a container carrying railway wagon. Unlike normal wagon loads, containers were only listed to carry furniture or goods (unless they were refrigerated containers, which carried frozen products kept cold by blocks of dry ice [carbon dioxide]). These needed to be placed on specialist flatbed wagons which had train braking capability due to the fragile nature of the products carried.

Between 1950 and 1958, more than 20,000 'Conflat A' vehicles were constructed with almost 11,950 examples produced in the last two years alone. BR contracted Pressed Steel to construct 5,550 wagons in one Lot alone [No. 3153] to design diagram 1/069. They were numbered B 502000 to B 507549.

Pressed Steel was founded originally in 1926 and is probably better known for producing body panels for cars. It took over the Beardmore Factory at Linwood, outside Paisley in Scotland around 1947. There it produced various types of railway vehicles during the modernisation period of the 1950's and into the 60's.

All wagons of this type have a 'pocket' in the body side for the storage of securing chains. Oleo pneumatic buffers and vacuum brake equipment were installed from new. The provision of vacuum braking enabled fast running for the growing number of container services. These wagons carried BR's standard 3 ton container, a type which was suited to the railway's road cartage operation.

During many years, BR continued previous railway custom by providing a door-to-door service with road haulage at both ends of the journey and the main haul undertaken by rail. The 3 ton rating derived from the practical limit when BR, and its predecessors still used horse and drays on the road sections of the journey. By persisting with this traditional design of wagon, the BR missed out on the burgeoning market for movement of international seagoing containers which were, in very many locations, too large for the standard British loading gauge.

By not facing up to gauge expansion in the 1960s and 70s, BR failed to capture this large (and fast-growing) traffic which went almost entirely to the road haulage industry. Only in latter years has rail decided to eliminate gauge-restricted areas [raising over-line bridges, etc.] and fight to gain more container business. This is especially true of lines serving both East and South Coast specialist container ports.

The use of 'Conflat A' wagons decreased rapidly with the Modernisation Plan introducing BR's Freightliner network in the early 1960's. Mass condemnations of 'Conflat A' wagons for scrapping, as well as transfers to non revenue earning service, took place en masse.

Similar wagon B 502824 was purchased and moved to the Buckinghamshire Railway Centre, Quainton Road in 2003. Since then it was purchased by the Midland and Great Northern Joint Railway Society and moved, during June 2010, to the North Norfolk Railway (NNR). It was restored to its original condition and is in service at the NNR carrying a "BIRDS EYE" liveried insulated 'AF' frozen foods Container AF65970B as its load.

It has not been possible to ascertain when our wagon (B502826) was taken out of service to become the match wagon for 6½ ton travelling hand crane DS 2008 (description elsewhere). We do know that the hand crane had received B502826 as its travelling companion during or before 1979 as they were both noted coupled together at Exmouth

Junction Carriage & Wagon Depot on 5<sup>th</sup> June that year.

On it's re-allocation to hand crane DS 2008, wagon B502826 was re-numbered as match wagon ADB 502826 at the same time. By May 1991 Crane DS2008 and ADB 502826 were noted as having become 'resident' at St Blazey depot. Thus they had entered Internal User service so that ADB 502826 was re-numbered again becoming IU 061015.

At their meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> July 1997, the Railway Heritage Committee (RHC) 'Designated' both the crane and match wagon. On 31<sup>st</sup> July 1998, however, the RHC decided to dispose of them to the Southern Steam Trust [which has since been taken over by the Swanage Railway Trust (SRT)]. They arrived by road transport on the Swanage Railway during late 1998.

Unfortunately, because the crane has not been used since it's arrival, the SRT Council of Management took the decision, at it's July 2012 meeting, to offer them for sale to other heritage railways but, so far, without success.

Information compiled by Peter Sykes 16<sup>th</sup> October 2021

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