My Bobber and other kits from the kitchen table:
Believe me, Athearn doesn't have to worry!

A few years ago I decided it might be neat to make up some HO scale kits that utilized resin castings combined with commercially available detail parts. I had had pretty good luck with mold-making and resin castings in modeling 1/25 dirt-track race cars and thought I could easily do up some train castings. I had also for years had a fondness for the O&W and thought there might be at least some level of interest from its devotees due to the dearth of available kits based on O&W prototypes. Obviously the big guys like Bill Schneider's Branchline couldn't justify the investment in molds, etc. for a kit that might sell just a few dozen copies.

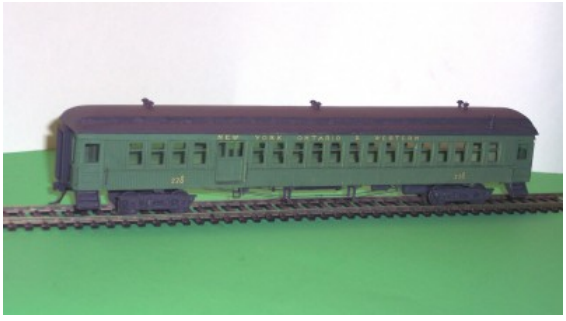
I decided to start with the Russell snowplow for three reasons: first, Walt Kierzkowski had sent me several photos of O&W plows; second, the Russell plow was used on many railroads so interest would not be limited just to O&W fans; and third, I had an old Ambroid kit of one and I thought that some judicious stealing of parts for mold masters from a kit of a company that was now defunct wouldn't get me into any legal hot water. (By the way, have you seen that this wooden classic kit has now been reissued and is selling for 80 bucks? Everything old is new again!).

So I made up the masters from primarily Evergreen plastic then the molds and had pretty good luck even with that complex-curved one piece plow master. In the process, I learned that a complex mold involving curves and undercuts such as the one for the plow would only be good for about maybe 20 pieces……the stress of removing the castings finally just splits the mold. I had great luck with the MicroMark ® 1 to 1 rubber and 1 to 1 resin mixes: they both cure very fast and are forgiving if your mix is not exactly 1 to 1. I also learned that in thin castings like the plow blades air bubbles in the resin are *verboten* and only result in scrap castings. It was also great to discover that an old warhorse like Selley was still in business making their oh-so-50's pot metal castings including oddballs like the small

searchlight for the light on top of the cupola. So I put this one up on ebay first and then on the OWRHS Yahoo group site and had great response, ending up selling about 35 of 'em with virtually no negative feedback. Hey, I thought, this is really great! What next?

I focused on the "great timber fleet" because I had never seen any kits off them except for the very early F&C resin ones which, having bought a couple on ebay, I found to have resin castings the consistency of peanut brittle and instructions that were comprised of a sketch without even a "hey, good luck!" thrown in. (To be fair, F&C kits are now just beautiful examples of accuracy and excellent castings.) I focused on the O&W's unique baggage cars because once again, Walt had sent me great photos, they didn't have too many windows, I had managed to make up a serviceable mold master of the chopped-end roof, and John Greene's Bethlehem Car Works had some perfect trucks and other detail parts. I had long ago made up my mind that my kits would be complete with trucks, couplers, grabirons, the works. I hate these kits that say "less t/c"……..does anybody ever buy a car without the damned wheels? Bah!

So in fairly short order (because now I had really been bitten by all of this) I produced kits of the 501 and 542 baggage cars. Both of them sold about 15 to 20 which I thought was pretty good given the small size of the O&W fan "congregation". Then I decided to try something a little more complex, the #228 "kitbashed" combine which was simply a coach with a baggage door hacked in the side. Bit and pieces of old LaBelle kits were used to make the mold masters and with this kit I really learned that with very narrow thin sections, like the thin frames across the windows, if after pouring the resin into the mold you don't run a toothpick through each and every one of those areas it just ain't happening…….the resin simply doesn't run into those narrow channels without a little prodding.

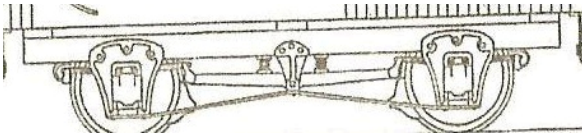


I was really pleased with this one and it too sold about 20 copies. Then I decided I would try something a little different and focused on the Fish's Eddy station. I had some pics of this one too and this project turned into just a delight, not so much for the kit but what I encountered in gathering information. First, Bill Phelps had some pictures of a model of the station that was built years and years ago prior to all the wonderful window castings we can now use. Then I ran across Marge Gould who as a kid lived in the station with her family when her father worked for the O&W during and after WWII. My conversations with Marge and Bill led me to write another article on this site,

"Swirling Around in Fish's Eddy." The bugaboo about this kit was the back of the station. There were no clear photos of it anywhere and I had to rely on Marge's memory, some fuzzy photos of the ends that showed just a *little* bit of the back, and some insight from Jeff Otto who looked through several muddy old photos as well. I had good luck with this one in making the bay window and upstairs back porch into single castings and having the windows and doors an integral part of the walls and ends. I think this one also sold about 15 and most likely not more because unless you were modeling that portion of the O&W or just had a love of old stations, you couldn't very well plop down a Fish's Eddy station in your layout featuring Cadosia, now could you? I then went on to do the Merrickville station, one of the O&W "standard" designs featured on several stations with the only real difference being the baggage and passenger ends were switched.

But I still had the wooden fleet bug and nobody had ever done a kit of the 200 series coaches. This is a natural, I thought, and I probably can sell about 50 of these as these things were just *everywhere* on the O&W so again hauled out the LaBelle box and made up the masters, put the call out to John Greene for the trucks, etc., made up kits in advance and waited for the orders to just roll in. But I only sold about 15 or so of these, kind of disappointing, but I thought oh, well, I'm kind of burned out on this deal for awhile anyway so this is a signal that interest is sort of falling off so I'll just rest up for awhile. And just like most of you, I'm sure, my train interest waxes and wanes and I was heading into a wane period anyway so a good time to stop making resin rings on my wife's craft table.

About a year ago I started to think about another kit and I settled on the bobber caboose because of what a cute little bugger it is and it was such a major part of the O&W around the turn of the century. The only ones around were pretty much the ready-to-run ones made by Mantua/Tyco and Life-Like but nothing close to the O&W version. This should be a snap, I thought, a little box body that I could do in one casting, just an old caboose roof hacked down to size, find the undercarriage pieces, easy! So armed with the usual armful of pictures from Walt, on and off I started looking around for components.



Much to my disappointment, I couldn't find any undercarriage like the O&W used. I even bought an ancient Cliff Line bobber kit on ebay thinking maybe, just maybe, the trucks would match but nope. Any available had toolboxes and all kinds of other junk on them but nothing like the open frame with the tie rods of the O&W. So I thought well, I'll just have to make some up then. I scoured around and

found some great journal boxes at Precision Scale (brass, or course, and not cheap) so I went ahead and bought about 20 sets of 2 (anybody need any?). I searched everywhere for that "thing" in the middle, the bracket that the rods from under the journal boxes went to, but came up with zilch and thought maybe I could make one up. I really tried hard but the tiny bolt heads and "3-D" design just wouldn't work. Discouraged, I just sort of gave up on the idea and the bobber kit languished.

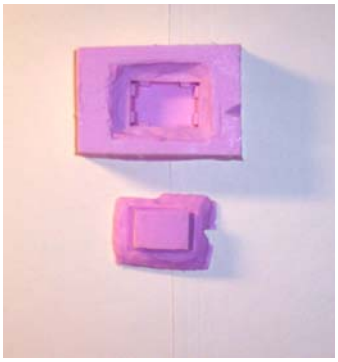
Living so far away I couldn't attend last fall's convention but I was fascinated by what I saw of Joe Bux's presentation on kitbashing a bobber caboose. I looked at the pics and then the video that Ron had up on youtube for awhile and thought there!! He's done it!! Those truck sideframes are *exactly* perfect!! I have to contact Joe and find out where he found the components.

So I emailed Joe and asked him for some assistance in how he did the trucks. He emailed me back and said he would send me some "stuff" and I thought great, probably some catalog page of where he got the parts and what a thoughtful gesture from a guy I've never even met. A few days later, a large priority mail box arrived with Joe's return address on it. When I opened it, I couldn't believe my eyes. Joe had sent me the mold masters and molds he had made for the truck sideframes, castings he had made, several jigs and fixtures he had used in the project, some pictures, and even a complete Walthers caboose, the starting point for his kitbashing project. He said he had finished his project and that I was welcome to the items he had sent and he later also sent me a ton of literature and articles on bobber cabooses. Joe's kindness and interest in my project are to me the epitome of what this hobby is all about and you can rest assured that Joe will be recipient of kit number 1 of my run!!

Now I was really excited…….the tough part was done and on to making the rest of the molds. I started using Joe's idea of cutting apart the body of the Walthers caboose and then splicing it down to bobber size. I tried that but using my razor saw to make the cuts as opposed to Joe's use of a perfect hobby-sized band saw didn't result in nice clean butt joints. I gave up on that but the caboose windows were just perfect so I carefully cut them out and made new walls from Evergreen v-grooved plastic using the Walthers windows. The Walthers ends were not quite right with a different door. Joe told me he had used different doors on his project so I started to scout around. Nope, none available anywhere so I rummaged through what I had and found an old Tyco bobber that Jack Coughlin had sent me with doors that were almost perfect. I regret to say that the bobber bravely gave its life so I could butcher it for its doors. The Walthers end windows were just perfect so I hacked them out too and installed them on some new ends I made along with the doors purloined from the Tyco bobber.

In this picture you can see my mold master for the sides and ends as well as the resulting mold. My mold master boxes are not the same class as Joe's master-carpentered ones, just using sheet plastic which I cannibalize for other molds as evidenced by the pieces hacked out of the base of this one, but they work well. I also put together mold masters for the body/floor, the roof, and the cupola thinking I could cast each as a unit and certainly cut down on the assembly time. Well, it didn't quite work out that way.

In the past I had made "3-D" castings of car parts and thought it would work well for this as well. As an example, my cupola came out perfectly. What you do is to build a mold box about an inch higher than what you want to cast, in this case the cupola. You then cover any openings (the cupola windows) with a thin sheet of something on the inside. Then, you fill the piece with modeling clay and build a small "base" of clay as a pedestal on the bottom of the mold box and then place your clay-filled master on top of the base. You now have an empty mold box with a rectangular base of clay as a pedestal on the bottom and your master sitting on it. Brushing everything with mold release, you then fill the box with rubber. Once it's fully cured, you remove the mold and you will see your original part filled with clay and the clay base you made is in the mold itself. You then dig out all the clay and in this case, what you have is a cupola "master" still in the mold but "empty" with a wider opening above it created by your clay base. Making sure you have all the clay out, then brush mold release all over everything and pour rubber into the "hole" in the mold letting it overflow to build an edge on the top of the mold larger than the hole. Once that is cured, you remove it and then take out your master, in this case the cupola. What you now have is a two part mold, the bottom having the hole in it and top being the "plug" you just made. When you put the plug in the hole, the space between the plug and the bottom is the exact thickness of the cupola master. Making the castings is then easy…….you just fill the hole with resin then insert the plug, making sure it's all the way down into the hole. This forces the excess resin to ooze up out of the hole and overflow the edges of your plug insuring that your wall sections are all totally filled. Once cured, you remove the plug and voila! There is your complete casting. The pictures of my two piece cupola mold show you how the mold looks when done (it has a "vee" notch on the top and bottom to show which ends go together).



This worked great on the cupola but not on the body "box". For some reason no matter how hard I tried I could not get the resin to fill well on the ends and sides. I finally gave up and decided to go back to the tried and true method of making separate sides and ends. I also had a real problem with the roof mold. Because the roof is rounded, you can't glue it roof side down directly to the bottom of the mold box. Because the center of the roof extends further down than the ends, gluing the bottom of the roof to the mold box results in some deep "cuts"

in the mold made by the roof ends. This makes the mold extremely hard to fill totally with resin, keeping out the air bubbles, and the wear and tear on the mold in removing the castings only allows you to make a few before the mold just tears up. I finally had to separate the roof into three, the center section and the two end "extensions" and cast all three separately. In my kit, however, I will have them glued back together with 3' wide "tarpaper" (.005 plastic strips) covering any seams. You're welcome for thanking me for eliminating this tedious step!

You will also notice that the cupola mold is pink and my other one is blue. The blue is the standard MicroMark ® 1 to 1 mix mold rubber. Because I knew some of these molds would have deeper cuts, I decided to try MicroMark's 10 to 1 rubber mix (the pink) because it allegedly is stronger and more tear-resistant. But what a mess……..the "10" portion is a sticky gelationous consistency that is very difficult to remove from whatever measuring container you use that is then mixed with 1 part of the liquid binder. You have to get the proportions *exactly* 10 to 1 or the cure time greatly increases. Instead of curing in the promised 24 hours, my 10 to 1 rubber molds took 3 days to fully cure, probably because my measurements of the mix were a little off. I'd suggest that this 10 to 1 mix is not worth the trouble unless you really need some flexibility in your mold; the 1 to 1 mix is made from two easily-pourable substances and cures in 4 hours max.

Once I have my mold masters all done and do some castings, I make my "pilot" model. This shows me where things may be a little off and some masters may need to be redone. In this case there were a couple of things. As you can see in the picture, my platform ends are rounded as I copied them from some bobber blueprints Walt sent me. However, I later saw that the O&W bobber platform ends were straight so I redid these molds. You will also notice the wire "rails" from the cupola down to the roof. I initially thought these were handrails and modeled them that way but later discovered they were instead strap iron supports for the cupola that were attached to the roof. From my pilot model, I also discovered that I had to be a heck of a lot more careful in drilling the holes in the back of the journal boxes for the ends of the axles. They all have to be perfectly centered because even though I insert Tichy delrin "bearings" in the holes, if they are not perfectly across from each other you have one axle going a little east and the other a little west which just ain't gonna work. So I made up some fixtures to put on the table of my old drill press to make sure the holes were all in the same place.

On all my kits I try to make handrail forming a minimal activity but sometimes I just can't. In this case, there are no endrails available anywhere that match the O&W's (and believe me, I scoured everywhere including Hon3 parts) so these take a little work. Hopefully my anal instructions about bending around a #2 pencil for the right curve will ease the process!

So I hope anyone who has bought or will buy any of my kits will enjoy them. Perhaps my greatest compliment or testimonial has come from Rich Cobb, the master builder who has built two of my kits, the Fish's Eddy station and the 542 baggage car. Rich has commented how much he enjoyed my kits and although he had to do a little fiddling here and there, this was no different than any other kit. The pictures of the kits Rich has built show what a beautiful finished product they can be.

I have no idea how many more I might do……it sort of happens when the urge strikes me. I'm always open to suggestions about what I might do that would appeal to more than just a couple of people so feel free to contact me at jcan2x@hotmail.com anytime.

I'm sorry to say that it's very difficult for me to make up any kits of ones I have already done because first, the molds in many cases are shot and second, it's just not worth trying to round up one set of parts that go with my castings. So I say my kits are "limited run" for these reasons. So hope everyone who buys my kits actually puts them together! If somebody thinks that after a few years of leaving my kits on the shelf they will grow to be worth several hundred dollars like the old Fine Scale Miniature kits, better think again because I ain't no George Sellios!