

That 'pesky' paperwork for contest entries!

Don't ignore this article saying it does not apply to me! Hopefully when you read these words it might stir a little interest and maybe prompt you to venture forth to enter a model you are currently adding detail, kitbashing or actually constructing. Perhaps you have been planning to create something for so long but not yet got around to doing anything about it. Here is just the opportunity to start that project and put your feet in the water and enter your model/s. Have you have taken a photo or created a piece of 'art' work and can enter it in the Region Contests next year at our Convention in Derby. Then do think about entering this as more the merrier is the watchword!

As a past Contest Chairman and also a judge for British Region and in National Conventions in North America I have come across many instances where the modeller had submitted his entry and did not realise the importance of accompanying documentation. It struck me then that perhaps the person was unaware of the best way to describe his efforts on the entry form and so left the form blank.

At our recent 2014 Bournemouth Convention this situation again arose when some very nice freight car models entered in the contests had only the barest explanation about each model. In all of these instances the judges had the unenviable task of being unable to award the points that may very well have been justified. The judges can only award points for what they see and have explained to them in the documentation, unfortunately it is a fact they need to be advised if a person has scratchbuilt a part or used a commercial one, or how something has been attached or fitted together. I am sure you will appreciate judges are not clairvoyant or be all-knowing when it comes to every model. Therefore, it is in your best interests to provide the judges with a simple explanation of what has been done or not done as the case permits.

Are you one of those people confused or put off by the having to explain what you have done? Perhaps it is the stories of "too much paperwork" that you hear from others? Many members it seems are confused about the use of the word 'Contests' and what is needed in respect of the documentation when submitting an entry. It is hoped these words can clear things up a bit and give you encouragement to enter your modelling or artistic efforts in the future.

Let me first say that I appreciate that the word 'Contest' is off putting to many. In the USA this event is or was looked upon as a chance to beat your fellow modelling friend when both your models were judged.

When this attitude prevails it is no wonder people were put off by this wrongly perceived competitive and public nature of the Contests. Perhaps we in British Region should break this mould and use a title such as "A Celebration of Modelling Efforts" or something of a like kind? We could perhaps ask for suggestions in time for the next Region Convention! For the time being and for the sake of clarity I will continue to use the word Contests here. It has also been said that entering Contests is a form of showing off. It may be for some but fortunately in the USA the participation in this event nowadays is looked upon in a totally different way by those organising the event and the main focus is to ensure each model is judged on its own merits and it is an opportunity for entrants to improve their own skills.

So why do we enter? Here I can only give my own reasons, and be sure there are many others who can give their reasons too. For me the first is primarily to gain a merit award for that particular model. The second is the aim of proving to myself that I can produce a model showing that my basic skills are being expanded and improved. Merit Awards gained in the Contest can count towards the Achievement Program if you wish. AP assessors and Contest judges use the same scoring scheme so you can still get the AP recognition for a good model.

Any member can enter the Region Contests and their entry does not have to be part of the Achievement Programme. However, most members currently entering models do so to gain merit awards which count towards those elements required in the Achievement Program (AP) - their ultimate aim being to achieve Master Model Railroader status.

Let us also highlight here a few of the most common misapprehensions –

- ***“I have to attend a Contest venue to enter.”*** You do not have to attend a Contest to enter. If you can get your model to the Contest along with the paperwork you can enter. This is known as a “proxy entry”. For more information the Contest Chairman can help.
- ***“What if I want to have my model judged for AP purposes only but cannot get to a Convention”?*** Models can be judged at your home, at Club or Regional Meets or at other agreed venues. However, this requires considerable advanced notice to allow judges who may live a distance from you to be contacted and appointments made for each to attend. This does require a lot of co-ordination by the AP Chairman sometimes months in advance especially during the Summer when holidays are involved.
- ***“You only stand a chance if everything is completely scratchbuilt”.*** Not at all. Many models entered in the Contest have been, super detailed, kit bashed or constructed by merging one or more buildings (say) to complete the model.
- ***“N Scale doesn’t stand a chance”.*** Models of all scales are judged on the same basis using the Judges scoring matrix. The Judges are scale blind when analysing and judging models.

What is there to stop you entering a Contest other than the paperwork? Hopefully a few pointers will explain the things that you should consider when entering a Contest, what the judges will be looking for, and how you can present your model in the best light. A brief description of what happens in the Contest room during the Judging process is also useful to know.

When you choose to enter any model, photo and/or art and craft contest you will be showcasing your skills as a modeller, photographer or crafter. In the model category your work will be judged on its own merits and will not be compared with other entries during the judging process. The judges will not know the names of the entrants so personalities can’t get in the way of fairness either. After the judging is complete the judges are willing to discuss your entry with you - one-thing judges will never do, of course, is get involved in discussing someone else’s model.

Contest Classes (for models), there are 11 model categories and in the British Region the most popular categories are:-

Steam locomotives.

Diesel locomotives and others.

Passenger cars.

Freight cars.

Cabooses.

Maintenance of way.

Structures. There are two structure categories:-

- Structures on-line is for railroad related structures.
- Structures off-line is for non-railroad structures such as farm houses, restaurants etc.

If you are unsure where your model fits, please contact the Contest Chairman for his guidance.

The Judging Scheme

A problem for judges is perhaps the variety of models they will encounter, for example, how do you judge a so-so scratchbuilt model against a nicely done kit bash? To handle this kind of situation, the NMRA has put together a set of criteria to cover the various aspects of a model, a sort of checklist for judges to both look for and consider, plus a points scoring system to assess them. You will appreciate this has to be a fairly rigid structure with the intention of making the judges assessments as objective as possible. It also forces them to assess one aspect of a model at a time. This ensures, for example, that the quality of paint finish is assessed separately from the quality of construction and so on.

Each model is assessed and awarded points using this same set of criteria; the maximum possible score is 125 points. To achieve a “Merit Award” towards the AP, a model must score at least 87.5 points, which is 70% of the 125 points available. The points are awarded in various judged elements as follows:-

- Construction - 40 points
- Detail - 20 points
- Conformity - 25 points
- Finish - 25 points
- Scratchbuilding 15 points
- Total 125 points

So what do you think the judges are likely to look for in the various categories? Let's go through them in order and try to get an overview.

To help the judges, the NMRA has produced the scoring matrix suggesting how points should be awarded for combinations of complexity and quality of work. A matrix of this type is available for each of the criteria. It is worth reading and digesting this document before you submit an entry as it will help you when you come to explain your modelling efforts.

Construction: The judges are trying to answer the following sorts of questions,

- "Is the model put together well?"
- "Is it square?"
- "Are the joins neat with no excess glue or solder?"
- "Have appropriate materials been used?"
- Other considerations will be how complex the model is and how difficult it was to build.

This is where your documentation comes to the fore! -

On the entry form you will hopefully have ticked the respective boxes showing what materials and processes you have undertaken. In addition it is helpful to describe how your model was made; such as did you cut sheet or use strip styrene! If the roof is removable did you construct the internal timbers that support it? Explain all that you did. Use an additional sheet if you need more space than is on the form. If you did something that proved very difficult, but isn't obvious, be sure to mention it so you get the credit. Equally if you have omitted something for a particular reason, which may be spotted by the judges, say why it as not included. Every bit of information is relevant and helpful, but be careful not to overdo the explanations. If you used magazine plans, or drew your own plans, include a photocopy of these as well as any photos you have. If you have some showing each stage of construction , that is even better!.

Detail: What the judges are looking for here is only the quantity of detail added to the model.

- be sure to include a comprehensive list of the parts added or show the parts sheet included with your model by the manufacturer. If need be, for clarity, include a simple hand drawing with arrows to show where parts were added.

Conformity: In this category the question the Judges are asking is,

- "How close is the model to the real thing?"
- The judges are interested in prototypical accuracy. They will note the obvious missing items or technically incorrect features - some models are often submitted without the underside brake gear which is an obvious omission. The judges can't possibly know every detail about every prototype so it is important to include information with your documents to help them give you full credit for this conformity element. It isn't possible to over emphasise the importance of good information covering this area, without it, the judges are unable to assess conformity and will be forced to award a lower score. It doesn't have to be a huge amount so long as it allows the accuracy of the model to be assessed.
- A couple of good, clear, photos of the prototype, or a plan of the prototype will really help. However, it is also important to stress again that the amount provided is sensible and helpful. To decide what to include, put yourself in the judges' shoes and ask, "What would be helpful?" (Of course the other big consideration is "What would gain me extra points?").
- "Freelanced" models can present a problem. By definition there can't be prototype photos or plans, however, freelanced models are usually based on one or more real vehicles or

structures. Photos and drawings of these will demonstrate that you have followed prototype practice and that your model is logical.

n.b. Again it is also worth noting that if for any reason you have elected to omit some part or piece of equipment then the reasons for this should be explained in your descriptions or additional notes.

Finish: Here the judges are looking at painting, lettering and weathering.

- Note that models are not penalised if they are not weathered. Remember though, that if they are “ex-works” in respect of rolling stock or a newly built structure they do need to be pristine. Once again the complexity of the work comes into the picture. Clearly a well-done, complex, multi-coloured model should score more points than an equally well-done plain black model.
- Incidentally, models will not be penalised for the quality of purchased decals. Marks can be lost though if they are poorly applied. There is nothing worse than seeing the “silvering” behind the decal, where the film is still visible.
- In most cases a simple description of what you did and the materials used will suffice. If you did something unusual, like hand lettering or producing your own artwork for decals, be sure to draw attention to it.

Scratchbuilding: Here a list of scratchbuilt parts is more than adequate.

- Points will be awarded for how much of the model is scratchbuilt and how difficult it was to make the scratchbuilt items. If you have made moulds or other kinds of masters then do try and enclose these in your submission. It is best to read the Judges Scoring Matrix to see the level of points that can be awarded for the actual work completed in this category.

One sensible piece of advice worth noting was overheard at a National Contest, when the person said that “if the modeller had jotted down a few notes or perhaps taken a photo at each stage when building his model, then it would have made his form filling much easier!”. A good suggestion I am sure and one I will certainly follow in future.

Entering the Contest:

The Contest Chairman will announce in ‘Roundhouse’ when Contests will be held, these days it is normally at the Region Convention, he will give the dates and how to obtain entry forms. For each model you enter you will need to complete the two entry forms. On the first (form 901, “Contest Entry Form”) you give your name, a one-line description of your model and your valuation of your model for insurance purposes. As it includes your name, please note the judges will never see this form as all judging is anonymous. The form is only used by the Contest Chairman to keep track of the models. You can also include any special handling instructions on this sheet too. For example if you write “if you turn it upside down the roof falls off!” The Contest Chairman will pass these instructions on to the judges or place a notice to that effect by the model prior to judging.

The second form (form #902, “Judges Score Sheet”) allows you to describe your model for the judges - since this form #902 is a single sheet; it only allows a few lines for each of the five criteria (construction, conformity etc) but you can include additional sheets as necessary. Use these to give the judges a clear picture of what you have done and to present your model in the best light. Remember that form #902 and any supporting information is the only chance you have to “speak” to the judges when they look at your model. So make sure you get credit for all the work you have done.

For photo entries you will only need to complete form #901 with your name, details and a title for the photo you are submitting along with its valuation for insurance purposes, plus of course your signature.

n.b.

It is important that you do not include your name or other details on either the model or supporting material as this will lead to disqualification.

In the Contest Room

There will be a specified time when you (or your representative if this is a proxy entry) must deliver your model or photo and paperwork to the Contest room. You will be given a receipt (a tear-off portion of Form #901) that will allow you to reclaim your model later. The Contest Chairman groups all models in the same class together, with their paperwork, before judging is ready to start. It used to be customary that all judging was done behind closed doors, however, attendees can now be present during the judging but there is one rule that must be observed; that being that no one is allowed to talk either to judges or between themselves whilst in the room. The judges normally work in teams of two or three. New, "apprentice", judges are usually grouped with two experienced judges in three-person teams.

First everyone examines a model and gives their points score for the criterion being judged. Often they are in close agreement but occasionally there are differences. This usually turns out to be because one judge has spotted something that the others may have missed. After discussion, the judges agree on a points score and move on. In certain circumstances the Contest Chairman's decision is sought and his adjudication is final.

The Judges comments -

The judges will endeavour to comment briefly about each model, generally on the reverse of the form #902. These comments will provide specific positive comments on the model and/or may suggest positive ways that the modeller might improve on the work submitted or as an 'aide memoir' for any subsequent entries.. A model contest judge, and/or, a member of the Contest staff are always available to answer any questions you might have at the end of the contest. Happily, gone are the days when models were criticised by the judges as this only furthered the disenchantment with the process for those submitting models.

So now it's over to you -

Entering a contest is quite easy and can be very satisfying. If you already have a model you are proud of why not enter next year's contest once the details are announced? If you haven't anything at the moment there's still enough time between now and the Convention to build a model for your entry. If you would like to discuss your plans or need some help with paperwork relating to what to include then please contact the Contest Chairman, he has a number of people he can call upon to help you. Details are in the Region Directory or send an e-mail to contestchairman@nmrabr.org.uk

Further information

There is more information in the Region Directory and much more on the NMRA website (www.nmra.org). There is a Contest section that gives general information but focuses mainly on the annual National Contest. Details of the judging scheme, guidance for judges etc is given in the Achievement Program index. There are pages of information with the necessary support to let you print them. These pages include the guidance given to judges and include the matrices they use. They are well worth reading as they also give you help with regard to what judges look for and also what you should make effort to include on your model. You can get to this information from the NMRA home page or directly from <http://www.nmra.org/convention/contests/> where you can read or download all sorts of informative documents to help you understand what is involved. You can also complete your forms on line and print them off but you cannot save them on line.

Happy modelling and I look forward to helping where I can anyone who is interested.

Terry Wynne