



Winnipeg Model Railroad Club

Model Contest Tips

This is adapted from one written in 2015 by long-time WMRC Member
Morgan Turney - WMRC Model Contest Chairperson in 2015

So, you want to enter a model in the WMRC Model Contest. **That is EXCELLENT!** The Winnipeg Model Railroad Club hosts its annual Model (and Photo) Contest each year at the Club's Open House in the Spring. Why? It's an opportunity for Club Members to highlight their modelling skills to others, and perhaps learn some techniques for the future. It has been a tradition in the Club since its beginnings and some years ago trophies were developed to honour modeling (and photographic) achievement.

At one time when the Club membership was well over 150, there were several categories for the Model Contest with several entries in each one. The Club had trophies, but it was found that most winners did not want to take them home from the Annual Dinner. In a few cases some were damaged. Plaques and personalized *Certificates of Merit* were initiated and in keeping with the changes in the National Model Railroad Association (NMRA), the number of categories was reduced. In keeping with the NMRA, the Club also started incorporating a Scratchbuilt judging area.

Starting with the 2026 Spring Show there are now six categories for the Model Contest: Motive Power; Rolling Stock; Structures; Displays; Modules; and the Annual Special Event. To avoid any confusion, Motive Power includes any type of steam, diesel, or electric locomotive, traction unit, maintenance vehicle, or other type of self-propelled vehicle that runs on rails. This includes everything from "speeders" to "Big Boys" and includes unpowered models of powered prototypes (dummy locomotives). Rolling Stock is just about anything that runs on rails and is not self-propelled. This includes freight, non-revenue, and passenger cars of any kind including baggage cars, RPO cars, business cars, and cabooses as well as hand cars.

Many modellers enjoy showing and sharing their models and the Spring Show and Model Contest is the perfect venue for this. To select which models in their respective categories are plaque and *Certificate of Merit* winners, the Club utilizes a point system that has been adapted from the NMRA. The NMRA "Achievement Program Judging Guidelines" are complex; the Club uses a much simpler evaluation. Regardless, there are some easy "rules" to follow for you to earn the points necessary to win a 1st, 2nd, or 3rd Place Plaque and Certificate of Merit!

All six model categories are judged basically in the same manner. Of course, the idea is to accumulate as many points as possible in five different areas. The five areas in each Category for Judging are: Construction; Detail; Conformity; Finish and Lettering; and Scratchbuilding. Regardless of the category of modelling or the area of judging, entries can be kit built, scratchbuilt, or a combination of both.

Simply put, the more work you have put into the model, the more points that will be awarded in each respective area of judging. Keep in mind that it's not just one Judge who evaluates your model in all areas. Judge A will only judge the Construction area of each model. Judge B is only going to look at Details for all the models. Since each Judge only has a score sheet for their specific area e.g., Construction, they have no idea what is being entered by Judge B. There are five Judges looking at the same models but with different judging criteria, and not knowing what is being scored by the other four.

Here are the first two tips. One; enter every Category that you can. Why? If nobody enters anything for Rolling Stock and yours is the only one, you win First Place! If only you and one other enter Motive Power one of you is going to receive First Place and the other will be Second Place!

And the second tip? When you provide your Entry Form you will also have to complete a Judge's Score Sheet. The first lets the Judges know what your name is and which of the five categories you're entering a

specific model. The second sheet is where you have the opportunity to “prime” the Judges. Enter everything that you can about your model: How complex was it to build; Did you do any soldering; What detail items did you add; What company(s) made those details; What was the prototype that you modelled; Why was that prototype unique; Attach photographs or plans so that the Judge knows what you were modelling; Describe the finish and the decaling – did you print your own decals; What parts did you fabricate out of wood, or metal, or plastic, or 3D printed¹? The more detailed notes and photos/plans that you provide, more that the Judges can discern about your model.

Other than the actual construction of the model, the most important category is CONFORMITY. Think about that; you’re trying to duplicate a model of a prototype so … show the Judges what you’re duplicating! If you provide a photo of the prototype that you’re modelling as part of your entry material, that will show the Judges that your model conforms to the prototype. If the photo shows a rust streak down the side of a box car, and you added that detail to your model, more points can be awarded because it conforms to the prototype. If the photo shows the bell located on the underframe, and you wrote down that you moved the bell to match the prototype, you’ll get more points! Again – write down every detail that you can think of to get more points awarded! Remember the old adage: *“Pictures are worth a thousand words.”*

CONSTRUCTION – fairly self-explanatory. This area mirrors the scratchbuilding section to a degree so the more you have scratchbuilt the more points you’ll have awarded. HINT: some modellers keep a written record as they make their model(s) so that when the time comes to fill out the Judge’s sheets that already have the work they did written down!

DETAIL. Were the details commercially purchased or did you make them yourself? Ensure that you write down the manufacturer, and in some cases the manufacturer’s model number, of parts that you replace or add to the model(s). Maybe you added a tack board to the side of a box car kit and the kit didn’t come with one; ensure that you write down that detail. Don’t forget the weathering details. If your intent was that the model looked like it just came out of the railroad’s paint job be absolutely certain to note that. Otherwise, weathering can make a big difference in point allocation!

FINISH and LETTERING. Be certain to fill in the boxes that apply to your model and check off how you painted the model. What decals were used? Did you print your own decals or purchase them? How did you weather the model; chalk, paint (what kind e.g., Vallejo or Tamiya acrylic or metallic); eye shadow, pigment, etc. How does your finish and lettering conform to the prototype photo you provided?

SCRATCHBUILT. This is the most difficult area for the Judges to score. Use as much detail as possible to describe what was physically scratchbuilt by you. Write down how you scratchbuilt the various components. Did you cut your own logs to simulate a log load? That is scratchbuilding. Anything and everything that you added to your model that was fabricated by your own hand is considered scratchbuilt.

Some modellers worry that the Judges will not be impartial; they’ll know who entered what even though there is no identifying information on the Judging Score Sheets except an Entry Number. That is why there is a Model Contest Chair. This person does not do any judging; they are an arbitrator if required, and a source for any questions that the Judges might have. The Model Contest Chair also ensures that if a Judge has a model entry that the Judge will not be judging their own model.

So, what’s stopping you from entering the Model Contest? You don’t have a model ready for the April Open House? Seriously?

Come on – you have something or several items that you’ve put together that you are very, very proud of. You’ve taken the hours and days and weeks to create a piece of model railroadania. Your family and friends are thrilled at what you’ve accomplished! You have skillsets that should be shared with others in the Club!

Show off to your fellow modellers! Enter one … or more …!

¹ To be recognized as 3D printed scratchbuilt items, you must have created the CAD design.

3D printed items obtained on the internet or purchased commercially cannot be classified as scratchbuilt.