

“Size matters?”



JMHX 72713 at Houston, TX in April, 1988, Eric A. Neubauer photo



Due to its low density, carbon black creates special difficulties for freight car designers. The typical solution has been to continue construction of 77-ton cars long after 100-ton cars were the norm for all other types.

Thrall Car was arguably at its creative zenith in the late 1960s when they introduced the all-door box car and the center beam flat car. In 1967, they transformed carbon black car design by installing Granuflators at the ends of their cars thus eliminating the slope sheets and increasing cubic capacity by over 20%. This change left them as the undisputed leader in carbon black car design and production.

In 1969, they produced forty-one 89-ton carbon black cars for J. M. Huber. Since none have been built since then, these huge cars are apparently still ahead of their time. There's no reason to give up hope, though. Thrall pioneered an 83 foot center beam car in 1969. The next substantial order for an 80+ foot center beam car didn't come for 30 years. More may be built after the current economic recession ends.

The only time I saw any of these cars was during two visits to Houston, TX in 1988 and 1989. The weather was dreary, and the ground was muddy. However, I did manage to get a few photos. The former Southern Pacific yard in Houston was a good place to see carbon black cars.

JMHX 72701-72741 were still in service when Huber disposed of their carbon black car fleet in 1996. They became ECQX 72701-72741 owned by Engineered Carbons and later Degussa. All were still listed as of January 2009.

Eric A. Neubauer
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Use this hyperlink for
information on Eric's book:
Carbon Black Cars

