

Building a Prize and Merit Award winning model starting with a kit or a RTR model.

By George Gilbert

Starting with kits or RTR models you can earn merit awards and place well in contests. But you have to do more than follow instructions and build the kit. Add extra detail in a way that shows your skill and understanding of the prototype. You can see what I did with the caboose from the attached contest sheet printed below.



My caboose is a detailed Bachman plastic caboose. Don Spiro published an article in the December 2004 Railroad Model Craftsman about detailing the same caboose, you might be able to find and read. I went a bit more overboard that described in that article. On my model I fully replaced the under-frame and added complete brake rigging. I also did a lot of work on the end platform and railings. I have attached the contest write up on my caboose; it provides additional information.



One of the cars I used for my Cars Certificate was a narrow gauge baggage/mail car. The model was a La Belle kit built pretty much following instructions. But I added a complete interior. The postal section had mail bags in the stands that held them open, it had sorting tables and pigeonhole cabinets for mail sorting and a couple of Postal employees.

Another Kit that I did well with was a Detail Associates 2 level station kit. Before building that kit I stared at the plans for a while and finally realized that the way the doors & windows were laid out could only be if the building floor plan was totally unrealistic. So I re-arranged things to match a more reasonable floor plan. I then documented all this in the contest write up. To demo the corrected floor plan I built a complete interior for both floors of the building. In order that interior could be seen I had to have removable roofs and lift out sections of flooring to see from 2nd floor into 1st floor. That kit model placed 3rd. in a NMRA national contest.

It goes without saying that the **Construction** should be executed well. Finally the **Finish and Lettering** should be beautiful.

Take the caboose you are planning to build. Get the underbody and brake rigging correct. Then don't just paint the underbody flat black; included the underbody in your weathering of the model. If you decide to scratch the end railings and ladder build jigs so that you can get it all build right. If you decide not to do interior detail then at least place interior walls in the model so that the views through a window do not show a hollow box. If you do decide to do interior detail with removable roof, don't forget to detail the underside of the roof.

1.Construction: Score: 33 of 40

This model is a significant rebuild and super-detail of a plastic Bachman 4-wheel caboose.

The kit provided body shell and frame. All cast on grab's removed and replaced with wire and NBW detail. Mullions were cut out to change 4 pane windows to single pane. Cast on markers removed and replaced with marker lamp castings. Plastic running board discarded. Roof surfaced with painted tissue paper to simulate canvas roofing. Wood running boards were fabricated and added. The frame of the floor and under frame completely was cut out leaving only side frames and end platform support. A new wood under floor was added along with appropriate wood structural members. Then complete brake rigging was fabricated from wire, NBW, modified Grandt turnbuckles, brake shoes from a Kadee kit, chain and bits & pieces of styrene and brass. A new wood surface added to end platforms and wood top blended onto the buffers. End rails were fabricated from wire and chain. Brake shaft is brass wire, wheel is Tichy. Ratchet and chain guide are commercial parts. Coupler buffer is Styrene and NBW's. Air hose is commercial part.

End Ladders are completely scratchbuilt from flat and round brass wire.

2.Detail: Score: 17 of 20

Free standing wire grabs, everywhere there is a grab. NBW castings "holding" grabs in place.

End Railing and ladders.

Cut Levers (movable)

Coupler box details

Marker lamps (with red and green lamps)

End platform brake handle shaft and other parts, including wound up chain.

Underbody shows planking. Wood beams

Complete brake rigging with shafts, supports, beams, clevises, brake shoes, pull chain, train air line, air hoses, and brake cylinder. It is all there.

3.Conformity: Score: 23 of 25

Model is based on a Bachman kit that is typical of 4-wheel "bobber" cabooses. It very closely resembles Reading 90181 (photo included). The model is built as a prototype freelance for my home railroad. The Reading car and typical practice found in several books and articles were used to keep the model prototypically plausible. It proved to be difficult to find brake rigging detail in any reference for a 4-wheel caboose. It turned out the best available reference was the Grandt Line 3 foot narrow gauge caboose kit instructions. The brake rigging on this car follows that design.

4.Finish and Lettering: Score: 22 of 25

Car body was airbrushed caboose red, under frame grimy black using acrylics exclusively. The roof is tissue paper fastened with grimy black brushed on. Lettering is individual letter decals treated with settling solution then over sprayed with flat finish. Various parts accented with other colors (i.e. Air hose is a rubber red). Wheel faces treaded with a wet groupie mist of water and conte (black & rust brown) so surface has that gunky look of splattered grease from

friction bearings. Weathering is done with weathering powder and pastels. It is supposed to look fairly well maintained, but definitely used.

5.Scratch Built: Score: 9 of 15

Body: kit part but detailed

Frame: Kit part highly modified then detailed

Grab irons: 18" grabs commercial parts. Caboose side grabs scratch.

The bulk of scratch work is the brake rigging: Includes cross beams, levers, shafts, hanging brackets, shafts (some clevis scratch from brass, some modified Grandt turnbuckles), air lines, and chain. Brake cylinder commercial. Brake shoes were kit-bashed from a Kadee truck brake kit. The end platform rail is all scratch-built as well as the end ladders are all scratch.

Total Score: 104 and First place in the Division Contest in Kit-Built Model Contest / Caboose

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Photos are from the Southerner, the official publication of the Southeastern Region of the NMRA. www.ser-nmra.org