

# Bad Car Orders

## How to ensure smooth operating rolling stock

by Keith Stillman - Superintendent of the Easton And Potomac

The engineer of No. 120. the Southern interchange run from White Hall to Broadway, was pulling out the slack in preparation for departing White Hall when the train parted. After walking the train the crew found a coupler that would not stay closed. Closer inspection revealed it had a missing spring. Reaching for a bad car order slip, the conductor wrote up the problem and placed the bad car order slip in the associated car card (in front of any existing waybills) and then notified the White Hall yard crew to remove the car from the consist. This car would not be leaving White Hall with No. 120 today.

One of the most important secrets - actually it is not that much of a secret - to a good operating layout is good rolling stock. Key elements to good rolling stock are couplers, trucks and weight. Couplers should be of consistent heights, move freely side to side, always center properly and consistently mate with all other brands of couplers in use on the layout. The wheels should be metal (besides sounding better than plastic, they keep the track cleaner) and in proper gauge. Trucks should be free rolling, swivel freely side to side and not have too much play. Car weights should be as close to NMRA standards as possible (good luck with those flats and hoppers). And every piece of rolling stock that finds its way to the layout should go through a standard inspection and adjustment process to ensure all of these criteria are met.

But things happen. Rolling stock that was perfectly fine one day can be a problem the next. One area of frequent issue is couplers. Even if you ensure all couplers are in spec before being placed on the layout, frequent uncoupling with uncoupler sticks can cause them to sag, loose coupler springs or come off completely. Therefore we need a way to

identify out-of-spec rolling stock (bad order cars) and get them fixed.

Bad order cars are just that, cars that have a problem or problems that need attention. And just like the real railroads, you should identify these cars and take them out of service until they are fixed.

The way I do this is to provide bad car order slips around the layout, stored in all of the car card boxes and easily assessable when needed. The information provided on the slip includes the date the problem was detected, the initials of the operator and a brief description of the problem.

Once a bad piece of rolling stock has been identified it must be handled. As the bad car order slip indicates it should be placed on the nearest siding for repair. Unless absolutely forced, do not remove the car by hand! Having a bad order car adds variety to the operation session. The operator will need to determine how to deal with the problem piece of rolling stock and get it out of the way as quickly as possible without using their hands, if possible.

After the session is over you should go around the layout and look for bad order cars. Remove these to the workshop and fix the problems identified. After the bad car order has been addressed you replace the car on the layout in its same location and remove the bad car order slip from the associated car card so the car can continue on its way to its destination.

You don't need to fix the bad piece of rolling stock before the next session. Just make sure the bad car order slip remains with the car card. This will alert the operators to the status of this piece of rolling stock so it can be handled appropriately. The car should not be moved during the next session unless absolutely necessary and once again never by hand. If a bad order car

happens to find itself in the way, the operators will need to figure out how to handle the situation thus providing more operational variety.

I have found this process to be very helpful with identifying bad rolling stock and getting it fixed in a timely manner. It is easy to implement, provides operational variety and mimics real world procedures. All you need to do is print up enough bad car order slips to place several in each car card box and instruct your operators on the procedure for handling problem rolling stock. Give it a try. That is after you have brought all of your rolling stock up to standards!

Bad Car Order	
drop at nearest siding	
Date: _____	Initials: _____
Description of problem: _____	
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

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