

GRS Kit : RCH 1939 (Air Ministry Specification) 14-Ton Oil Tank Wagon.

This GRS kit is representative of the fleet of more than 3,000 tank wagons which were built to Government order during WW2 for use of the Air Ministry in transporting fuel and lubricants for air operations. After the war the tanks were sold to the major oil companies. These (supposedly) standard specification wagons were built by nine different contractors so, as one might expect, a considerable number of variations crept into the design and, after the war, even more variation appeared as the oil companies modified them to meet their individual requirements. Oil tank wagons were one of the more colourful aspects of the steam era goods train (at least when the tanks were clean) so I could not resist the GRS kit and went on the pre-release waiting list.

If you are wanting an accurate model, you will need to choose your prototype wagon before you commence construction. The combination of wheel type, welded or riveted tank, position of mounting straps, turnbuckles, ladders and catwalks (or lack thereof) represent just the major options. Add to these the post-war variations (Class 'A' or 'B', addition of ladders, variations in catwalks and modifications to tank mountings) and you have another set of possibilities.

A very thorough treatise on the subject, written by Peter Fidczuk, was published in 'Modellers Back Track' Volume 3 issues No.1 and No.2 (1993) and is a 'must read' if you want to get it right.

Turning now to the kit (in fact I ended up building two) the first thing to decide is the period you wish to represent and the class of wagon (class 'A' is for petroleum spirit and 'B' fuel oil or lubricants). The kit is provided with fittings for a class 'B' tank which has a bottom discharge pipe with a valve control wheel on the tank top. A class 'B' tank would normally also have a steam heating coil for thinning heavy oils to aid discharge (the manifold connection for which is externally visible on one end of the tank) but this fitting is not included in the kit. Class 'A' wagons have different tank top fittings to those supplied, since they were discharged by siphoning from a connection on the tank top. I elected for two Class 'A' tanks since I find the silverette livery more attractive than the black of most class 'B' tanks.

The GRS tank barrel is of the riveted type and incorporates a fundamental error. Tank barrels of this type are composed of three main rings and the seam of the centre ring is staggered so that it is on the opposite side of the wagon to those of the two outer rings, each ring having just a single seam. Unfortunately, the GRS barrel has both sides identical, with the result that there is no seam on the centre ring but two seams on each of the outer rings. The first task was to correct this error by scraping, filing and sanding the surplus seams from the outer rings and creating a new seam on the centre ring. In the case of the riveted tank (I built one welded, the other riveted) this included adding a row of brass rivets along the newly-created seam.

Having corrected the barrel, you can now move on to the underframe. The end baulks (transverse 'timbers' which locate the ends of the tank) are slightly too tall. I cut mine down to correspond to the drawing but you may be content to leave them as they are not too conspicuous. The tank saddles and end baulks will require careful paring and sanding in order to make the tank rest correctly on the underframe. A great deal of care is required to ensure the barrel is located centrally on the underframe and perfectly upright before drilling the mounting holes : If it is out of true, the end stanchions will not locate correctly. This is probably the most difficult stage of assembly. When assembling the brake gear, be aware that the instructions relating to the 'V' hangers are wrong and the illustrations show the 'V' hangers incorrectly positioned.

The outer hanger (mounted on the outer surface of the solebar) should be cranked outwards over the flange of the solebar and not inwards as described in the instructions. This correction removes the requirement to use the spacer to pack the inner 'V' away from the inside of the solebar.

Having avoided these pitfalls, the remainder of the assembly can be done following the instructions and incorporating any modifications to suit the particular wagon being modelled. As with any kit, the care taken in the detailing pays dividends in the final result.

Overall a satisfying model but one requiring a great deal of care in assembly.

John Candy
10 February 2009

NOTE : This review relates to a kit supplied when this model was first released at the beginning of 2007. Current kits may have been subjected to modification.