

“Upon opening the box” or “Oh my goodness what have I bought?”

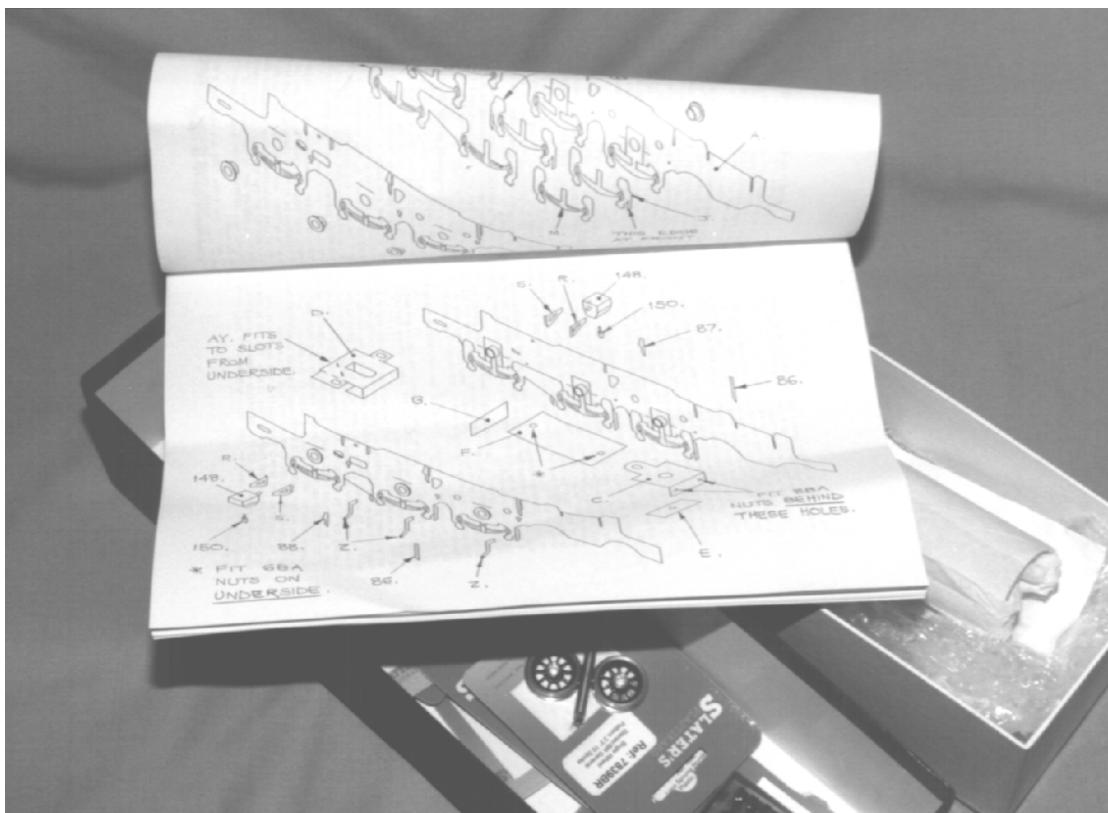
Bob Alderman © 2003

The following article was written to supplement the Manual that has been evolving for the Missenden Modellers Weekend. The Weekend is an annual event, for a long time organised by the late Martin Brent of “Arcadia” fame and now continuing under the helm of Chris Langdon. As a “tutor” at the event I have been meeting both fairly experienced modellers and the absolute novice just starting in the hobby. A common comment was about the way in which a kit, usually a loco kit, is presented and their reactions.

The purchase of a model locomotive kit is generally something of a major financial undertaking. I've usually bought my own loco and other kits. My fairy godmother only seems to buy me socks!

So what do you expect to see in the box? Usually nothing, as it all well wrapped we hope, and will be further obscured by the instructions.

Take the instructions out and discard. That's what a lot of modellers seem to do and blithely leap into construction and only look them up when deep in the mire. Often then tending to blame the quality of the instructions! Seriously, carefully place to one side for further viewing the parts.



The initial opening

Now take a look, but look only. There will be a packet or so of castings, whitemetal and, increasingly, brass and nickel silver lost wax castings. There should be a packet with all the machined items, axle bushes, buffer heads and the like. Some kits have what seems to be myriad of small castings. This can appear to be very daunting. Perhaps with them will be a rolled boiler neatly wrapped in tissue paper. There may be some lengths of wire for handrails

and other parts. Similarly for a whitemetal kit you will get the major castings well wrapped and a set of smaller packages for the smaller items.

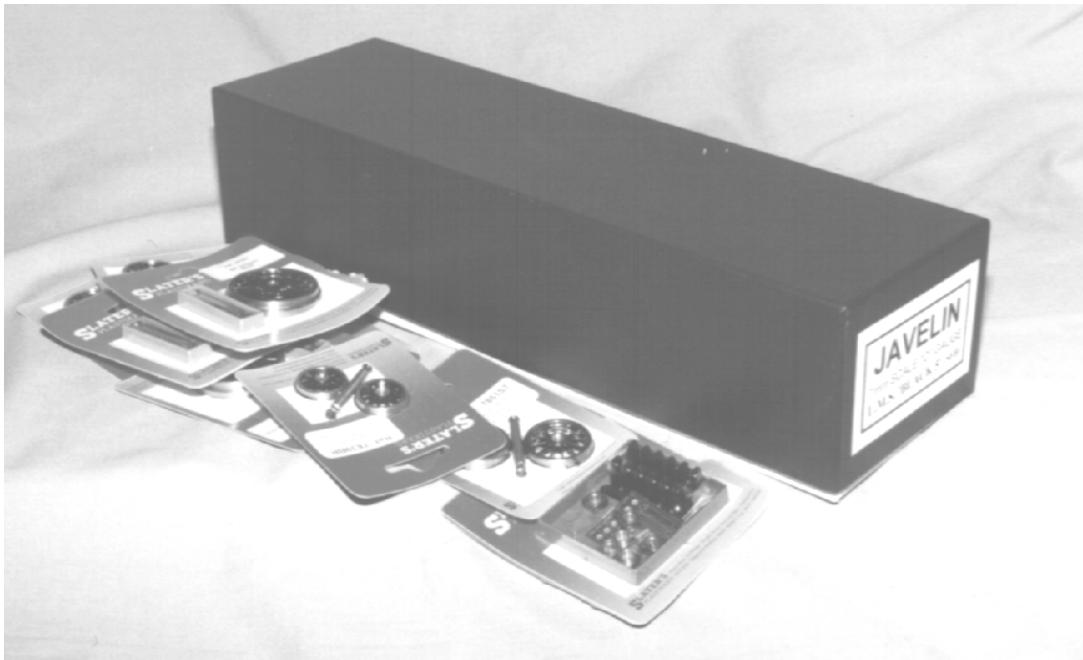


Some of the parts

Under all this will be the etchings, perhaps only a chassis for a cast kit. These should be wrapped in tissue too. For the moment stop! After this point repacking the box usually become difficult. Another reason is that unnecessary handling can damage them and maybe, if like me you have acid perspiration, finger marks can turn up on otherwise pristine surfaces.

Now return to the instructions. They must be somewhere you've only just taken them out of the box! It's not uncommon for them to become inextricably mixed up with the day's correspondence!

The initial look should give you the information on what other parts you have to buy that are not included in the kit. These are usually wheels and motor though some kits do include these, and some even bags of coal for the bunker. You may have already purchased the additional parts at the same time as the kit. You may also wish to further enhance the model with suspension, compensation or horn blocks. Similarly plunger pick-ups may be your choice. So in addition to the kit parts a tidy pile of other parts will be accumulating too.



The “extras”

So back to the instructions. You really should thoroughly familiarise yourself with them. Instructions can be very variable; the text layout can either be clear or confusing. Is it “step by step” in clear sentences or paragraphs or is the text all run together and stages of construction difficult to differentiate? The use of English can be interesting at times! They can be well illustrated or almost lacking illustration, but even a good illustration can miss off components. Most importantly there should be a means of identifying all the various components that have been supplied. Often there is a copy of the etch layout with part numbers superimposed over the outlines. Where the parts are well identified on the etch sheet a simple list suffices. Sometimes where there are etches in both brass and nickel silver then two pictures or lists. Similarly the various castings and other parts should be listed. Initially identify those parts in the packets this is usually where mistakes happen and parts are not included. Try and do this without opening the packet. Then YOU won’t lose a part. It is most unusual for an etched sheet to be missed.

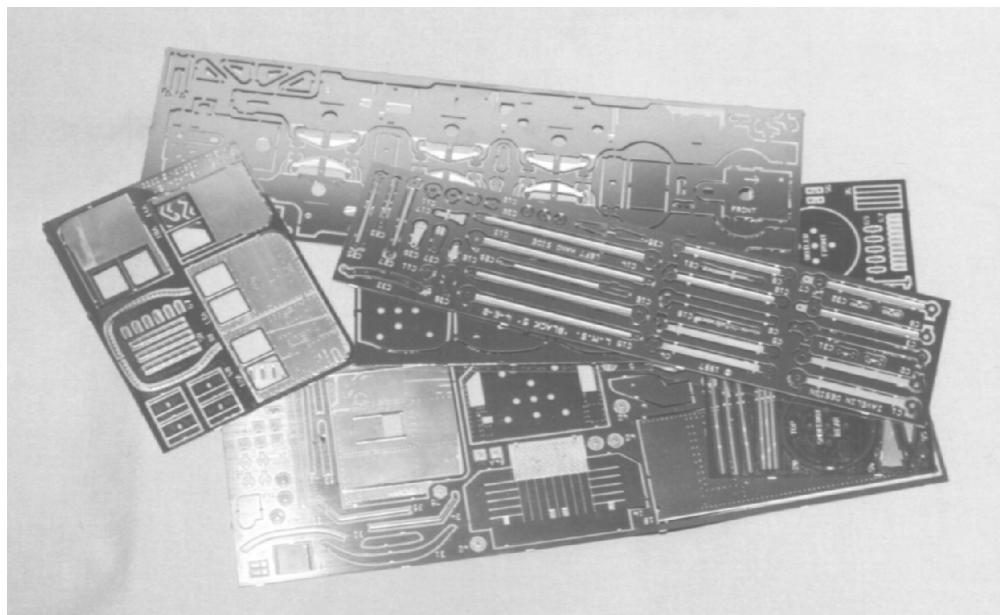
Probably the most confusing instructions are those where the text is lumped together. These bear especial reading and re-reading. It will be an advantage to have some coloured pens to hand. Use them to underline all the component identities, number or description, in one colour. Then read again and identify where the description changes from one component to another and separate the text with a line of a different colour. Irrespective of this it will be worth having a third colour when constructing the model. Use this to tick off each stage. It will help remind you where you stopped if construction is prolonged or interrupted.

If I dwell overlong on the instructions it is because experience has shown me that modellers do not read them at all, or only give them a cursory look! True some instructions are not well written so even more reason to read them. In your own mind you will begin to fill in the gaps or query the order of things. Even in the best instructions (in my experience) the order can go awry. I have come across “Step X - fit whitemetal part 27” followed “Step Y – solder on brass part 36”. In this order the whitemetal would have melted!

Even relatively brief instructions bear a thorough reading too. As you begin to understand the instructions you will begin to build the model in your mind. Now you’re on your way.

Hopefully by now you feel confident to look a little further into the box. Now is the time to open up the etches – carefully. Examine them for any damage, sometimes a bent corner. This may or may not affect a component. Severe damage will be cause for replacement. A polite letter to the manufacturer should result in a replacement. Often though some gentle adjustment puts things right.

Recognising the parts will now begin with the etches in front of you. Sometimes something in the flat appears to bear no resemblance to the part in 3D.



Admire the etches.

Now is the time to think of finishing the model too. Most cab spectacle plate windows were glazed. A few kits provide material for this, but you may have to find some clear plastic for the purpose. It is now, with the kit un-built, that it is easiest to use the cab components in the flat to mark out the plastic. The window can then be cutout and trial fitted. Once you have set of windows, package them safely and keep for fitting when the model is painted.

Similarly now is the time to use the etches to make templates to assist with lining the loco when its painted. The cab sides, maybe front, splashes and tender sides are now all easily accessible for taking templates from.

Consider too, at this stage, if it will be possible to separate the boiler, cab and footplate into individual items for subsequent painting. Some kits allow this but others do not. It may only take a small design change to achieve this. Now is the time to plan this.

Now you have a recognisable and familiar set of parts in front of you. Familiar enough for you to have built large parts of the model in the mind's eye. Now the actual build can commence.

Acknowledgement. The illustrations are from a Javelin kit 7mm scale kit of an LMS Black Five with their permission and in the light of some of the comments above they have a clear conscience.