

REPLACEMENT PLASTIC LENSES

There often comes the time when you need to replace the broken or missing lenses in your railroad car. This can be a real problem. However, if you have at least one good one left, it may be possible to have reproductions made of thermo-plastic. The plastic may be either clear or translucent white. You should avoid Lexan because it will yellow with age, whereas Plexiglas (and similar acrylics) will not.

The problem you have to think about is heat, when it comes to plastic. If you could find someone to make glass lenses, then heat is not a problem. Fortunately, today it is possible to find lower wattage bulbs with sufficient lumens, such as micro-mini fluorescents or LEDs so that there is not a lot of heat. You can generally find equivalent lumen LED lights for all standard incandescent lamps, and at about ¼ the wattage or heat output.

The DeQuincy Railroad Museum of DeQuincy, LA, needed 35 lenses for their former ATSF 1947, 44 seat, Pullman-Standard coach, and were able to find a plastic fabricator who would vacuum-form them for the car. See Photo 1. The fabricator even formed them with push-in tabs to engage slots in the fixture so that they were properly held in place, see Photo 2. Also note that the cylindrical shade, as seen in Photo 2, was formed and cut to slide onto the original fixture perfectly.



Photo 1.



Photo 2.

The photos show the elongated reproduction lenses, that even includes the central crease and rounded corners, see Photo 3, just as the originals had. The fabricator made the first test lens, and sent it to the Museum to make sure the dimensions were correct. Then a total of 35 were made to fit in the car, and the Museum is quite pleased with the result, Photo 4. The cost per lens was \$45, but this is based on a relatively large order of 35, and you should expect the per piece price to be larger for smaller amounts.



Photo 3.



Photo 4.

In addition, the car needed six semi-cylindrical covers or shades for the Art-Deco restroom lights, and the fabricator made up appropriate plastic parts for that service as well at \$35 each, and they are likewise shown in the Photos 5, 6, and 7. The fabricator also made three replacement end caps for three restroom lights (original missing caps were aluminum) at \$75 each. The end caps (Photo 8) were then painted to match the remaining aluminum caps. Also made were five flat lenses, Photo 9, for some of the other light fixtures, at \$15 each.



Photo 5.



Photo 6.



Photo 7.



Photo 8.



Photo 9.

A fabricator took some searching to find. The Museum finally came upon Thermo-Mold which is located at 5801 Berry Brook Dr., Houston, TX 77017 (713-944-6336) www.thermo-mold.com , whose President is Barry Johnson (thermo@thermo-mold.com). If you would like to talk to the person with the DeQuincy Railroad Museum who handled the transactions, his name is Leslie McMahan, and his email address is lmcmahan@gt.rr.com

If you should have this fabricator, or any other, make such parts for you, kindly let me know, and I shall try to make your experience known to other car owners.

Paul DeVerter