

# GOING IN CIRCLEZ GUIDE No. 6

## Tyco #356 (62') and #371 (40') High-Cube Boxcars

Among the smallest groups of cars offered by Tyco are the 62- and 40-foot High-Cube boxcars. Oddly, they also represent the balance of “real railroad paint scheme” boxcar production. As such, both groups, plus a related transitional group, will be covered in the same post here. 62' cars come first, followed by the 40' cars.

### 356 62' High-Cube Boxcars

The smallest and most easily-collected group of cars in the Tyco line is the 62-foot High-Cube boxcar, introduced in 1972. Tyco would quickly go on to add several more 62-foot cars to its line (including two additional types of boxcars) and even another high-cube car, all of which had more total offerings and catalog appearances. In fact, the 62' High-Cube only made catalog appearances four times – a short run by Tyco standards. Nonetheless, it was quite plentiful (although perhaps not popular) in its day and is easily found in any venue where secondhand model trains are sold. The tooling still survives today, yet is somewhat rarely seen.

Yet, it remains a somewhat curious oddity in the Tyco line; its short catalog lifespan is perhaps testament to this. To wit, only two paint schemes were offered, and both of them were fairly prototypical if not one hundred percent accurate in design. Even so, the tooling managed to undergo no less than four revisions during its run, yet still retains a glaring, significant fault in its accuracy – which possibly explains the short, exclusive run.

### The Prototype Stage

60-foot boxcars themselves were still relatively new in the mid-1960's, as the advances in design, construction methods, and materials required to build them had only recently been achieved. Many novel and competing approaches were refined and virtually no order of boxcars was alike. The term “High Cube” was coined to refer to these new, huge cars which offered a much higher cubic capacity than had ever been available, and is most commonly applied to cars with roofs higher than 12 feet over the rails. Primarily, 60' boxcars were designed for specialty commodities such as auto parts; these designs were rapidly expanded to the 86' goliaths which are prevalent today for such service.

In 1966, owing to advances in airbrake technology and concerns for crew safety, the United States Federal Railway Administration ratified rules 231.27-29, formally outlawing the use of high-mount brake gear (brakewheels) and associated access hardware – namely, roof walks (running boards) and grabs, and full-height side ladders. With the exception of running boards necessary for hatch access on covered hoppers, etc., all new cars built on or after October 1, 1966 were to be constructed in compliance with this ruling. Existing cars for interchange were to be serviced, such that the offending hardware was removed and other proper modifications made by 1974. (Similar, phased-in safety modifications were also prescribed for locomotives in this timeframe as well).

The net effect of this was that tens if not hundreds of thousands of 40- and 50-foot boxcars needed to have roofwalks removed and ladders cut – often the roofwalks were removed first leaving the ladders in place temporarily - but the bulk of 60-foot cars were OK, as most were built after the new FRA rules were proposed, let alone put in place.



Photo by Thomas A. Biery

*This spectacular photo taken during the “rule 231 phase-in era” clearly shows several different boxcars with their running boards removed. The careful observer will note the BN and NP cars in the foreground both still temporarily retain their high-mount brakewheels at this time. It was far easier to remove the running boards - preventing crews from ambling on roofs and thus complying with the intent of the rule – than it was to redo the plumbing and other hardware in order to move the brakewheel low, although it had to be done eventually. Railroads were given several years to complete those modifications to their fleets as shop time allowed.*

And so, more than 6 years after the FRA rule was officially enacted, and two years before it was to be fully retrofitted, Tyco introduced a brand-new model of a typical, modern, 60-foot High-Cube boxcar. They actually were among the first to market with such a car in HO, and while it did not appear to mimic a specific prototype, it followed the “Athearn Philosophy of Design” by summarizing a number of typical features into a nice, aggregate appearance.

The tooling itself is 100% original work to Tyco’s credit, and features generally excellent detail. The ladder riveting, brake wheel housing, and door latch details are exceptionally well done! It featured wide, dual, inset plug doors; modernized, low-cut end ladders; new end-span hand-holds and footboards; and...

...**low**-mount brake gear on a car with **high** side ladders **and** a roofwalk: a colossal blunder! Any railroad that finally shopped a car sufficiently to cut the ladders and relocate the brake gear down low, should have absolutely performed the quicker, easier step of removing the roofwalk. And there weren’t too many 60’ cars that needed it in the first place!

And thus, stumbling right out of the gate, Tyco released a car (just one of several to come) that while arguably nice on its own merits (the rest of the detailing really was immaculate for its time), could and should have easily been so much more! The sad, bitter irony is it would have been far simpler to tool the car **WITHOUT** a roofwalk! I’m not sure what the general reaction to this was in 1972, but it does seem telling that the car (with brand-new, unamortized tooling) had a markedly short run, was never expanded to other roadnames, and was never cloned or copied by another vendor. Despite its huge sides which would have been perfect for all the fanciful promotional schemes that became a fad within a few years, it all but disappeared forever after 1975. Only IHC’s purchase of certain Tyco assets two decades later would resurrect this scarred tooling from obscurity.

It may seem pointless to complain about it now, but the perspective shared here is relevant. Mistakes like these are just but one exhibit and a large reason as to why Tyco bears a pervasive negative reputation in model railroading today (see the 62' Tri-Dome for even more). Had they only paid attention, and taken those last figurative steps, these 35-year old cars would still look perfectly at home weathered into a consist of newly-tooled models, and Tyco might enjoy a better reputation among graduated modelers. Who knows – they might have even weathered the 1980's better and could still be selling trains today.

### Catalog Number Roll-Call



**356-A: Union Pacific**

**(1972-1975)**

The Union Pacific 62' HC really was a breakthrough car for Tyco when it was introduced. Not only was it a somewhat serious attempt to cater to modelers with a faithfully rendered, popular prototype paint scheme on a modern, newly-tooled car, it was also by far the most advanced paintwork Tyco had ever offered on a freight car by that time! Sporting no less than five colors and a full battery of extra warnings and car data, the Union Pacific high cube is still a moderately respectable car today – only the botched roof tooling keeps it from serious consideration.

Tyco did have to cut a few corners in paintwork however, and the Automated Rail Way logo is where they show. Instead of the full Technicolor rainbow lettering the real cars got, Tyco substitutes a simple alternating red-blue pattern. Still, the point gets across, although early versions of this car's tooling did suffer from some defects which will be explained later. Union Pacific's boxcars were rather snazzy in the 1970's, right down to the silver trim. Tyco gets it right on the ends and roof but forgets it on the lower side sills. (It's a pity that instead of smartly-trimmed multicolor cars with huge, colorful logos brandishing corporate and civic pride, all we have today are anonymous, monochromatic slabs with plain data. I'll take a weatherbeaten, faded "map car" over a shiny brown box any day!)

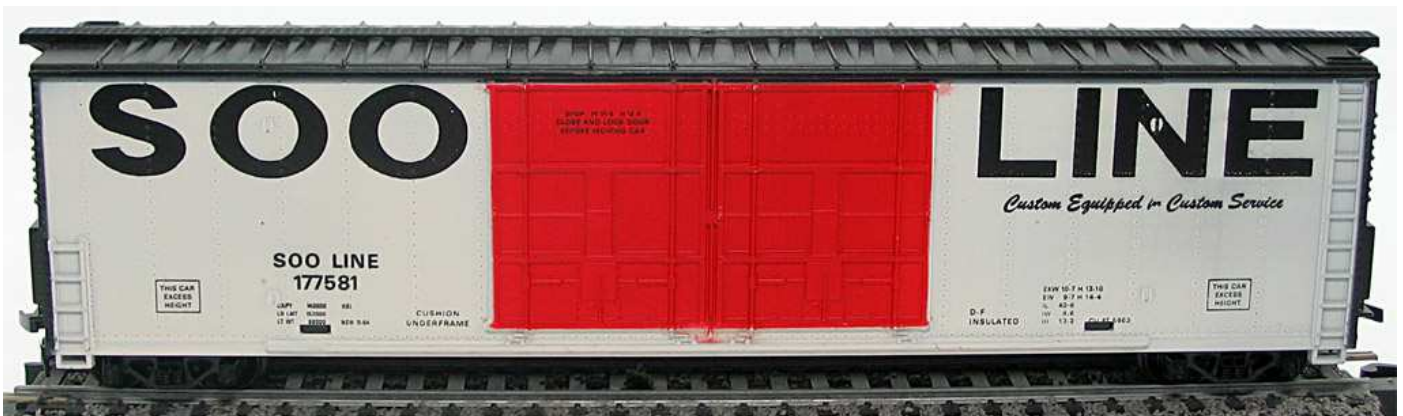
A nice battery of data featuring Excess Height Car warnings and smaller, scale-sized copy data rounds out the decoration. Tyco also used the full "Union Pacific Railroad" shield which was correct for certain batches of these cars from the mid-late 60's. By 1969, the UP had dropped the word "Railroad" from the shield.

The odd thing about this car is the reporting mark location. Those who are familiar with my reviews know that right-side reporting marks are a pet peeve of mine, except were CP Rail and certain other specific one-offs are concerned. Incredibly however, the right-hand marks could be considered correct to a degree on this car! Union Pacific briefly went a little overboard with oversized heralds; when there was no room on the left, they had to cram the marks on the right. The graphics layout as used by UP and by Tyco on 60-footers were very similar, so Tyco will get a grudging pass from me on this car, although their scheme is still not accurate (Where there was room near shield - as on Tyco's scheme - UP would still put the marks on the left).



RRPictureArchives.NET Image Contributed by RJ Sorensen

*A surviving example of a rare bird, representative of the scheme Tyco adapted to their 62'HC. The uncommonly HUGE UP shield left no room for them on the left side, but reporting marks on the right were a very uncommon remedy and a temporary fad at that.*



356-B: Soo Line

(1972-1975)

The second, last, and most common version of the 62' HC is the one decorated for Soo Line. While not as colorful as the UP, it is no less striking thanks to its famously applied selection of high-contrast colors. Soo Line boxcars in the “Colormark” scheme were standouts in trains throughout the country. The white paint even endured the elements surprisingly well (for the first 20 years at least).

The Soo's Colormark jobs were also relatively new to the railroad scene and surely in demand as models, but were an odd choice for this car. While Tyco was obviously eager to capture sales of the vivid, popular boxcar scheme, it would have been better suited to their 50-foot plugdoor: Soo Line did not own any High Cube boxcars. Oops.

The paint job features the same extra data that the UP car enjoys, but the actual Soo Line logo does suffer from a bit of distortion. This is clearly evident as the two “O’s” in “Soo” are not quite as circular as they should be.

**Variation Alert!**

**Tooling Variations**

There are four variations to the 62' High Cube's tooling – an amazing number of modifications in such a short timeframe! One might presume that difficulties were consistently seen with the tooling itself, and that is what contributed to the short lifespan; however the tooling did survive to be reissued by IHC some 30 years later.



Clockwise from top left: v.1 tooling; v.2 tooling; v.3 tooling; v.3 tooling with brighter paint (similar to v.1).  
Note the copy data changes on the v.3 cars!

The first version of tooling has a combination of two key features: Wide, squared stirrups, and door stops on the car sides. The door stops are most evident on the Soo Line examples, as the placement of the “N” covers them, but the paint doesn’t surround them well, leaving a high-contrast “hole” in the graphic. The Union Pacific car also suffers this fate, although perhaps not as perceptibly from far away (up close it is painfully obvious). The stirrups are a little more difficult to identify, until you compare the next revision side-by-side.

Revision 2 trades the original stirrups for new ones with smaller openings and a small, triangular gusset on the inside corner. Presumably this would make the stirrups stronger and less prone to breakage. The paint-fouling door stops are still present for now...

...until they are finally removed on Revision 3 tooling. Version 3 also shortens the roofwalk overhang – a modification that was also made to the older 50’ plugdoor boxcar as well. The roofwalk now ends flush with its angle bracket support. On v.1 and v.2 cars, the roofwalks extended out quite a bit... and if you coupled two such cars together, they would touch until you pulled out the slack!

The fourth revision is the scarcest, as it was done just before these cars were dropped from production altogether. In the mid 1970’s, many of Tyco’s boxcars begin receiving filled-in stirrups, and the 62’ High Cube is no exception. I do not have a Tyco version of this tooling, but an ebay photo confirms it:



*v.4 tooling: filled stirrups*

## Paint Variations

In evaluating the numerous Soo Line examples that have come my way, I noticed something different about some of them, which betrayed a subtle, but oh-so-typically-Tyco blunder!

Once v.3 tooling arrives, the copy data changes too, although the size and layouts are identical.

I have not encountered multiple UP examples to compare, but I would expect the same copy data changes to exist on them as well: **The initial releases of this car had INCORRECT data from a 40-FOOT car! The revised data is correct.**

Overall paint quality on the 62HC's is quite good, with a flat, prototypical finish. However, since their scheme is much more complex, UP cars can suffer from poor logo color alignment and registration. I have also noted a variation in the shades of white on Soo Line cars, although it is subtle and not worth a large amount of attention.

## The Resurrection

When Tyco exited the model/toy train business in 1993, IHC ended up with the majority of assets not already offered by Mantua. While IHC immediately rebranded the TycoKit line, rolling stock and locomotives went into hiding for about five years. In 1998, IHC re-released most of the old Tyco freight cars. The tooling and detailing was certainly outdated but the new paint jobs were often stunning, and well worth the low prices these cars had at their re-introduction. Among the batch of cars dusted off for new action was the 62' High Cube – the first time it had been seen in more than twenty years!



*1998 IHC re-release; Burlington Northern*

I have two examples of the IHC re-releases: one for Burlington Northern, and the other for Milwaukee Road. Both are very near identical to the earlier Tyco versions, save for the removal of the TYCO name from the chassis and

inside body shell. The paint is much improved, with a thinner more uniform appearance, and detail printing is clear and crisp.

The Milwaukee Road car is uncannily prototypical, yet has one particularly "amusing" added little feature:



RRPictureArchives.NET Image Copyright Scott Koehler



1998 IHC re-release; Milwaukee Road



\*Sigh\*... If only that were true, perhaps we would've had more of them. They really aren't *all* bad. Just ever so short of greatness, which I suppose is what makes them Tyco, after all....

**GIC Scarcity Rank™**

With only two cars released in the series, there is hardly much to rank here. I will simply state that the Soo Line seems to be quite more common than the UP; however, both are rather plentiful and are by no means difficult or expensive to obtain.

The tooling variations are a new, exclusive wrinkle though. I haven't made any exhaustive comparisons, but as of now it seems that v.4 (filled stirrups) is the least common in my experience, followed by v.1 (wide, open stirrups). Then you have the two open gusseted stirrups, with or without doorstops – I have not paid attention to which of them may be more common.

**GIC Scarcity Rank™** for 356-Series 62-foot High-Cube Box Car

**Easy Pickings->**

- Soo Line
- Union Pacific
- v.2
- v.3
- v.1
- v.4

<- "Happy Hunting"!

**Catalog-angle Photo Gallery**



## **371-Series 40-Foot High-Cube Boxcars**

### **Prototype Info**

Like its 22-feet longer cousin in the #356-series, the #371 40-Foot High-Cube Boxcar is another small group of cars in the Tyco line. Arriving five years later in 1977, the 40-footer showed up its 62-foot brother by adding one additional prototypical roadname at a time when Tyco was still largely enamored with fantasy billboard cars. But unlike the 62-foot car, the 40-footer did not have any major tooling gaffes, so it managed to hang around for an extra year before moonlighting as a popular operating accessory. While the prototypically-painted cars are slightly scarcer than the 62-foot versions, the tooling survived right through the end of Tyco Trains in 1993.

As a real-life prototype, the 40-foot high-cube is an odd car. It was conceived by Union Pacific in the late 1960's in order to stack large, heavy appliances like refrigerators in one boxcar assigned to captive service. In this fashion, a 40-foot car was thought to be more efficient as it would reach its weight capacity without wasting interior space. A 50+ foot car filled that way would be too heavy, while a "normal cube" car, with its lower roof, would have wasted space since the appliances could not be stacked.

The experiment met modest success, such that a few other (primarily western) railroads added a few handfuls of similar cars to their fleets, but never in very large quantities. The oddball cars quickly caught the attention of modelmakers, as Athearn tooled up two offerings, followed by Bachmann/Lionel (Kader) and AHM with a mutually shared yet different offering. Tyco was last to the party, nearly 10 years after Athearn's first model – and right about the time that the real cars were facing potential obsolescence due to technological and traffic pattern changes. Indeed, the diminutive size that was their *raison d'etre*, became their ultimate undoing as captive stackable appliance traffic waned and they became just another "too short, too useless" 40-foot boxcar.

More info on the other vendors' cars can be found at Tony Cook's HO Scale Resource site, in the May 2007 EXTRA.

Still, the 40-foot High Cube is an interesting car as it represents the zenith of 40-foot boxcar development, and was built at a time when 40-cars had long considered relegated to the impending obsolescence line. Indeed, they were among the last 40-foot boxcars ever built.

Tyco's tooling is very similar to the other smooth-side 40'HC's by other vendors, but does have a few differences. The easiest spotting feature is the trademark of pair rectangular holes in the sill into which the chassis lugs were inserted. Another quick spotting feature is filled stirrup steps (the very first releases of these cars did have open steps but they are fairly uncommon). More subtle differences include the omission of tack boards and door stops on the sides, the width of the side ladders, the tops of the end panels and detailing of the brake chains, among others. Tyco also does not paint the Excess Height warning stripe on the ends, whereas Athearn and Kader do. The cars all ride on Tyco's standard friction-bearing talgo trucks... except for one particular offering. Yet these differences are again subtle, and it is even possible to securely swap the other maker's chassis into the Tyco shell! (To go the other way, you'd first have to remove the mounting lugs from Tyco's chassis.)

### **Catalog Number Roll-Call**



371-A: Union Pacific

(1978-1982)

While at first glance it might appear to be a mere baby brother of the #356A 62-foot High Cube, the Union Pacific forty-footer is its own unique breed.

In the late 1970's, most of Tyco's production received a welcome boost in quality and all of the 40'HC's have nice paint jobs. However, the Union Pacific car features a bizarre, grossly bloated UP Shield logo. One wonders if it was still giving UP traumatic nightmares when they enacted their controversial licensing program 25 years later, citing "poor graphics and misrepresentation" as a reason? The crude logo is even more curious when you consider Tyco had previously used a beautifully-rendered one on the 62'HC.

Megashield aside, the decoration on the right side is also somewhat suspect. Although the "We Can Handle It" slogan was certainly contemporary to the model's release date, when the real cars were built they had the same Automated Railway maps as seen on the 62'HC, and it is unlikely they were repainted.

Tyco was perhaps embarrassed enough by this to use an Athearn model as a stand-in for their own catalog, even going so far as to cut the holes in the side to mount their own chassis! Advertising complaints aside, the rest of the car is nicely done with bright colors that are registered well. Data is appropriately small and very crisp, and the car (like the others in the series) is completed with a nice gloss finish.



371-B: Soo Line

(cat. 1978-1982)

The second car is yet again a smaller, spritual successor to the a previous 62'HC offering. Fortunately, the Soo Line "40" is not victimized by a rogue Tyco artist, and the graphics are fairly authentic. The paint quality is also much better than the earlier 62' car, with the same uniform application and gloss sealer as on the UP.

There is one thing to note about white cars from this era of production, however. It seems that the white paint can "self-weather" and take on a faint brownish tint at the edge a car. I had a Midnight Special caboose with this "feature"... and incredibly, I found three Soo Line 40's at a train show that all had the same problem! It's nothing too

terrible, and one should note it's almost realistic... but it is very odd and indeed makes finding a pure white car an extra challenge.

At first glance, the data may seem to be just a quick, cheap duplication of that used on the Union Pacific version, but... this car was built 3 months earlier (among other differences).



**371-C: Illinois Central Gulf**

**(cat. 1978-1982)**

A striking car, the ICG 40'HC may be the only roadname unique to this series... but ironically, it is hardly unique to Tyco as both Athearn and Lionel did a version of this car!

Tyco's is easily distinguished however. Beyond the tooling giveaways, Athearn's version was for the predecessor Illinois Central, while Lionel's featured a black door. So Tyco split the difference, then amped the size of the ICG ball logo for good measure. (Interestingly, all three models could be considered accurate to a degree: the real cars were delivered to the Illinois Central, then repainted into Illinois Central Gulf... but not all of them received black doors).

Look very carefully at this car though, and you'll discover an identity crisis of sorts. Yes, it would seem the government is none too thrilled with the IC/GMO merger, and has stepped in to take ownership! It's doubtful that the government, via the Interstate Commerce Commission or ICC - would ever have interest in running a railroad effectively (just ask Amtrak or the Rock Island)... but some careful wizardry with an ultra-fine black Sharpie could add this car back to the correct roster.

Even if they did get the reporting marks wrong, we can all be thankful that Tyco finally ditched the pale yellow of their earlier 40' boxcar for a proper IC/G orange. But they finally went cheap and borrowed the data from another HC – the Soo Line one, to be precise.



Lionel-HO ICG 40'HC (manufactured by Kader). Compare spotting features to the Tyco version above.

### Rollin', Rollin', Rollin'.... like a stone



902-A: Baby Ruth

(cat. 1978-1981; longer availability via train sets)

1978 saw the introduction of a new accessory designed to mimic sound. Tyco had already used an electric accessory to create a “steam whistle” and sought to complete the package by adding the trademark chugging sound. To do this they came up with a crude yet ingenious solution – and if the appliance business was beginning to wane, the 40'HC was now the perfect size for this new lading.

Using a large-diameter “rock”-filled cylinder that fit into the car, Tyco cut a hole in the floor and added axle bolsters to the inside chassis, allowing the cylinder (with a rubberized surface for grip) to roll on the track. A baffle inside the cylinder served to time the tumbling of “rocks” (the contents are actually synthetic beads) and keep them somewhat distributed for balance. And thus the “Chug Chug Sound in” Boxcar was born. Cataloged separately for a mere 4 years, it continued to be included in many *Chattanooga Choo-Choo* train sets and was available well past 1981.

Fanciful as the concept was, Tyco finished the job by dressing it in an equally fanciful scheme. And yet again, they re-used graphics from another freight car. Who needs a load of refrigerators when you can have a decade’s supply of candy bars instead? Answering that, Baby Ruth was the only roadname the chug-chug car wore in until the 1990’s. At first glance the decoration appears identical to the older #355-C 40’ Billboard Reefer graphics, and the empty black band across the top of the car seems to support the theory that they simply passed the larger car tooling through the earlier paint masks and tampo press.

If you compare them side by side however, subtle differences emerge. The orange stripes are actually larger on the high-cube tooling, and the black borders on the top stripe extend the full length of the car, while the bottom's stop short of the ladders. The red band at the top is not as tall, but the one on the bottom now covers the entire sill.



#355-C Baby Ruth reefer; the graphics from this car, with very slight modification, were the basis for the chug-chug car.

But the lettering is virtually identical in size, spacing, and placement – so it's obvious that Tyco reused quite a bit. The chug-chug car does have a vastly better paint job overall, in the same vein of quality as the other 40'HC's. One final nice touch makes the reporting marks slightly different by swapping the last two digits.



902-B: Purina

(cat. 1993; in train set)

In the early 1990's, Baby Ruth's lease on the NADX 5324 ends, and Purina buys into it. And thus, right before ceasing production altogether, Tyco applies their FINAL new paint scheme onto the chug-chug car.

And it IS a unique scheme, although it also has a smaller cousin. #355-E Purina Billboard Reefers may be exceedingly plentiful, but unlike the Baby Ruth graphics, the Purina scheme was extensively modified to fit the 40'HC – there is no empty "top hat" here.

The checker boxes are highly condensed and, unlike the reefers, Tyco extends the pattern fully from end to end across ladders, to the top of the roof, and nearly down to the sill. The "Ralston Pruina Co." herald is also different with taller letters and, unlike many of the reefers, is clean and crisp throughout. The reporting marks are also clean, and reside in a newly-sized "box" within the checkerboard. So while the graphics are not 100% new, they are quite a bit modified when compared with the Baby Ruth graphics used before.

There are other interesting traits to this car. It was only available in the last *Chattanooga* sets of the 1990's - not separately. The blue roof and ends are actually a vivid, molded color and not painted. And most interesting of all:

the trucks are the modern roller-bearing type, as introduced by Pemco and later seen on Yugoslavia-made items (see the modernized 50' plug door for more).

Yet the final irony is still the biggest – the seeds of Tyco's exit from the model train business had been planted years earlier, so it's curious that they would bother to change the paint on one train set car, for one year, at all!

## Variation Alert!

### Tooling Variations

There are two variations of the 40' High cube body tooling, and two variations of its chassis – but they are not mixed.

The body variation is very simple: open vs. filled stirrups. The only cars to get this were the first release. It is possible that the Baby Ruth chugger exists with these, but none has been found. The mold had long been converted to filled stirrups by the time the Purina chugger was released.

The chassis variation simply makes the car a regular #371 40' High Cube (with prototypical paint schemes), or a #902 Chug-Chug car. The chug-chug chassis features a large floor cutout and two gusseted axle bolsters for the rock chamber to ride on.

Like the #957 Electronic Sound of Steam in the 50' plugdoor tooling, it is very easy to swap the chug-chug chassis into any 40' High Cube. It could even be placed into an Athearn- or Kader-tooled car, provided the Tyco mounting lugs are removed first.

### Paint Variations

I have not observed any significant paint variations on these cars. The only major issue is with white paint on the Soo Line examples, as noted above.

I haven't searched for these as extensively as other cars, so I do posit the theory that the copy data on the three railroad cars might have changed (UP vs. SOO & ICC).

## GIC Scarcity Rank™

With the possible exception of the Purina chugger, these cars are all fairly plentiful and easy to obtain. The ICG does seem to be the more elusive of the three railroad cars but again is not too hard to find. Because it was only available in train sets at the end of Tyco's production, the Purina chugger of course is the scarcest of all but does turn up with some regularity.

There ARE some notable examples however, and those are the **versions with open stirrups**. The tooling was changed to filled almost immediately, so they are indeed scarce and not seen frequently.

**GIC Scarcity Rank™** for 356-Series 62-foot High-Cube Box Car

### Easy Pickings->

- Union Pacific \*
- Soo Line \*
- Baby Ruth (chugger)
- Illinois Central Gulf \*
- Purina
- \* any open-step car

<- **"Happy Hunting"!**

Catalog-angle Photo Gallery





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