

Finding and Understanding Serial Numbers

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Recording serial numbers has two main uses. They can help in compiling builders' lists and they can often determine the origin of a relettered car. Most serial numbers take one of two forms. Type 1 is a simple numbering system where the next car produced generally gets the next higher number. Type 2 is a lot based system where the lot number is often shown followed by a number that starts with one within each lot.

In many cases car numbers consecutively correspond to serial numbers, but in other cases the numbers skip around. Here is a list of known serial number systems:

ACF: Tank cars use type 2 (e.g. 71-15607 #3) found on top of striker or tank end at "B" end. Center Flow cars use type 1 (e.g. 4967) stamped on the side sill in various places between the left front and right rear corners and the nearest truck center. Center Flow cars built at Milton may also have type 2 serial numbers like tank cars.

AMF-Beaird (NACC): Both type 1 (non-consecutive) and type 2 (consecutive) are found on the back left bolster (e.g. H-13901 #2 142939).

Bethlehem Steel: A single number is usually found near the lower right rear (or left front?) of the car. May be type 1 (68' TTX flats) or type 2 (most other orders).

General American: Stamped numbers on the bolster ends near the front right (or back left?) corner of tank cars (e.g. BO10791 SO11). The most significant part is "10791" which is the B.O. or order number.

Procor: Similar to Union Tank, may be on bolster end for covered hopper cars.

Pullman-Standard: The Bessemer plant stamped type 2 serial numbers in the side sill near the "A" end on both sides of the car (e.g. 50 34). The Butler plant stamped type 2 serial numbers on both strikers (e.g. 34). Bessemer included the last two (rarely all four) digits of the lot number. Butler did not include any part of the lot number.

Richmond Tank (and GRI): Type 2 serial numbers appear on the "B" end striker (e.g. 2734-TS 10-1) of all cars.

Trinity Industries: Both type 1 and type 2 are found on the back right (rarely left) bolster for tank cars and on the side sill (rarely center sill) near the left back corner for other types of cars (e.g. 212-3 435987). This seems to be a continuation of the AMF-Beaird system. The type 1 serial numbers aren't applied anymore.

Thrall: A single number is found on the striker top or face. May be type 1 (covered hopper cars) or type 2 (other cars).

Union Tank: Type 2 serial numbers appear on the "B" end striker (e.g. 6252 20).

Wabash National: Roadrailers, etc. carry plates with VIN numbers usually somewhere around the front of the trailer.

Contact Information

You can access Eric's Railroad Car History website from:

<http://www.railroadcarhistory.com>
