

# Achievement Program - Scratch Building

by Bill Jacobs



Well, we've finally come to the end of this run, the last box on the Judge's Score Sheet-Scratch building. A number of years ago, scratch building was considered by many to be the pinnacle of model railroading-in fact it was almost a necessity because of the lack of commercially available parts that could be used to build models. Today, in a contest, it is only worth 15 points or 12% of the total points available. Let me give you a quote from our old friend, the Judging Guidelines, "This category deals with all parts of the model which have been fabricated from basic wood, metal, plastic, or other shapes and materials. Credit is given for quantity only, quality is considered elsewhere." The elsewhere is in Construction. Now, remember that we are only talking about motive power, cars, and structures entered in contests or otherwise judged by a group of qualified judges. Let's take each of these and discuss them in some detail, starting with the (in my view) easiest.

The scratch building of structures is a forte of mine, and I suspect others. However, I am a graduate engineer and my Grandfather was a carpenter who I "helped" a lot during my teenage years. To achieve the highest number of points in this category (11-15) everything must be scratched except metal, wood and plastic sheet and shapes and light bulbs and lettering (this is directly out of the Judging Guidelines). You can get no more than 10 points if you use metal or plastic doors or windows, interior fittings, figures and animals. So, how do you get a high score in this? First, leave out figures and animals, then build something that has maybe one door and not very many windows-say two. It also sounds like you should have an interior with a roof that can be removed so the judges can see into it. How about an abandoned shack with no interior walls with only studs showing. This is not too hard to do, just do all board by board construction with no paint, only alcohol and leather dye for a finish. Obviously I am speaking from experience here, but you can do it too. A good friend of mine, in the Arizona Division, swears that if you want to get an Achievement Certificate in Structures you should scratch build a bridge-which kills three birds with one stone. Look it up to see what he's talking about-I also love bridges so two of my bridge entries for this Certificate have already received Merit Awards.

Next in line is cars, which can receive the maximum number of points (10-15) if everything is scratch built except trucks, couplers, brake fittings, and lettering. Now, if you use seats, ventilators, door latches, diaphragms, ladders, and plastic or metal window sash, end platforms and steps that are commercial parts the maximum score you can receive is 10. Okay, this is obviously biased against passenger cars, so we will mostly talk about them. How about we construct a baggage car? Right off the bat, there are no seats, diaphragms, windows, or end platforms. See how easy it is to do this?

Last, and most contentious is locomotives. I will not insult your intelligence by repeating the Judging Guidelines here. I urge you, especially if you intend to get an Achievement Certificate in Motive Power, to go there and seriously read the Locomotive Category in the sub-schedule and the note at the bottom of page 10. In order to get this Achievement Certificate at least 90% of one model must be fabricated by the modeler and that's pretty tough. Many people build a four wheel industrial loco in a larger scale than they normally model. One of the problems with that approach is that they are mostly one color and may not even have a number, so the scores in other areas (see previous columns) may be much lower.

I will now bring up a little problem, which I think will grow over the years. The NMRA did itself no favor in the June 2014 issue of the NMRA Magazine by saying on the cover and in the article that the SD39u locomotives were scratch built. They are beautiful, no doubt, but they do not meet the current NHRA rules of being scratch built. Actually, they almost don't really seem to be a kit-bash. This has resonated pretty strongly across our division and I suspect throughout the organization, especially those who model late-model diesel locomotives. And a last note, I have read, but not seen yet, that Home Depot is now selling a Dremel 3-D printer for around a thousand dollars. How shall we decide if one of those cars is scratch built? I actually hope to get in on that discussion, maybe I'm just a glutton for punishment.

I hope you have liked this series of articles, I've liked writing them. Please do not hesitate to contact me for any reason at all-I've been around for a while and if I can, I'll help or find somebody who can.

See you on down the line, Bill