

Scratchbuilding Wagons in OO

by Philip Parker

The first question on many peoples lips when reading the title of this article is With all the high quality ready to run wagons available, many people do not even consider it worth assembling kits. The idea seems to belong to a distant time or to modellers in exotic scales. I believe that there are many good reasons to have a go and hope to give a few pointers to those who want to start.

For illustration, I witi use a model of an L&S WR van I have constructed for a model of the Helingly Hospital Railway I am working on. The plan is to set the layout sometime between 1900 and 1920, and this brings me to the first reason for scratch building. Not every wagon used on the railway (especially those of obscure lines or from the early part of the century) has been produced in either RTR or kit form and those that have often need much work carried out on them to bring them up to the latest standards. If you have ever detailed a wagon, then you have acquired some of the skills of a scratch builder.

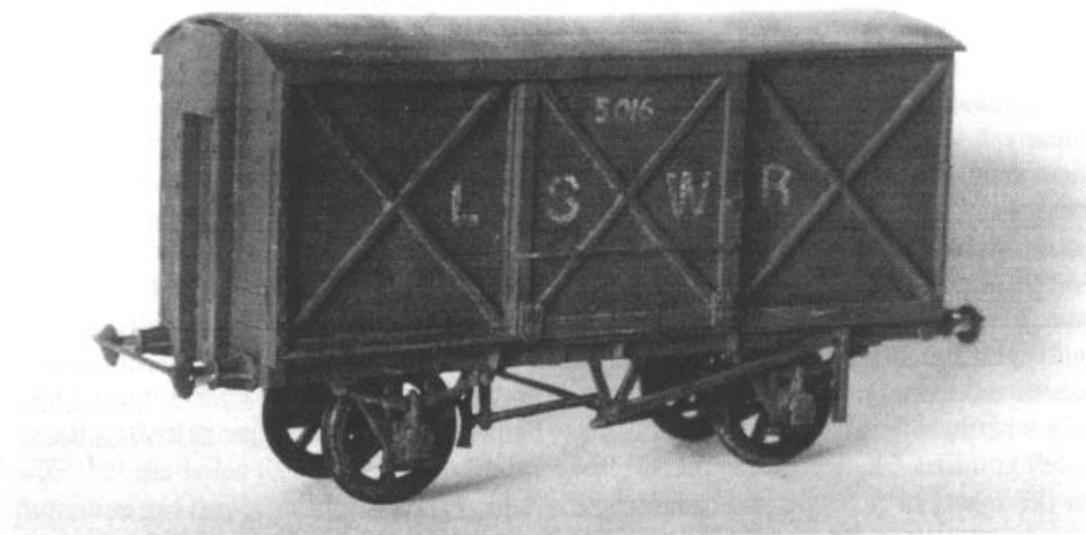
Secondly, building wagons makes you look at each model individually. You see the details, understand how things work, and this raises the quality of your modelling. Third, cost. My wagon cost about a pound to make. A similar kit by someone such as Parkside will cost at least four times that, more still for RTR. Finally, this is a creative hobby, so making things is fun. Yes fun, enjoyable, pleasurable etc. etc. There is something about starting with a sheet of plasticard and a plan and ending up with a model ihat is very satisfying.

So if you haven't turned the page muttering under your breath, where do you start? You need a plan. Many magazines publish plans and if your own bookshelves cannot help, then the pub(ic library is the neat stop. Books exist for all companies wagons and most include photographs with each plan to make research even easier. Photocopy the plan to save damaging the book on your modelling bench, this copy should be 4mm scale if possible. Check this with a ruler as many copiers are not as accurate as the makers would tell you.

Important We all love those complicated multi-wheel jobs that carried big boilers or bridges around, or strange wagons for unusual loads but they don't make a good choice for a novice scratch builder. Start with something with four wheels and you won't go far wrong.

Next, material. We've all read articles about people who made live steam loco's out of old baked bean cans, but plasticard is a better bet for most modellers. White is easier to draw on. You will need at least three thickness, 3 mm, 1 mm and very, very thin ought to do it. One sheet will give you the material for several wagons and lots of other jobs. A pack of assorted microstrip is also a good idea. Both liquid (I use Polsol) and tube (Revel Professional) plastic glues as well as some superglue need to be in the tool box.

Superglue? Yes, I'm too lazy to build complex components such as axle boxes from scratch and so brought some Kenline white metal ones and altered them to suit, a similar thing can be done with break gear, although I used leftover Parkside kit parts. Various bits of wire come in useful and metal/plastic joins are best made with superglue.



A LSWR 10 ton ventilated box van scratchbuilt by the author. Constructed from plasticard with white metal axleboxes & Romford wheels. Photograph by the author.

Finally, instructions. I don't propose to give a blow by blow account of wagon construction, unless asked very nicely, besides the editor will want to fit something else in the magazine as well as this article. The best method is to treat your wagon as you would a kit. You just have to make each component up before you assemble it! Start by making a working underframe (Use a Ratio underframe kit if this bit scares you too much) and then build the body on top of it. Most wagons are basically a box on wheels, think of them like that and each one won't seem so daunting. Iain Rice's books on wagon improvement give some useful pointers so I suggest you also read them. The most important point to remember is that what will almost certainly be the most expensive component, the wheels, can always be reused if you don't like the way the model is turning out. That way you don't lose too much if it all goes wrong. I hope I have encouraged a few people to take the plunge and dig out the plasticard. Most of you will complain "I haven't got the ability". To the first I say - The van I built took about ten hours, the same as two or three wagon kits, not bad as I was unfamiliar with the prototype. To the second I didn't know if I could produce anything comparable to a commercial kit but when I had a go, I was pleasantly surprised, you don't know until you try.....

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