

Y9 Fruit Van ('Fruit C')

I had built a 'Mink C' to Diagram V7 (see MRJ No.45), and was thinking of modelling another example, this time with the new ends which were fitted to some of these vans in later years. It then occurred to me that, if I was prepared to modify the doors, I could turn the vehicle into a 'Fruit C' conforming to Diagram Y9 - a modernised version of the 'Fruit C' design, of which 50 examples were built in 1937-39 on Lots 1606 and 1634. Admittedly the resulting model would be 4mm short, as the 'Fruit C' vans were 22 feet long, compared with the 21-foot length of the 'Mink C'. However, I have previously explained my '5% rule', whereby a discrepancy in any linear dimension of the model not more than 5% greater or smaller than the correct scale figure is acceptable. The 4mm error in the length of this vehicle was within this parameter, and so I decided to have a go at this conversion, using a Colin Ashby 'Mink C' kit as the basis.

Work began by altering the sides. The outside-framed doors needed to be filed down to allow for the fitting of vertically-planked doors flush with the door-hinge stanchions. I figured that, rather than filing down the parts by hand, this job could be done more accurately and reliably by milling in the lathe. This proved to be the case; but at one stage in the operation, inadequate clamping, combined with a moment of inattention on my part, led to the milling cutter catching on the work-piece, twisting it out of alignment and chewing into one side of the door frame.

After muttering a monosyllabic expletive, I managed to finish the job without further mishap. Examination of the damaged door jamb suggested that the remains of the stanchion on that side could be removed and replaced by styrene strip. The result would be less than perfect, but this did not justify abandoning the model. The repaired side inevitably became the 'B' side of the model, and it has not been detailed to the same standard as the 'A' side. Perfectionists may wince at this, but my approach to model-making is essentially practical; I do not produce perfect models, but I do complete a reasonable number of models to a standard which is acceptable to me.

The new doors were made from 40-thou styrene sheet. The planks were marked in with a pointed scraper-board stylus. Strapping was 10-thou x 30-thou styrene strip, with the capping strip above the doors cut from 20-thou x 30-thou strip. My original intention had been to omit the bolt-heads on this strapping, but I relented, and set about adding this detail. Thin styrene sheet can be embossed with 'rivets' in the same way as sheet metal, but I found that the narrow styrene strip was liable to distort or break when embossed in this way, and so I resorted to the well-known method of cutting 'cubes' from 10-thou square styrene strip and sticking these onto the strapping with Mek-pak. I admit that this does make a difference to the appearance of the model, but I am not entirely convinced that it would have been missed if it were absent.

The vertical locking rods on the doors were represented by plastic micro-rod. I remembered afterwards that I had some Kenline castings (No.29) which might have been better for this purpose, but the micro-rod nevertheless produced an acceptable representation of the locking rods. The fine chain on the doors was simulated by twisting two strands of 5-amp fuse wire

together. This is quite effective in producing the illusion of chain, and is a lot finer in appearance than the finest chain available from the trade.

I originally intended to leave the planking of the sides untouched, but I felt there was nothing to lose in experimenting on the 'B' side of the van to see if I could reproduce the louvres between alternate planks which were a feature of the prototype. When I was building the Y2 'Fruit A' from a Coopercraft V5 van kit, I had scraped the louvres in the top plank with a craft knife, but I reckoned that I could produce a better result with a scraper-board stylus. Holding the stylus as shown in *Figure 1*, I found that a louvre could be scraped away quite neatly, without the need to use a straight-edge. In fact, using the scraper-board stylus free-hand in this way produced rather straighter louvres than I had managed to do when building the Y2. Having practised on the 'B' side, I was able, with care, to produce even better louvres on the 'A' side, and was so encouraged by the success of this technique that I was tempted to have a go at a future date at the earlier Y3 'Fruit C' (originally 'Fruit D'), which had louvres all over it. Since then David Geen has produced a very acceptable whitemetal kit for a Y3, and so I can save myself the extra trouble by using that kit.

Looking at a photograph of the Y9 prototype, I happened to notice that it had 'T' section strapping, whereas the Colin Ashby kit correctly reproduced the 'L' section strapping of the V7. It was a comparatively simple matter to add 10-thou x 20-thou styrene strip to represent the correct form of strapping.

The replacement van ends were purchased from the box of spare parts which Ratio used to take round with them to various exhibitions. These new ends have 12 planks from the floor to the eaves, whereas the sides of the 'Mink C' have only 11 planks. The discrepancy is not at all obvious unless the vehicle is very closely examined. The ends required no modification, other than some slight chamfering at the corners to ensure a close fit with the sides.

The roof of the Colin Ashby kit was a moulding, unlike the roof of the earlier Ian Kirk kit, which had been formed from styrene sheet. Some filing and scraping was required to get the roof to sit down firmly at the sides, and styrene strip was added to the van ends to get the fit right.

Having adjusted the fit of the roof to my satisfaction, I set about adding the necessary details. *Figure 2* shows the pattern in which the shell ventilators were arranged on this vehicle and the layout of the gas piping. Bearing in mind that the model is four millimetres shorter than the strict scale dimension, the spacing of the lamp tops and the ventilators was slightly reduced to suit. The lamp tops were Mallard castings (441 025) and the shell ventilators were from ABS (F.300). Alternatives are readily available for both.

At this stage, I came to the conclusion that the roof ought to be shortened slightly. It was only 1mm over-length, but I had already decided that the moulded capping strips on the ends did not look quite right and would need to be replaced. So I set out to kill two birds with one stone by filing 0.5mm off each end of the roof, which would also remove the moulded capping strips. These could then be replaced by styrene strip.

What happened next was one of those incidents where you wonder afterwards how on earth you could have been so incredibly stupid. I appeared to be making no impression with the file, as the remains of the capping strip still seemed to be visible after quite a lot of filing.

Slowly the awful truth dawned on me; what appeared to be the remainder of the capping strip was in fact a ridge thrown up by the action of the file. I had rubbed away well over 2mm of material by this time. The roof was now far too short. What made matters worse was that the discrepancy was all at one end, bearing in mind that I had already super-glued the lamp tops and ventilators firmly in place. The roof was irretrievably ruined. Model-making came to an abrupt end for the day.

A couple of days later I had calmed down sufficiently to set about making a new roof. The curvature of the roof was tighter than the 65.5mm diameter of a standard aluminium drink can, and so a smaller container was required to enable the roof to be heat-formed from styrene sheet. I had noticed that Sainsbury's sold wine in small cans. Now, I would deny that I am a wine snob, but I do enjoy a decent Claret or a good Burgundy, and I would be most unlikely ever to have bought a can of "*Vin de Pays du Gard*", were it not for the fact that these slim 25cl cans looked about the right size for a GWR van roof.

Having drained the contents (smooth, but predictably bland and anonymous), I set about forming the new roof. This was cut from 20-thou styrene sheet and is 87mm long by 36mm wide. This was 1mm shorter, as explained above, and also 1mm wider than the moulded roof, which had been just a little narrow. The styrene sheet resisted being strapped down to the small diameter can, so I took the process in two stages, heat-forming it first round a standard-size drink can, then round the smaller can. The styrene sheet was tacked to the side of the can with a couple of small pieces of Carr's 'hot' tape, and a piece of thin card (cut from the back of a cereal packet) was placed over it. Crepe bandage was then bound tightly round the can, so that the styrene sheet was formed to the curve of the can. The card was put there to prevent the weave of the bandage being imprinted on the styrene sheet. Boiling water was poured into the can, and after a couple of minutes the can was emptied, and re-filled with cold water to cool everything down. Finally, the bandage was removed, to reveal a perfectly formed roof, which will always hold its shape.

In the event, the wine can turned out to be 53mm in diameter, which is very slightly under-size, but the slightly sharp curve which was produced is closer to the correct radius than the curve which would result from the use of a standard 65.5mm can, and it is easier to flex a slightly tighter-curved roof to fit the van ends than it is to persuade a larger-radius roof to sit down on the body.

New shell vents and gas lamp tops were super-glued in pre-drilled holes in the appropriate positions, and gas pipes were added from thin wire. The layout of the gas piping which fed the two lamps was determined from photographs, although I do not guarantee that I have used the correct size of piping (thicker for the main supply, thinner for the supply to the pilot lights). On the other hand, I did put down small mounting pads of styrene strip off-cuts, as these were clearly visible in the photographs. I think it is well worthwhile to make a reasonable attempt to get the roof details, including gas piping, etc. more or less right, as these features are far more visible on the model from a normal viewing angle than the underframe detail.

Turning to the underframe, I did not propose to fit compensated compensation to this vehicle, so the underframe for the 'Mink C' was assembled straight from the kit, complete with its moulded W-irons, springs and axleboxes, although I did insert brass pin-point bearings in the axleboxes. This vehicle had 3-foot diameter disc wheels.

The brakes were also assembled from the kit parts, but in this case I mounted the push-rods on what was now the 'B' side of the van the same way round as those on the 'A' side – i.e. with the moulded detail facing inwards. This corrects the anomaly which I pointed out in my article on the construction of a 'Mink C' (in MRJ No.45) when the brakes were assembled the 'right' (i.e. wrong) way round. As in the case of the 'Mink C', ABS V-hangers (F.U19) were substituted in place of the moulded V-hangers on the solebars of the kit, and an ABS brake cylinder was added (either from F.319, or from F.315). A long gas cylinder (Mallard) was also stuck under the floor.

The double footboards below the doors were assembled in the same way as on the Y2, using 3mm x 1mm brass angle filed to shape, with rebates cut out of the back of the lower steps to clear the axle boxes. These were soldered to two pieces of wire fixed behind the solebars and anchored in the floor. Experience long ago taught me that metal has to be used for fittings of this sort, which would be very vulnerable to damage if they were fabricated from plastic.

Dean Churchward (D/C III) brake levers were fitted (ABS castings, again from F.319 or F.315). The stretchers between the axleboxes were flat strip on this vehicle, and so nickel-silver strip was glued direct to the axlebox keeps. Buffers were the later RCH 2-rib type for vacuum fitted stock (ABS F.317). The vacuum hoses, which hung down, were surplus from a Ratio plastic kit, and the steam hoses, also suspended, were castings whose origin I have now forgotten, but there are plenty to choose from on the market. Smith's screw-type couplings (LP5) were fitted later.

One final detail which I added before the model was painted was to stick a thin 'plate' of styrene sheet over a couple of planks just to the left of the centre line of the body, on which the instruction '*Return to Worcester*' would later be written in italic script.

This model was painted with other Brown Vehicles, but because the prototype was built in the late 1930s, it had black ends and did not carry the running number on the ends. Numbers ran from 2803 to 2832 and from 2847 to 2866. 'Methfix' transfers were used for applying numbering and lettering. The GWR roundel or 'collar stud' totem was applied in this period to denote ownership. It is difficult to get the PC/HMRS transfers to fit on some Brown Vehicles, and a bit of juggling was required to get "FRUIT C" and "PASSENGER" into the space available. When it came to '*Return to Worcester*', I had to compromise and change this to read '*Empty to Worcester*'. The transfers were protected with a coat of sprayed matt varnish, followed later by some weathering.

As with some of the other Brown Vehicles, the roof was painted white, with brown below the rain strips. In this case, I decided to model the vehicle in nearly new condition, and so the soot weathering I later sprayed on the roof left the original white colouring of the roof still visible under the soot. As in the case of the Y2 'Fruit A', this model was weighted to a total of 50 grams [but as noted before, if a vehicle is to run in train with whitmetal models, its weight needs to be 'beefed up' to match them].