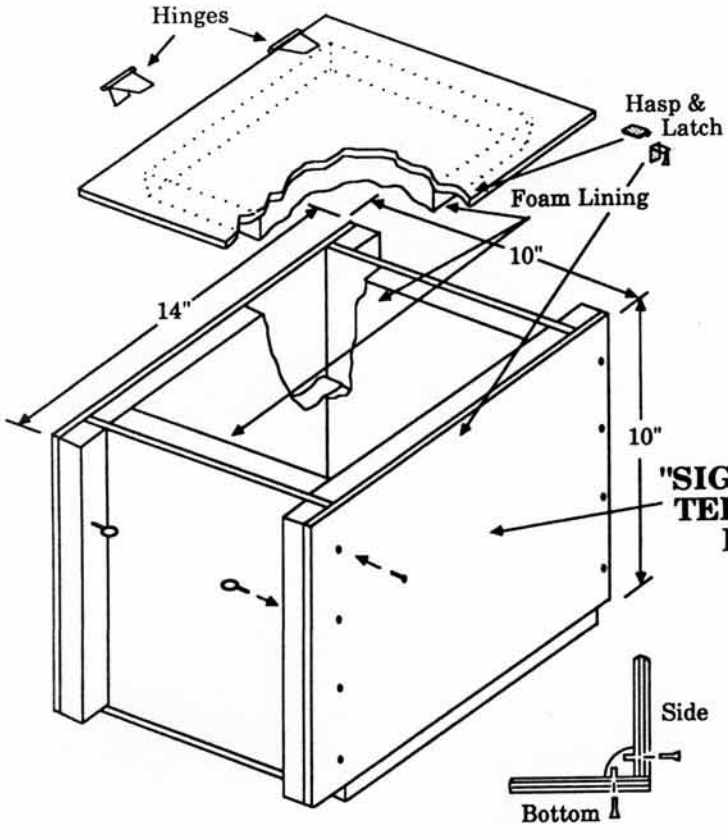
BUILD A COOLER FOR YOUR MOTOR CAR

By Dick Ray
Western Maryland M-9, No. 67

When I first rebuilt and restored my prized Fairmont M-9, I wanted everything on the car to be as close as possible to the original configuration of a typical Western Maryland Railway inspection car. On long summer trips where we had to carry food and soft drinks, a modern brightly-colored plastic cooler seemed out of place in the tool tray of a 1951 rail car.

I came up with the idea of building my own cooler, fashioned after a typical railroad "add on" box for signal and telephone cable repair tools and parts. I decided to build the box of wood, with dimensions sized to fit in the left front tool tray floorboard. The size was also chosen to hold 12 standard soft drink cans, plus sandwiches and other goodies.

The sketch shows how the box was constructed. All of the panels were made from a good grade of quarter inch plywood. I cut both sides to be exactly the same size. The ends are identical also. I sanded all the edges and filled the defects. All surfaces then received three coats of primer/sealer, with sanding in between coats on the outside surfaces. Two 3/4-inch-square strips were attached with white glue and flathead screws to the outside of the ends.



The bottom edges of the sides and ends got a strip of quarter-round attached to the inside, flush with the bottom to facilitate attachment of the bottom to the sides. The ends of the quarter round were mitered to fit together in the corners. More white glue and flat head screws were used for these strips also.

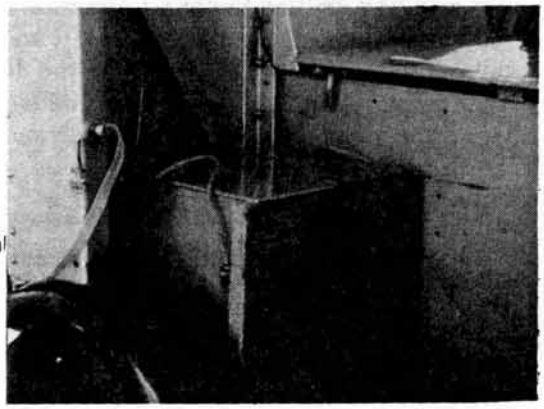
Next I assembled the sides to the ends (again, with white glue and screws) and "squared up" the box as close as possible. I cut out the bottom and the top from the same plywood, and using the box as a pattern. Some of the extra plywood had been sanded and sealed ahead of time for this purpose. The bottom was then attached to the quarter round and covers the entire bottom, as shown in the sketch.

The top was attached with strap hinges, using machine screws. The top is held shut with a chest-type latch, attached with machine screws. After three coats of yellow paint on all outside surfaces the box was ready for insulation. I used three-quarter inch rigid foam, glued into place with clear silastic. The pieces were cut with an X-Acto knife to fit snugly. The lid has insulation also, cut and tapered slightly, to fit inside the other insulation. Rope handles through screw eyes in the end blocks provide a way to carry the cooler.

The final detail was stenciling *"Signal and Telephone Dept."* on the front of the box, since my car served in that capacity on the Western Maryland Railway.

The cooler works well, even though my particular design won't allow ice to be put into it (the ice would melt through the seams in the foam). Perhaps some sort of sealant for the foam, or a solid foam box that fits within the wood box could be used, if ice is desired. My cans of soda, however, seem to stay quite cold for all but the hottest days.

This was an easy project that required only simple tools, and the result is a "railroady" looking accessory for your track car.



Dick Ray's homemade cooler is painted Cat yellow, to match the color of his ex Western Maryland M-9. Note how the cooler fits snugly in the front portion of the car's tool tray.

Photo By Dick Ray