

THE MITCHELL MANOR



In May 1998 at an exhibition I bought, on a whim, the Malcolm Mitchell kit for the Manor. Propelled by an urge to build something bigger after completing the 517 and remembering my own experiences of these superb engines working hard in BR days.

I also invested in having the boiler pre-rolled, the firebox ready shaped and Malcolm's lost wax brass prototype crank pin nuts, all well worth the little extra cost. Consequently, a large package arrived a few days later with the parts for the Manor and 3500 gallon tender.

Resisting the temptation to begin building I put the kit of parts away and spent a couple of weeks simply studying the construction notes and gathering information about the class.

A letter duly went off to the late proprietor of Len's of Sutton for photographs and a copy of "Locomotives Illustrated No:114" dedicated to Granges and Manors was obtained. I spent ages going through every book I possess (not a small number) cataloguing pictures of Manors at work. A drawing from the NRM was next and set of Slater's wheels came after that.

All this money and not an iron turned on in anger yet! However, this was only my second foray into 7mm locomotive building and I wanted to build a model of an actual locomotive, as I did with the 517, and to get it right. Eventually I decided upon 7805 Broome Manor because I had pictures of it from both sides at about the same period.

So what does one get in the large and sturdy box?

The engine comes as one sheet of nickel silver for the frames, motion and bogie and three of brass for the remainder. (The tender is all brass and is really a separate kit with its own book of instructions and exploded diagrams.) A comprehensive booklet of instructions, a couple of bags of lost wax brass, copper and white metal castings, various screws, washers and bearings and a collection of various gauges of wire. There are also four sheets of exploded diagrams and numerous detail drawings in the instruction book.

The instructions contain a parts list and it is well worth checking that all the items are present. With several hundred parts it is easy for a couple to be missed.

However, my experience of Mitchell Design kits is that missing parts are speedily and courteously despatched.

How does it compare for dimensional accuracy? Every dimension I have checked against the drawing is spot on, especially the boiler so that its slender shape and large gap between it and the foot plate are faithfully preserved. It is the only kit I know of for the Manor that is a truly accurate portrayal and not a compromise. A sadly underrated kit in my opinion. Particularly when one considers the chequered career these locomotives had in BR days.

Eventually I got around to actually starting work and began with the frames as recommended in the instructions. I made the rear axle the driven one since the chassis is designed to take a Portescap RG7 motor vertically in the firebox and I happened to have one in stock.

I had originally intended to use my preferred method of power using a 6 volt motor, batteries and infrared control and got as far as mounting all the necessary batteries in the boiler. However, my chosen period keeps receding into the past and is now to circa 1910, in those circumstances a Manor would clearly be an anachronism. Instead I decided to build it using conventional track power to a Portescap, with a view to "letting it go" one day. It actually did go, unexpectedly, at Telford 2000.

I dislike pickup's, wire pickups are fiddly and get bent out of shape, while plunger types introduce unnecessary drag. Doug Thomas suggested using an American method of picking up from one side of the loco and the opposite side of the tender with an insulated coupling between them. To do this required committing violence to the wheels by shorting half of them out. This was achieved by drilling into the back of both the rim and the boss and carefully soldering a wire between them. Very easy really and it worked a treat however, I have since discovered, for a different project, a product called Electolube silver conductive paint that does the job excellently.

The chassis was started first as per instructions and it really does go together very well indeed. All the parts fit where they are supposed and in no time at all it seemed I had a smoothy running compensated chassis. It would be just as easy I suspect to use full springing and the chassis also has sufficient extra parts to build to Scale 7 standards. The bogie is an excellent representation of the real thing too

The ease of construction of the kit is, I think, largely down to its excellent design. This is not to say of course that one shakes the box and it all falls together. It requires serious work and attention.

I made the cylinders removable because otherwise removing the front drivers is a fiddle and it simplified removal of the motion as well. Fitting the full brake gear is straight forward and it was worth taking the trouble to fit fine chain retainers to the

beams as well. I used some fine silver chain obtained for a couple of pounds in a cheap jewellers, just be careful how you solder it!

The instructions suggest soldering the smoke box, boiler and firebox solid onto the foot plate but I was concerned about how the painter would cope. Instead I modified the construction so that the boiler barrel, soldered to the smoke box was separate from the firebox.

Holes were drilled in the end pieces of the boiler barrel and the firebox before building those parts and 10BA bolts soldered in the boiler side. This allowed for the firebox to be bolted in place with 10BA nuts. The firebox and boiler barrel are then bolted as a unit into the back of the cab. However, for this I soldered some hefty brass strip to the inside of the outer firebox former and tapped four 10BA holes that matched holes in the cab back. Bolts then hold the firebox fast while their heads are hidden behind the backhead.

The smokebox mounting was also similarly beefed up with 2mm thick strip and tapped so that it could be bolted to the footplate. Some rearrangement of the fixing holes was required on this frame stretcher since it was necessary to also bolt the cylinders in place as well as provide a fixing for the bogie. It made for a little extra work but the more components I can make removable the better. This made subsequent assembly/disassembly work and painting very easy.

The only down side to this is that when disassembled, the footplate is somewhat vulnerable since it is a delicate set of etches but it is unlikely to be taken apart very often.

I experienced no problems with this kit and replaced very few parts (Carl Legg loco screw couplings for instance) but had fun making the buffers between tender and engine sprung.

Anyone with a modicum of patience and determination could build this kit, indeed, I am surprised to find so few of them on BR/WR layouts. Despite being few in number I remember seeing them all over the Western region in my spotting days, usually, unlike the one I built, very dirty and unkempt.

It was sent in works grey to Ian Hopkins who painted and lined it for me in ex-works BR lined green livery (in Great Western days they were plain green) and so it was at last finished in September 1999. The photograph gives some idea of how impressive the finished kit looks. If you model God's Wonderful, particularly BR period, then go and get one a give it a try.