

## First impressions of the Connoisseur Models LNER J50 Component Pack

by Christopher Rabin

Despite having enough model railway kits and other "projects" to keep me busy for many years to come, I could not resist acquiring an "LNER J50 Component Pack" from Connoisseur Models after seeing a photograph of the finished item in the model railway press.

This is not a blow-by-blow account of how I built a J50 in 4mm scale, largely because the components are still safely and invitingly packed in the bag they came in! Instead, this can be considered to be a taster of what to expect, should you too be intrigued by the idea of a "component pack".

Jim McGeown of Connoisseur Models offers a growing range of 4 mm locomotives, all of which so far are LNER tank engines. They are described as "component packs" because they are 4 mm versions of his 7 mm range, and were therefore not designed to cater for up to three different chassis widths in 4 mm scale. Thus, the 4 mm modeller may need to make adjustments to the footplate and splashers, especially in 00. Similarly, etched holes may be too small (no real problem), and some of the smaller etched parts a little on the fiddly side. As Jim writes, "As long as the modeller is aware of this, the components should provide no disappointments. .... They should also be ideal for the sort of modeller who never builds a kit as it was intended anyway."

Back to the J50 component pack. In keeping with its name, it is packaged in an A4-sized self-seal bag, containing a stiffening board to which the components are attached, and four double-sided A4 sheets of instructions. The components themselves consist of a 19 by 18 cm brass etch in 12 thou (footplate and body); an 8 by 18 cm nickel silver etch in 15 thou (chassis); five straight lengths of brass rod/wire in three different diameters; a small bag of more than 20 crisp whitemetal castings (chimney, dome, smokebox door, buffers, sandboxes, etc.); and a further small bag containing brass bearings, fixing nuts and bolts, copper-clad strip and wire for pickups. Additionally, there is a small nickel silver etch providing spacers for EM and 00 (11.2 mm wide).

Six and a half of the eight pages of instructions are diagrams. One page is given over to identifying and numbering the parts on the etches, and there are five pages of clear isometric exploded diagrams (with brief notes) to indicate the order and method of assembly. Apart from the half page of 4 mm scale plans, no prototype information is provided (so I'm not sure whether the components are for a J50/1, J50/2 or a J50/3), but the builder is referred to "Locos of the LNER, 8a" by the RCTS.

The chassis as supplied is for "rigid" construction, without the half-etched hornblock cut-outs that are often a feature of 4 mm chassis kits (and also without etched suggestion of springs). Frame spacers are the tried and tested L-shape with location by tab-and-slot. There are holes for plunger pickups, as well as half-etched holes for press-out rivets. Coupling rods are included on the same etch, and are three-layer with extra overlays for boss and knuckle detail. The brake gear is finely detailed. All three sets of steps up to the footplate are in nickel silver for additional strength. The brass footplate and body is similarly detailed, and is formed from more than 70 separate parts. The boiler and smokebox must be rolled from flat etches, but the advantage of this is that accurate locating holes are provided for boiler castings and handrail knobs (not included with the components). The cab contains no interior detail, but can be accessed from beneath the footplate once assembled for further detailing. The modeller needs to supply wheels, motor, and gearbox -- and a motorising pack is available from Connoisseur Models. If you are happy to drive the centre axle, then there is a convenient cut-out in the footplate to permit this. Otherwise, the rear axle looks like the next best alternative: the position of the cab may be problematic unless you use a more exotic gearbox or resort to some surgery...

Saving what may be the most interesting part till last: the price. When I purchased mine (in the spring of 1999), it was 35.00 pounds post free from Connoisseur Models. The motorising pack (Mashima/Branchlines motor, Branchlines 38:1 gearbox and Romford wheels) would have been a further 29.00 pounds. Certainly competitively priced for a 4 mm scale etched loco kit if this meets your specifications. I am sure that with some care taken in assembly, you will be rewarded with a superb-looking model, judging by the quality of the parts. (However, in view of the separate pieces of beading on the bunker, cab, and tank sides, I think it is safe to say that this is NOT a project for someone who is still getting to grips with a soldering iron!)

Connoisseur Models can be reached at

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and are also the maker of the "Pocket Money Kits" range of wagons and coaches. A catalogue showing both ranges is available: mine was priced 50p for last year's. (The usual disclaimer applies, that I am only a satisfied customer!)

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