

ORIENT EXPRESS REPRODUCTIONS

A Short History of the South Australian OBF 4-wheel open wagon

The S.A.R. Of & OBF wagon group was one of the most common goods wagons in the 1960's and '70's along with the 4 axle version, the OB. What is so surprising is that this wagon group was built relatively late, and was built (and then rebuilt) after the 4 axle version.

When W.A. Webb introduced modern 4 axle goods wagons in the 1920's in large numbers, modernising the South Australian Railways well ahead of similar moves interstate, one would have thought it was the foreseeable end of the traditional 4-wheeler. But over time it was found that there were many customers and tasks requiring less than a full 40 odd ton load and further 2 axle wagons were ordered, probably not least to replace the ageing Y class wagons.

The Original OF – 1948-1950's

In November 1947 a prototype Of (#1) was introduced and from late 1948 to 1951 a total of 500 wagons, numbered 2 – 501 were built. All were fitted with traditional friction bearings, pressed metal doors and the all grey colour scheme. These wagons in their original version were relatively short lived, since they all became rebuilt with sealed doors over time.

From OF to OBF – 1960-1967

Already from late 1960 a rebuilding program started. Initially 300 units were converted, primarily sealing the doors (indicated by painting the doors red) to enable transportation of bulk grain and fertilisers. When the Of were upgraded to become an OBF they did not keep their original running numbers but rather received consecutive numbers starting from #1 again. Wagons sent to the workshop for the upgrade seem to have been picked at random with no apparent pattern visible. This program concluded in 1967.

OBF Version 2 – 1964

Interestingly, already while this upgrading program was still on its way an additional lot of brand new OBF's were built, numbered 500 – 599 in 1964, over just five months! These wagons had modern roller bearings, prefabricated doors, different brake gear, strengthened sides and ends, but the same overall dimensions.

OBF Version 3 – 1968-1971

From 1968 to 1971, the remaining original Of wagons were converted as #301 – 495. These kept their pressed metal doors, but received the proven roller bearings, as such being a hybrid of the two previous versions.

1970's – 90's

Finally during 1971 to 73 (#'s 600 – 799) and as late as 1976 to 1977!! (#'s 800 – 899) a further 300 new OBF wagons were constructed featuring the roller bearing and design of the 1964 version. These modern roller bearing 4-wheelers were the ones most often seen up-road. Particularly in Victoria they were very popular, as I have been told by a couple of locomotive drivers of the period, who much preferred the OBF to the home grown GY wagons which served the same purpose.

When SAR was replaced by ANR in 1978 some wagons were downgraded back to Of due to poorly sealed doors. Those downgraded were repainted in the all red colour scheme, the others remained grey & red and simply received an ANR logo. Then in the AN days only wagons with roller bearings were given the new green and yellow livery.

While most of these wagons were condemned in 1986/87, some of the later batches survived into the late 1990's!

A few words about the model:

Only two of the three Of/OBf versions are available:

1. The original body shape with pressed metal doors and friction bearings as Of and OBf (as converted from the original Of).
2. The version of the OBf with prefabricated doors and modern roller bearings which was built new from 1964.

The third hybrid version, which was rebuilt from original Of wagons with substantially altered frame to accommodate the roller bearing is not available. This would have required a third mould, increasing the cost considerably.

Optional weight

All models come with optional weights included in the packaging. After releasing the OB wagon we had some comments which indicated that a higher weight would be desirable. Though we never had any issues on our test layout, we asked to incorporate an increased weight in the 4-wheelers. Since in open wagons this would raise the internal floor of the wagons, it has been decided to offer optional inserts painted in the same colour as the respective model.

Add on detail

To avoid damage during transport, there are parts which have to be fitted.

The goose neck arm is clipped in easily on both end walls from above, allowing it to pivot over approximately 90 degrees like the prototype.

The air hoses need to be fitted slightly differently on each of the two versions:

1. On models with pressed metal doors and friction bearings the air hose is inserted into the small square hole on the end wall just to the right of the coupler.
2. On models with prefabricated doors and roller bearings the air hose is inserted into the small square hole on the underframe next to the coupler box.

As the air hose is painted it may be necessary to remove the paint from the tab to allow for easy insertion.

All couplers provided are original Kadee #5 couplers.

We hope you enjoy this model, contributing to realistic South Australian broad gauge operation. Mixed with any number of OB wagons and a brake van hauled by steam or diesel the classic grain or fertiliser trains in South Australia can be modelled!

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