

Contents

Chapter 1

Vehicle history and basics4

Chapter 2

Plastic kits10

Chapter 3

Resin and metal kits18

Chapter 4

Detailing and weathering cars and trucks30

Chapter 5

Converting toys to scale models42

Chapter 6

Modifying and scratchbuilding truck bodies54

Chapter 7

Truck loads68

Chapter 8

Paint and decals76

Chapter 9

Lighting vehicles84

List of manufacturers94

About the author95



CHAPTER ONE

Vehicle history and basics

A single scene may include vehicles from a wide range of years. Here, a plain-Jane, single-color 1950 DeSoto, displaying the pontoon fenders of the period, is parked ahead of a much-flashier, two-tone 1959 Cadillac (at right). The panel truck at left is a 1959 Chevy.

Jeff Wilson collection

Scale trucks, automobiles, and other vehicles are more than just nice accessories to add to a model railroad. Vehicles help tell a layout's story by setting it in a specific time frame. Also, names of familiar businesses on the sides of trucks let viewers know that a layout is set in a particular region or city.

Because vehicles are all around us in real life (and there are a lot of car and vehicle buffs out there), it's likely a visitor who is not a modeler or railfan will more easily be able to identify with a nice model of an automobile or truck than with a train.

Vehicles also offer many modeling opportunities for customization and personalization. You can customize a delivery truck with a special load or paint scheme to immortalize a friend or honor a local business.

Vehicle models have progressed tremendously in the past 20 years. Assembled models (especially in HO scale) are available that match a wide variety of prototype automobiles, many featuring true-to-builder factory paint schemes. Details have improved dramatically, with many models now including light lenses, seats and interiors, figures, windshield wipers, builders' insignia, hubcap lettering, chrome, and fine grilles.

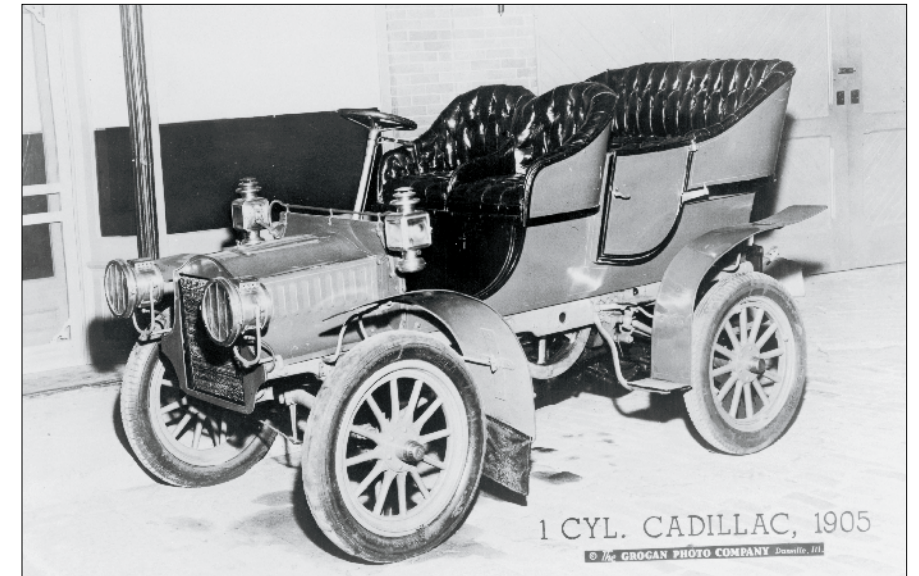
There are still plenty of vehicle kits on the market, offering ample opportunities to enhance, detail, and modify assembled models. And a great thing about eBay and other online sources is that, even if older kits and models are no longer in production, for the most part, if a kit has been offered at some point, you can track it down somewhere.

Older kits and models are often bargains compared to newer models, and with a bit of work, some paint, and details, you can improve these older kits and make them foreground models. Many of the projects in this book feature this older type of model.

As you go through this book, realize that it is not meant to be a how-to guide for duplicating specific projects. Instead, use the tips and techniques presented to enhance the models that mean something to you and fit with your prototype railroad, locale, and era. Also, although the vehicles throughout the book are HO scale (the scale that I model), you can use many of the same techniques and methods in N and other scales.

Automobile history

The first practical internal combustion cars of the late 1800s were essentially



Early cars featured open designs. This fancy 1905 Cadillac is modern enough to have pneumatic tires and a steering wheel. *Library of Congress*



Ford's Model T was the first widely available, assembly line produced car. This 1921 version still looks good in 1938. *Library of Congress*



This early 1920s Diamond T shows the open cab and narrow tires typical of that era. It sports a fresh paint job in 1930 for Railway Express Agency. *Jeff Wilson collection*



1

CHAPTER FIVE

Converting toys to scale models

Some paint, details, and a bit of kitbashing can turn toy vehicles into scale models. This Dodge LPG truck began as a Matchbox wrecker and the Ford reefer as a Matchbox dump truck.

When trying to find vehicles to match specific prototypes, don't overlook the cars, trucks, and other vehicles that have been offered as toys over the years. Although some are not to scale or are crude in terms of detailing, others offer good potential—with a bit of work—to become realistic scale models, 1.

I follow a few basic criteria. First is appearance: Is the detailing good? Does it match a prototype accurately enough for my needs? Does it represent a prototype that I can't get in a true scale model?

Next comes size: Are its proportions realistic, and does its size match my scale close enough? It usually doesn't have to be exact—for HO (1:87) layouts, for instance, S scale models (1:64) are usually just too big to look realistic. However, models in the range of 1:72 to 1:100 can sometimes be used by placing them away from other models. Test the appearance by setting it next to a few scale models. If the effect is jarring or unconvincing, then avoid it.

Also, if you don't trust eyeballing this, use known scale dimensions. For example, a truck body should be 8'-6" wide (8'-0" through the 1970s) and a max of 13'-6" tall (12'-6" into the 1960s and shorter before that). Look at the cab and body separately—either or both can serve as raw material for a new truck.

My first projects are a couple of toy trucks that have been around since the late 1960s: Dodge and Ford trucks from Matchbox, 2. The Dodge is a reasonable facsimile of an early 1960s light-heavy Dodge conventional cab, and the other is a pretty good model of a Ford N-series truck of the mid to late 1960s, neither of which is available as a true scale model. I'm using only the cabs for each.

Some of these early Matchbox (and other) toys are collectible, but many were played with hard, including the two that I found in a box at a rummage sale for 50 cents each. Search eBay and antique stores, and you can come up with inexpensive toys like this.

Disassembly

Usually the first step in a toy conversion is taking the model apart. Matchbox trucks have tough cast-metal bodies, and the frames can be either plastic or metal. They're usually riveted together, so start by drilling out the rivets, 3. I used a drill press, although a handheld drill will work as well. Start by drilling a hole through the rivet



2

This Matchbox Dodge dump truck (left) has lost its box, and both it and the Ford tow truck (right) have been played with extensively. Both are close enough to HO scale to make credible models.



3

If models are riveted together, drill out the rivets. Start with a small pilot hole and then use a bit as large as the rivet.



4

Cut the cab from the body, frame, or chassis. A small hacksaw works best for metal bodies.



1

CHAPTER SIX

Modifying and scratchbuilding truck bodies

This HO scale Fruit Growers Express 40-foot refrigerated trailer was modified (kitbashed) from a Walther's 40-foot dry van. It's an example of how truck models can be customized to represent specific prototype vehicles.

Even with the variety of model trucks available, you might not be able to find a model that matches the specific prototype you're looking for. If you're trying to model a specific truck or piggyback trailer, you have many options for starting points, and it's often a comparatively easy modeling task to modify an existing body or build your own using styrene, 1.

Simple box bodies are a good place to start. They come in a variety of styles, in dry and refrigerated versions, and in many sizes—depending upon what they're designed to haul. The largest straight boxes today are 24 and 26 feet long, but smaller boxes are also common. Check photos from the era you're modeling to get an idea of common construction styles and sizes.

Box conversion

I needed a refrigerated box for the Matchbox Ford truck conversion I did in chapter 5. I wanted the truck to represent a store milk delivery truck from the days of my youth in the late 1960s-early 1970s. I started with the box from a Boley truck (no. 4002), which is now part of Walther's SceneMaster line. The Boley truck was more modern, but the box had distinctive rounded wheel cutouts that were common through the 1960s. Some details were rather heavy and needed to be modified, and it would also need to be shortened a bit.

The body has a frame/ridge running around the perimeter of each side, but it was way too heavy to be realistic. I decided to remove it completely by rubbing the sides on sandpaper, 2. For a smooth finish, start with 100-grit until the ridges are gone, then move to 220-grit, and finish by wet-sanding the side with 400-grit wet-dry paper. I did the same to the rear, as the molded hinges and door latches were a bit too heavy. I left the grooves that indicated the edges of the doors.

The body was longer than I wanted (18 feet), so I cut it down to a 16-footer by cutting a scale 2 feet from the front. After marking the new dimension on the body, I used a small machinist's square to keep the cuts aligned and cut each surface with a sharp hobby knife, 3. Don't try to cut too deeply in a single pass—multiple passes will result in a smoother edge with less chance of the blade slipping. You can also use a razor saw, but I find a knife to be more precise and less messy.

Make sure the edges are square and smooth by rubbing the end of the box on fine sandpaper. Add the new end by



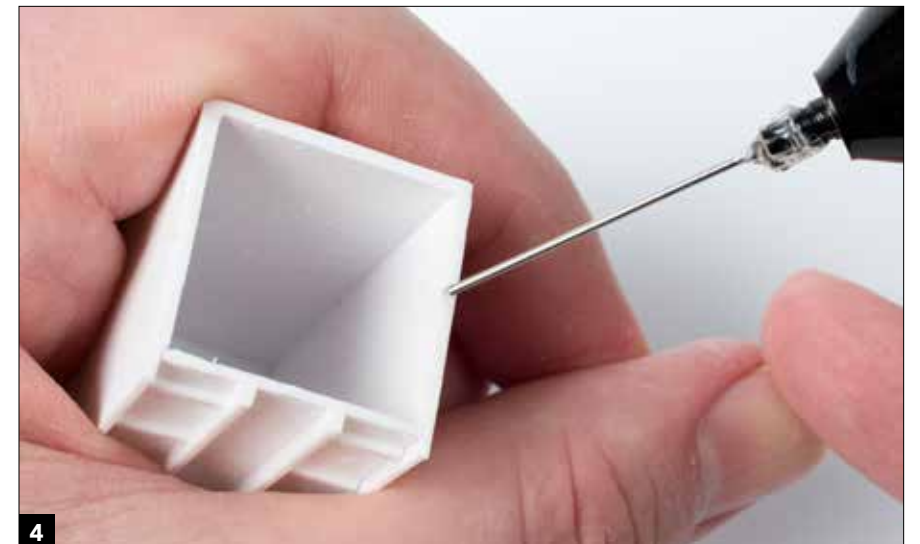
2

The Boley box had a heavy frame around the edge of each side, but rubbing each side on progressively finer sandpaper removes it.



3

Trim each side with a hobby knife, making repeated light passes. A machinist's square ensures proper alignment.



4

Run a bead of gel-type liquid plastic cement around the edge of the box and then press it against the new styrene front.