



Chicago North Shore & Milwaukee (North Shore Line) Car 228

Car 228 is a “Merchandise Despatch” car built by the Cincinnati Car Company for the Chicago North Shore & Milwaukee Railroad – best known as the North Shore Line – in 1922. The North Shore Line ran frequent high-speed passenger trains between downtown Chicago and downtown Milwaukee from 1916 through early 1963. Railroad historian and photographer William Middleton described the North Shore Line as a “super interurban.” There are still many people today who remember the North Shore Line fondly and remember riding on the line.

Less well-known is that the North Shore Line also operated a thriving cargo business, using powerful electric locomotives to haul carload freight and Merchandise Despatch (yes, the North Shore Line used this spelling!) cars to haul less-than-carload (“LCL”) freight to any station along the line or for transfer to other railroads or steamship lines. The merchandise cars were essentially self-propelled boxcars that carried packages, newspapers, furniture and other items. Small packages could be brought to any North Shore Line station for shipment, and larger items were processed through freight houses, where transfers could be made from trucks.

As the North Shore Line began handling truck trailers in piggyback service, the LCL business decreased and was finally eliminated in 1947. At that time, the merchandise cars, which were already being used as locomotives for the piggyback trains, were given a variety of new assignments. These included service as locomotives for shorter freight trains, cabooses, yard switchers, snowplows, tool cars, and sleet cutters. Car 228 became a sleet cutter, which scrapes ice from the overhead trolley line.

A total of 37 merchandise cars, and five similar refrigerated cars, were built by Cincinnati for the North Shore Line between 1920 and 1926 and were numbered 203-244. The first 12 cars were built with cargo doors at the ends of each side, while the remaining cars, including car 228, featured wide center cargo doors on each side.

When the North Shore Line shut down in 1963, nine merchandise cars were initially saved. Sadly, only five survive today. Car 228 was sold to the Indiana Railway Museum. In connection with that museum’s move from Westport to Greensburg, IN in 1971, the car was sold to The Wisconsin Electric Railway Historical Society (TWERHS), which opened a trolley museum in East Troy the following year. In 1988, possession passed to the East Troy Railroad Museum, which had assumed operations at East Troy a few years earlier.

A restoration effort for car 228 began in 2022 and work was completed in 2024.

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CNS&M 228 at Highwood, Illinois, September 18, 1954 (Don Ross photo).

Vital Statistics:

Length - 50' 0"

Width - 9' 0"

Height - 12' 4"

Weight - 78,000 lbs.

Construction - Steel frame, wood body

Gauge - Standard (4' 8.5")

Roof Type - AR

Ended - Double-Ended

Seats - n/a

#Wheels/Conf. - 8 (1A-A1)

Trucks - Baldwin 78-35AA

Brakes - AMU (M23)

Compressor - DH-25

Motors - WH 557R5 (2)

Control - WH HLF-28A3

Voltage - 600 VDC

Ownership History:

Chicago North Shore & Milwaukee #228 - 1922-1963

Indiana Railway Museum - 1963-1971

The Wisconsin Electric Railway Historical Society - 1971-1988

East Troy Railroad Museum - 1988-present

East Troy Railroad Museum

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