

GWR 4-plank open wagon.

On display at the WEP stand at the Halifax show in 2001 was the latest kit to emerge from Bill Parker's innovative stable of etched brass wagons. A long awaited (others and I started making noises two years ago!) etch for God's Wonderful basic 4 plank open merchandise wagon.



Any GW modeller will need hordes of these, particularly if modelling pre WWI when the majority of vehicles in freight trains were made up of various open wagons. Vans were much less common than they later became. Such kits of course must be easy to build and reasonably priced. This one compares well with the plastic versions available with the distinct added advantage that it has enough mass to hold its own without extra ballast and crisp detail combined with great strength and fine brake detail. By the time you read this I will have completed a further 20 and some of the notes that follow are based my findings during batch construction.

The kit comes as usual as a flat packed single etched sheet taped to stout card, a bag of white metal castings, coupling links and bearings and some brass wire.

Instructions are to Bill's usual high standard, neatly printed and excellently illustrated with good exploded diagrams. The major dimensions all check out correctly. It is 16' over headstocks and 15'6" inside; the thickness of the planking is 3".

The method of design and construction is almost exactly the same as for the 5 plank, (also reviewed elsewhere). Unfortunately, I have lost the original photographs taken during construction. Four separate etches make up the outer sides and ends with planking and bolt details that fold over at right angles to make the top edges. Scoring the metal from the etched side and good bending bars are essential for the sides; ends and sole bars since the fold-overs are scale size.

These are soldered to the open top box using spacers so we get scale thickness sides in brass but lightness and detail too.

Strapping and bottom strips for the doors & end stanchions for the ends are separately etched. Fitting the stanchions and the door bottom strips are best secured, I have found, by using a method similar to that used for old tinplate models.

Open out the slots, which are slightly undersize (as of course they ought to be) carefully with a No: 11 scalpel blade. Carefully file the cusp off the visible edges of the tabs, then insert the stanchion or bottom strip tabs into their respective slots. Hold the parts tightly together. I used some fine, square nosed pliers to hold the stanchion or strip and another pair to *gently* twist the tabs about 30°; Twist them alternatively in opposite directions. This will hold the parts tight while avoiding any problems in cleaning up excess solder. I have constructed numerous kits using this method for external stanchions, etc., and, provided the tabs are a good fit in the slots nothing will distort or come adrift. The corner plates really do hold the whole thing together, just like the real thing.

The underframe is a set of etches that are commendably easy to construct, which are then soldered to the base of the body. It includes WEP's usual excellent three point compensated suspension. The wheels, as usual, need packing washers on the axles to prevent excessive side play. Eileen's Emporium's (usual disclaimer) 5BA washers do the job but, rub them down on some fine grit paper glued to a flat board first to get them flat and shiny on both sides.

I also found it was critical to use wire of sufficient diameter to hold the rocking unit tightly in place (The instructions clearly state 0.9mm but I missed that.) or the wagon sits too low at one end. I found that 1mm was necessary on some where the etching has opened up the holes more. Check it out each time.

I built this kit in five evenings but never worked for longer than an hour to an hour and a half at a time. Ian Hopkins painted and hand lettered it and soon it will go back to the paint shop for weathering, along with the other 20.

The kit produces a delightful model that should satisfy even the most ardent rivet counter, of which, there are 444.

Criticisms. These excellent etches are let down - as usual - by poor cast white metal buffers that need drilling out and have whitemetal heads and shafts. I have railed against these before and consider they detract from the high quality of the overall design and etching however, my dislike of white metal is well known and perhaps not generally shared. The axle guards are OK but appeared to have come from worn moulds because there was a good deal of flash on them.

I know Bill buys in these parts and I, and others, have strongly suggested that he should at least make available better parts to those of us willing to shell out a little more to maintain the same high quality. He has said that he is going to do this. I hope so. In the meantime I find that that Hayward Railway does a well-made white metal buffer with integral springs and steel heads.

The couplings are steel links that are fitted to an excellent etching of the gedge hook. These are laminated from two layers of brass and can then be filed to get the distinctive rounded shape that also makes coupling them up easier. They fit well in the etched slot provided. Do remember to chemically blacken the hook and links before fitting.

You can choose to build the early type with brakes on one side only or the later type when a single extra shoe and lever was provided on the other side. The single sided brake fits my chosen period but they were in use for many, many years and so would be valid on any GWR and probably steam era WR layout.

For this one off I used the supplied buffer bodies carefully drilled out by a colleague (Douglas Thomas) and provided with steel heads and integral springs, the remainder used integral buffers from Hayward. Very nice, when you can get them.

Old hands at my local Epsom club were impressed with the quality of the finished wagon and the creative way the problem of producing an etched brass open was achieved. All credit to Bill for producing - I think - the first etched open merchandise wagon. There is already of course an open etched signal post wagon but I have not tried that one, yet.

Bill's response to this review is typical of him and what one expects of a responsible model supplier, "a fair assessment". The castings for the springs on future kits has been improved and he intends to investigate better buffers. Future additions to the range of open wagons will be 3, 5 & 7 plank and china clay wagons (with opening end) and will include sheet support bars where applicable.

I have no hesitation in recommending this kit, which I consider to be accurate, easy to build and good overall value, to anyone needing GWR opens. I now have 21 of them, mostly painted red to fit my 1900 period and await the 3, 5 & 7 plank versions with interest while agitating for some 1 and 2 planks too!

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