



Steel cars, soft berths

Pullman delivered its services via myriad car types and accommodations

By Joe Welsh and Robert S. McGonigal



W. B. Cox; Krambles-Peterson Archive

Sturdy, Pullman green *Charles E. Perkins*, an 8-section/1-drawing-room/2-compartment car built by Pullman in 1930 and acquired by ACL in 1948, is characteristic of thousands of heavyweight sleepers. The 12-wheeled stalwart stands at Orlando in March 1952.

Representing the new order of the lightweight era is 6-double-bedroom/5-compartment *Silver Quail*, pictured at Chicago on April 30, 1971. Burlington Route bought the all-room, stainless-steel car from the Budd Co. in 1952 for Pullman service on the *California Zephyr*.



Owen Leander; Krambles-Peterson Archive

Pullman provided its services in an enormous fleet of cars, which, in its heyday, could be found in almost every nook and cranny of the United States as well as selected points in Mexico and Canada. The movements of a car were largely dependent on its type. Some specialty cars like observations rarely, if ever, ventured from the train to which they were assigned, while others, which had floor plans more attuned to serve the shifting demands of Pullman service, could be found almost anywhere.

At perhaps the height of its variety in the late 1930's, Pullman's fleet contained a wide selection of car types. These ran the gamut from older heavyweights to brand-new streamlined lightweights. Included in the mix were a host of recently rebuilt heavyweights with updated floor plans and accommodations better suited to a changing market.

Sleeping cars comprised the overwhelming majority of Pullman's service. In 1930, when its fleet peaked at 9,801 cars, the company owned 8,263 sleepers, nearly half of which were 12-section/

1-drawing-room cars. The basic Pullman accommodation for decades, the section contained two seats facing each other but sold separately. By day, sometimes two perfect strangers could hardly avoid eye contact. In the evening, the same space was converted into a lower berth and an upper berth. The upper-berth passenger, who paid less, rode facing backward during the day and had to dress and undress in a coffin-like space several feet above the floor.

Passenger dissatisfaction with sections (particularly uppers), coupled



Burlington Route

Although its emblem has been air-brushed off the roomette blanket in this CB&Q publicity photo, Pullman's commitment to comfort is evident.

with the sharp drop in first-class ridership during the Depression, forced Pullman to improvise and change. The company's short-term solutions included the single-occupancy section (selling a whole section to one passenger for a fare slightly above that for a lower berth only). But it also focused on more innovative answers like the duplex single room (rooms partially overlapping each other to save floor space, a concept that enjoyed great popularity in the postwar years) and its most successful prewar innovation, the roomette.

The larger rooms for two (compartments) and three (drawing rooms), which had proliferated in the roaring 1920's, survived in large numbers during the depressed 1930's and were retained in new car designs. But as the economy spiraled downward such expensive rooms became harder to sell.

One accommodation that debuted in 1930, the double bedroom, would prove increasingly successful, especially postwar. Originally an outgrowth of the single-bedroom cars introduced in 1927, the double bedroom would prove nearly the ideal accommodation for two passengers. As Pullman rebuilt older cars, it often added double bedrooms to them; as it built new streamlined equipment, double bedrooms were incorporated into configurations such as all-bedroom cars, roomette-and-bedroom cars, and bedroom-lounge cars. The shift from sections to rooms coincided

with a revolution in car-construction technology that saw heavyweight cars replaced by lightweights.

The last new sleeping car type to enter Pullman service, in 1956, was the Slumbercoach (or Siesta Coach, as its designer, the Budd Co., called it). It featured 24 "duplexed" single rooms and 8 double rooms at prices not much more than coach fares. Only 18 were built new, while New York Central rebuilt 10 similar cars from older sleepers.

Not just sleepers

Parlor cars offering first-class, daytime accommodations in either plush, rotating seats in a common area or in private rooms were a small percentage of Pullman's fleet. Parlor-car numbers peaked at 1,186 in 1930, but the parlor's popularity waned during the Depression and by 1947 there were only 231 in Pullman service. The most intensive parlor-car corridors were Boston-New York, New York-Washington, Chicago-St. Louis, and Chicago-Twin Cities. Pullman parlor service lasted until 1956 when the last users, Pennsylvania, New Haven, and Wabash, took their operations in-house.

Pullman began providing dining service on the railroads' top trains in 1868, but by the 1920's the practice had all but vanished in favor of railroad-operated dining cars. Nevertheless, for a time Pullman maintained a small roster of diners to assist railroads afflicted

with heavy seasonal traffic (Atlantic Coast Line, for example, used Pullman or other off-line diners during the Florida winter travel rush). In 1930 the Pullman roster included 18 full diners.

A resurrection of Pullman dining service occurred in the 1930's. When plummeting patronage caused some railroads to conclude that full diners were no longer cost-effective on certain trains, Pullman stepped in to provide a less labor-intensive restaurant service in cars containing a mix of either sections and a restaurant or parlor seats and a restaurant. Between 1932 and '39, Pullman rebuilt approximately 79 cars to provide such service. These supplemented dozens of other cars built new in 1929-30 that provided either restaurant or buffet service in addition to sleeping or parlor facilities.

Prior to the turn of the century, Pullman maintained a robust variety of private car types for charter by individuals or other parties. By the late 1920's, the majority of Pullman's 24 private cars available for lease were configured like railroad office cars with sleeping, dining, and lounge facilities as well as an open platform. The *Ferdinand Magellan*, rebuilt for presidential use in 1942, was of this type. By 1944, the Pullman private car fleet was down to just 2 cars.

On the following pages are presented 9 common types of Pullman accommodations and 11 representative or noteworthy sleeping-car configurations.

Accommodations: From section to drawing room

Shown below are nine of the most common accommodations offered by Pullman in the postwar era. The artwork is from the booklet *Pullman on Dress Parade*, published by the company in 1948. By this time most travelers had come to prefer enclosed rooms, and the heyday of the section was over, although Pullman still had many thousands of them in use on heavy- and lightweight cars. Four classic-era accommodations are not shown. The short-lived single bedroom and

chambrete each had a crosswise bed. The master room was found on a handful of cars on premier trains; bigger than a drawing room, it had two berths, four armchairs, and a full bath with shower. The Slumbercoach double room, developed by Budd in 1956, resembled a roomette with an upper berth.

More on our Web site: View the entire 40-page *Pullman on Dress Parade* booklet at www.ClassicTrainsMag.com

Section

1 person each seat/berth

The section had two facing seats that could be folded down to form a lower berth, and an upper berth that folded down from above. Partitions or walls separated sections from each other; at night, heavy curtains separated them from the aisle. It was the least expensive and by far the most common accommodation for individual travelers in the wood and heavyweight eras. Rooms became more popular, but lightweights with sections were built well into the 1950's.



Roomette

1 person

Pullman introduced the roomette in 1937. It was the successor to the section, becoming the most popular single-person accommodation of the lightweight era. A marvel of efficient use of space, it featured a seat with a berth behind it that folded down from the wall, a wide window, small closet, luggage rack, fold-down sink, and toilet. A wall with a sliding door gave complete privacy from the corridor. Up to 22 roomettes (11 on each side of the aisle) could fit in a car.



Duplex roomette

1 person

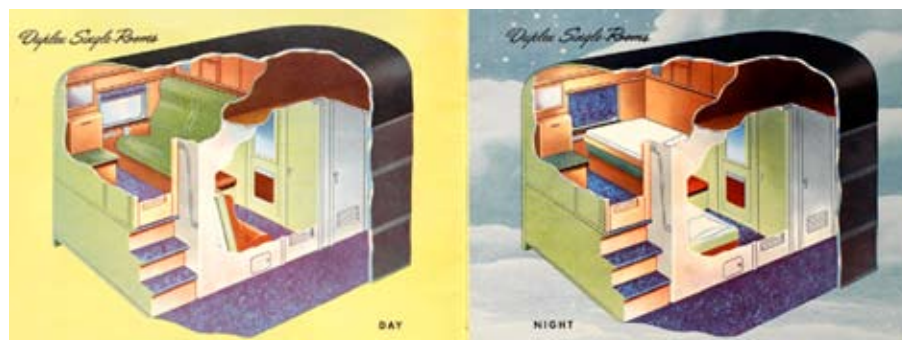
Another feat of lightweight-era engineering, the duplex roomette had all the features of the roomette (albeit somewhat smaller). Rooms were on two levels, with up to 12 on each side of the corridor. Space was saved by the paired-room "duplex" design, in which part of each room was either above or below an adjacent one. In lower-level rooms, the bed slid under an upper room; in the uppers, it folded down from the wall. Slumbercoach single rooms were similar.



Duplex single room

1 person

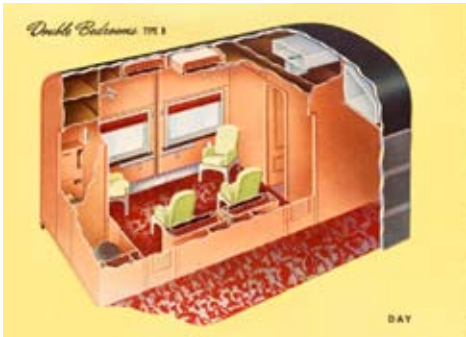
Though based on the same principle of partially overlapping rooms as the duplex roomette, the duplex single was slightly more spacious. The rooms were wider and located on only one side of the corridor, which ran along the side of the car. Equipped similarly to roomettes, duplex singles had sofa-sized seats, the backs of which folded down to make berths that were crosswise to the car. First installed in rebuilt heavyweights, this was primarily a lightweight accommodation.





Double bedroom (type A) 1 or 2 people per room

A circa-1930 Pullman idea, the double bedroom became one of the most popular accommodations, particularly after World War II. A folding wall enabled two adjacent rooms to effectively become one large room (*"en suite,"* as shown here and below), ideal for families or other parties of up to four people. Early types featured a toilet that folded into a cabinet under a sink; although clever, this design afforded users of the facilities no privacy from their roommates.



Double bedroom (type B) 1 or 2 people per room

A major advance over the type A double bedroom (and the similar type C, not shown), the type B featured a small room, or annex, for the sink and toilet. As with the earlier types, the berths were crosswise to the car, and two rooms could be used *en suite* by folding away the wall between them. However, instead of the single sofa provided in types A and C, each type B had two armchairs for daytime use; these could be folded for storage under the lower bed at night.



Double bedroom (type D) 1 or 2 people per room

The type D double bedroom came in two variations: beds lengthwise to the car and crosswise. The lengthwise version had a roomette-like seat and an armchair, while the crosswise version had a sofa. Both contained an annex for a sink and toilet. The folding wall between rooms had a door that enabled passage between the rooms even with the partition closed. Also, this configuration permitted opening or closing the partition while the berths were set up for night use.



Compartment 1 or 2 people

This enclosed accommodation for a party of two dates from late in the wood-car era. A sink and toilet were always standard; early compartments placed them out in the room, but later versions had an annex for them. Initially, the seat/berth arrangement resembled a section; later, a sofa replaced the two facing seats, resulting in the crosswise/lengthwise bed configuration shown here. Larger than double bedrooms, compartments were built long into the lightweight era.



Drawing room 1, 2, or 3 people

Also from the 19th century, the drawing room was for decades the principal alternative for travelers desiring more deluxe accommodations than a section. Features included three berths and enclosed sink and toilet facilities. Through the heavyweight era, the berths were lengthwise: a section-style arrangement by the window, with the third berth along the corridor wall. Lightweight versions had a sofa and the lengthwise/crosswise berth layout shown here.

Car types: A sampling of Pullman sleepers

Pullman cars are generally divided into three groups, by type of construction: wood (1859-1910), steel or heavyweight (1910-1934), and streamlined or lightweight (1934-1968). More substantial and thus safer than their wood predecessors, steel cars were built by the thousands in Pullman plants until the Depression ended the need for new cars. During the 1930's, Pullman invested heavily in improvements to its cars, most notably by installing air-conditioning. However, the company's relatively young fleet became outdated almost overnight when the first streamliners burst on the scene in 1934.

Thanks to new construction methods and materials, cars of the new generation weighed significantly less than their predecessors, leading to the terms "heavyweight" and "lightweight." The older cars rode on six-wheel trucks to distribute their weight and generally had two vestibules (some heavyweights lost one vestibule during rebuilding). Lightweights needed only four-wheel trucks and had just one vestibule. The lightweight era had two phases, before and after World War

II, during which passenger-car production was curtailed.

In the heavyweight era, cars operated by Pullman were almost invariably products of the company's carbuilding arm. Early in the lightweight era, rival manufacturer Budd challenged this arrangement, leading to a 1944 court order that led to Pullman selling its operating arm. As a result, Budd and ACF Industries produced many cars for Pullman service after the war, but Pullman remained the dominant builder.

Another result of the court decision was the transfer of ownership of most of Pullman's fleet to the various railroads, which in turn leased the cars back to Pullman. In the early 1930's, nearly all its cars wore the dark color "Pullman green"; in the lightweight era, the practice of painting cars for the railroads to which they were assigned became widespread.

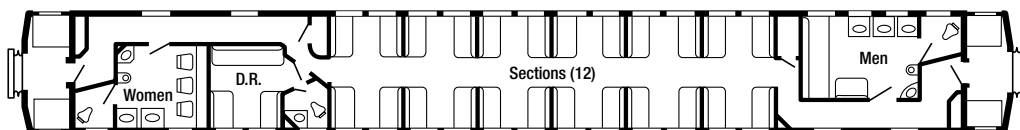
To avoid confusion with equipment owned by the railroads on which its cars operated, Pullman used names, not numbers, to identify its cars. Cars of a given type were often assigned related names.

12 sections, 1 drawing room

Developed in the early 1880's and constructed until 1930, the 12-1 was far and away the most numerous Pullman car type of all time. Some 4,000 were on the books in 1931, comprising 40 percent of the company's fleet at the peak of the heavyweight era. Generous lounge and restroom spaces served section occupants, while those in the drawing room had their own facilities. Similar in layout were the more than 500 all-section "tourist" sleepers, which had 14 or 16 of the budget accommodations but no rooms. Built in 1923, N&W's *Cuttyhunk* is pictured on the ACL at Orlando, Fla., on June 25, 1955.



W. B. Cox; Krambles-Peterson Archive

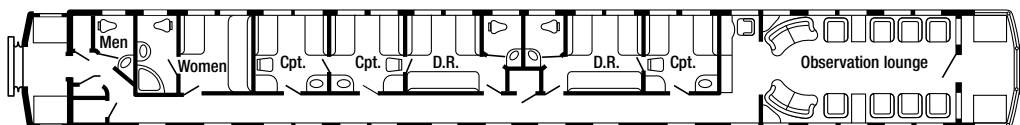


3 compartments, 2 drawing rooms, observation lounge

The open-platformed, brass-railed, heavyweight observation car is an American icon. Dating back to the wood era, the format reached a high point in the "3-2 obs." In addition to a 12-seat lounge, this luxury heavyweight had five private rooms and, as part of the women's restroom, a shower. (Pullman ran several types of open-end cars, including 10-section/observations.) The 3-2-obs cars were assigned to the top limiteds when new in the 1920's, but green Pullman pool car *Golden Beach* is well past its prime on the rear of a Shriners' special at New Orleans on May 31, 1947.

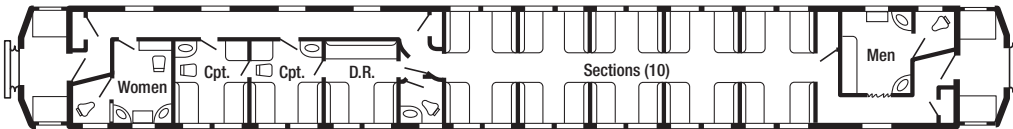


Elliott Kahn





W. B. Cox; Krambles-Peterson Archive

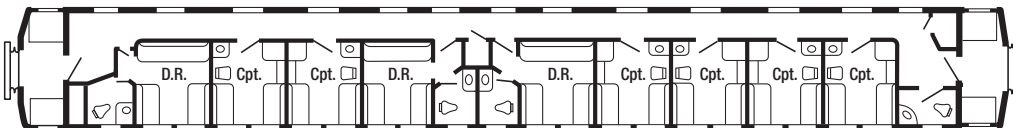


10 sections, 1 drawing room, 2 compartments

Pullman introduced the 10-1-2 during the 1920's in response to the public's growing preference for private rooms. (The section was far from dead, though: In 1937 nearly 5,300 sleepers contained at least a few of them, and even in 1957 Pullman still had 17,665 berths in sections—19 percent of the company's total sleeping capacity.) There were 550 10-1-2 heavyweights, plus 250 8-1-2's, which had 2 fewer sections but more lounge/restroom space. Many 10-1-2 names had prefixes of *Fort* or *Lake*, as on Lehigh Valley's 1924-vintage *Lake Tracy* at Orlando in August 1954.



Owen Leander; Krambles-Peterson Archive

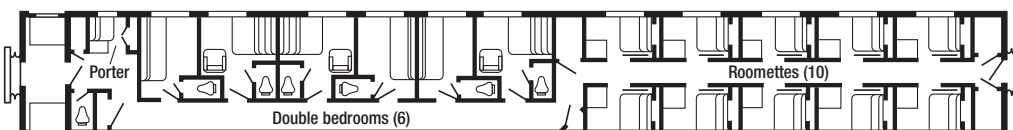


6 compartments, 3 drawing rooms

Compartment/drawing-room cars like the 6-3 (and its close cousin, the 7-2) offered the most elegant accommodations on the finest trains. Many were assigned to Pullman pool service, in which they ran in vacation trains to the South in winter and northern resorts in summer. Pullman built 202 6-3's and named them after famous men of the arts (e.g., *Beethoven*) or in the *Glen* series. In Chicago on March 19, 1967, 41-year-old heavyweight warhorse *Glen Douglas* replaced the two-tone gray that replaced solid green on Pullman's pool cars during the 1940's.



J. David Ingles



10 roomettes, 6 double bedrooms

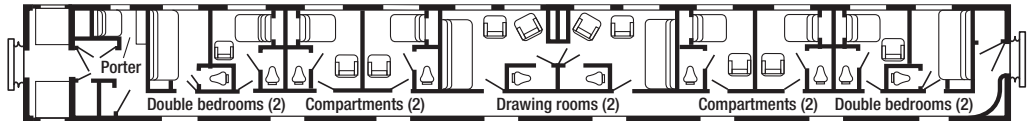
What the 12-1 was to the heavyweight era, the 10-6 (and its predecessor, the 10-5, introduced by Pullman in 1937) was to the lightweight era. The layout had just the right ratio of the two most modern room types. A total of 106 10-5's were built before World War II put car construction on hold. There were 682 10-6's, which, in addition to an extra roomette, featured lavatory annexes in the bedrooms. The plan is for a 1950 ACF-built MP car; variations had the roomettes at the vestibule end, or the bedrooms in the center, as on C&O's *City of Staunton* (P-S, 1950) pictured at Cincinnati on October 10, 1969.

4 double bedrooms, 4 compartments, 2 drawing rooms

The 4-4-2 sleeper (not to be confused with the Atlantic type steam locomotive) was developed by Pullman in 1938 for luxury streamliners. Nearly 175 were built, pre- and postwar. Other popular all-room-without-roomette lightweights were compartment/drawing-room cars and all-double-bedroom cars. Seen from the corridor side, UP's 1942-built *Imperial Hour* rests at Los Angeles in April 1964. UP was among a handful of roads to retain the large PULLMAN lettering after assuming ownership of the cars following the 1944 divestiture order. The plan is that of a 1948 Pennsy car.



Alan M. Miller

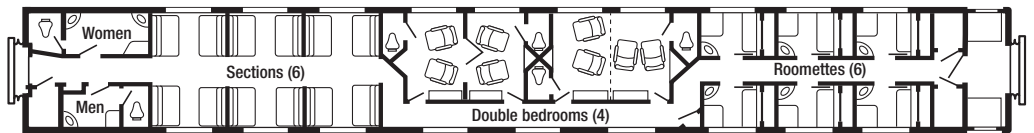


6 sections, 6 roomettes, 4 double bedrooms

Some 213 lightweights were built to the 6-6-4 layout between 1942 and the mid-'50's. Many had *American* in their names, but not Missouri Pacific's *Arkansas River*, seen at Colorado Springs in August '58. The EAGLE on the letterboard refers to MoPac's family of streamliners; the "M.P." sublettering at the ends indicates car ownership. PULLMAN is omitted, a practice followed by a few roads on their Pullman-operated cars. Tiny window pairs are for upper berths in sections. Later examples, like the 1953 C&EI car shown in the plan, had their bedrooms in the center and were called "6-4-6's."



John S. Ingles

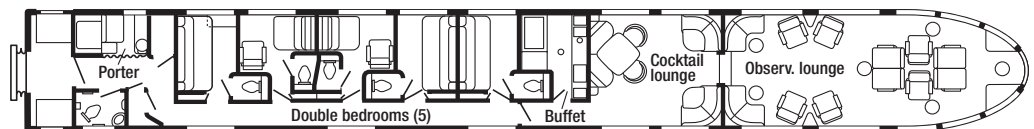


Double-bedroom observation lounge

Many great streamliners, and even some minor ones, proclaimed their identity with a lighted sign on the rear of an observation car. Like their open-end, heavyweight forebears, many lightweight obs cars had sleeping accommodations and were operated by Pullman. Representative of the sleeper-obs genre is L&N's 5-double-bedroom car *Royal Street* (Pullman-Standard, 1949), standing at New Orleans on March 24, 1963, on the rear of—according to the tail sign—the *Gulf Wind*. The graceful "boat-tail" end was a signature P-S element; some roads ordered "blunt-end" versions more suited for mid-train operation.

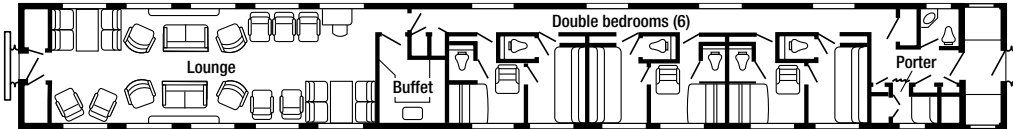


George Krambles; Krambles-Peterson Archive





John S. Ingles

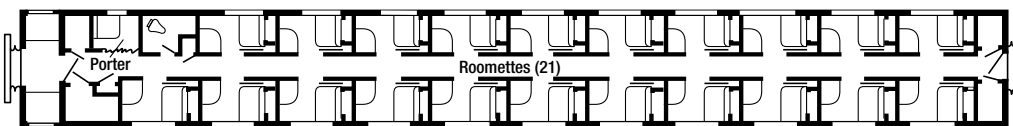


Double-bedroom lounge

Like observation cars, many mid-train lounge cars also contained Pullman sleeping space. Rooms, not sections, were the norm in the lightweight era, as is the case with RF&P's 6-double-bedroom/lounge *Colonial Beach*, pictured basking in the Florida sun at St. Petersburg in March 1971. ACF built the lightweight, stainless-steel-sheathed car in 1949. Beverage and light food service was provided by an attendant working out of the buffet. Sleeper/lounge cars were often found in the front half of long trains that had additional lounge space in an observation or other car. The plan shows a 1948 Seaboard car.



Alan M. Miller

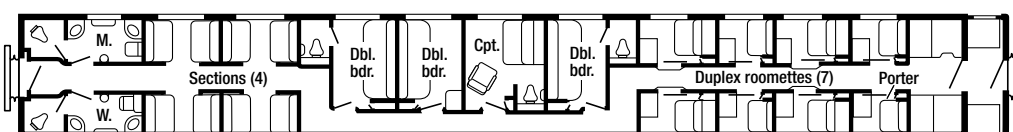


All-roomette

Lightweight car *Roomette I* introduced one of Pullman's most popular accommodations. It contained 18 of its namesake single-person rooms and was the first of 218 all-roomette cars built by P-S, Budd, and ACF between 1937 and about 1950. Capacities varied from 18 to 22 roomettes. SP 9305 (the road's lightweight cars were not named), in the *Lark* at Los Angeles on September 11, 1964, is a 1950 P-S car with 22 roomettes, while the floor plan shows a PRR car with 21. In the 1950's, the popularity of the double bedroom and the loss of business travelers led to the conversion of many roomette cars to other layouts, including coaches.



John S. Ingles



7 duplex roomettes, 4 sections, 3 double bedrooms, 1 compartment

Few Pullmans contained more than three types of accommodations, but Great Northern and Northern Pacific had some with four, built by P-S for the postwar re-equipping of their transcontinental limiteds. GN's 16 *River*-series cars were 7-4-3-1's; NP's 18 cars had 6 roomettes in lieu of the sections and restrooms. In July 1961, *Poplar River* displays the *Empire Builder* train name and sublettering for GN partner CB&Q, which owned some *Builder* cars. The staggered windows at the vestibule end denote the location of the duplex rooms.