

A Not So Ready-to-Run Model

Text and Photos by Steve Malcolm, Director, Eastern Iowa Division

I attended the Milwaukee Trainfest this fall, with a mission to hunt down an era specific CB&Q caboose to complete a late 50's early 60's train. The [Hawkeye Model Railroad Club](#) had an approaching open house, and time was becoming an issue. There was a perfectly good American Model Builders Laser kit sitting in my inventory, but I knew that was never going to get built in time for the open house. I needed a caboose fast, so I was after something that was ready-to-run. As luck would have it, I was able to snag a Walthers CB&Q wood caboose for 15 bucks.

On the long ride home, I had the opportunity to take a closer look at my new waycar. As I slid the plastic cradle out the box, a nifty little package of material dropped onto my lap. It contained some red plastic and a bunch of shiny metal pieces. I ignored it and set them aside. Popping off the cover and plucking out my caboose I finally developed a clearer picture of my recent purchase. This thing didn't have any frame ends or railings, no ladders, no grab bars, no brake wheels. Where's the smoke stack? What about couplers? I glanced back at the box; "Yep, 'ready to run' it says". Picking back up that hastily discarded gift package, I discovered the couplers and the frame ends. The bunch of shiny pieces turned out to be the grab bars, and guy wires, and the brake wheels. I looked at the box again; "Yeah it still says 'ready-to-run'". I'm not sure what the marketing department at Walthers was thinking. Maybe the guy in China got tired of putting these things together?

They were kind enough to provide some instructions though. Three, to be exact:

1. Drill out all grab iron mounting holes with a # 80 bit.
2. Press hand grabs into drilled holes.
3. Secure with ACC or paint.

"Gee, thanks".

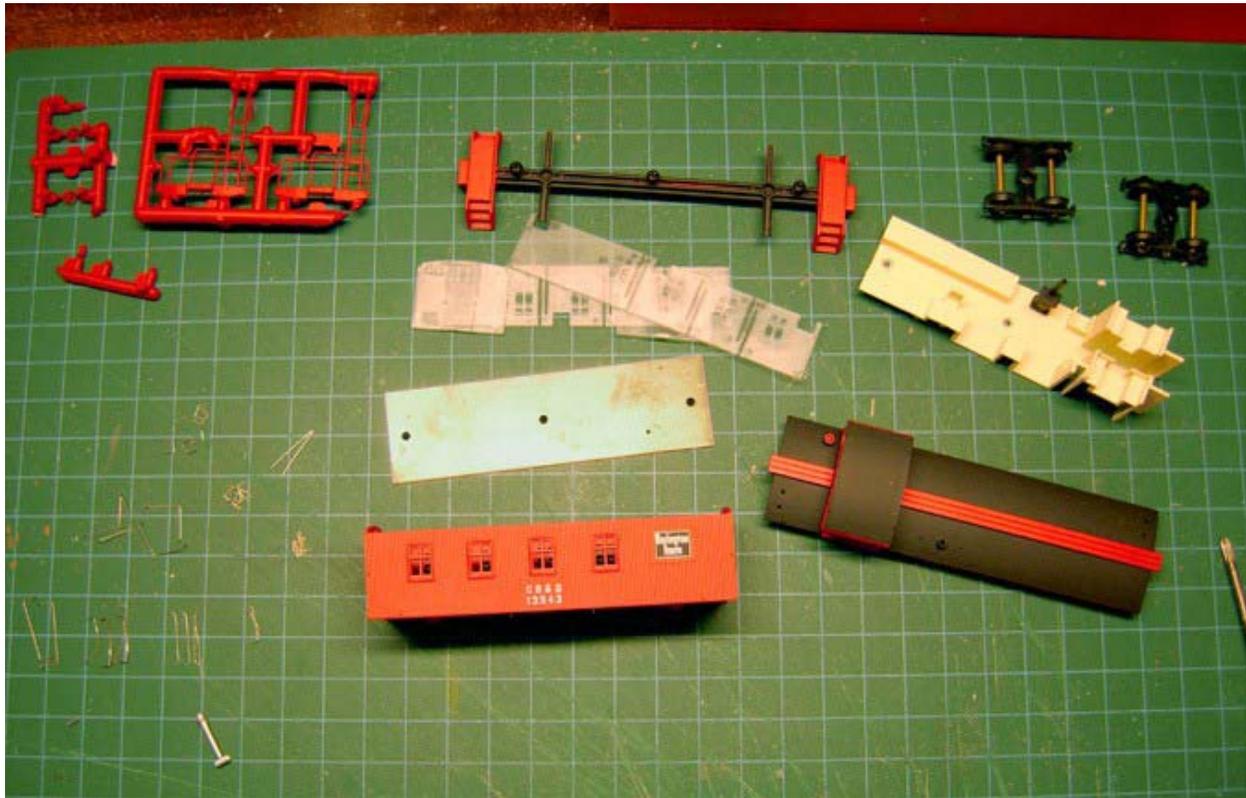
"Do I even have a #80 drill bit"? I checked. My index stopped at #74. I cursed the drill index.

It turns out that there is a little more work involved. On Darwin's tree of model railroad evolution, this model has branched off from the lineage of ready-to-run items. I'm classifying it somewhere between an Athearn Blue Box and that craftsmen laser kit sitting on my shelf. My rationale for this is that, if you have a pin vise and a #80 drill bit in your toolbox, you've stepped up from beginner status. I have named this new species the "Ready-Kit-to-Run".

Here's the beast, fresh out of the box. In the lower right hand corner on the side of the car, you can see two small bumps. Walthers did us all a favor here. Those bumps are a little bolt detail and a dimple that locates the drill hole for you. This saves a lot of time marking locations and creating starter holes. As I looked the car over, I started counting. This ready-kit-to run needed a total of 60 holes drilled out.



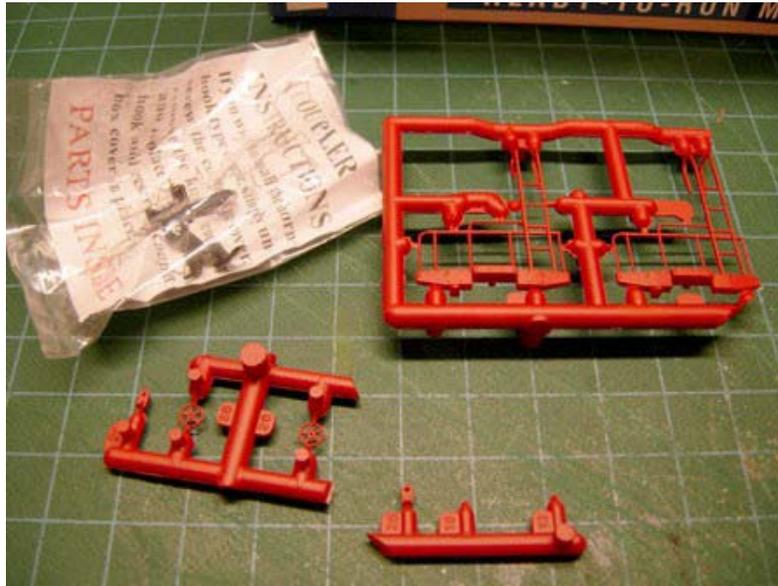
In trying to get a grasp on this project, I decided that it would be best to disassemble the model and divide it into the three separate tasks: frame, roof, and car body. This made it much easier to drill and mount the parts. Another advantage was the chance to set a completed section aside without having to worry about damaging any of the added details. The model comes apart very simply. Pop the roof off, remove the three screws, and the interior and weight will come right out. In anticipation of weathering the car, I also removed the window glass. With everything taken apart, I laid it all out, and double-checked the inventory.



When doing the inventory, I sorted the metal grab bars and guy wires into piles to make them quicker to locate and keep track of. One thing to note here is to make sure your tweezers are not magnetized. It may sound advantageous for picking up metal parts, but it actually ends up testing your patience. I have the habit of placing my tools in one of those metal pans from Micro-Mark that uses magnets to hold an assembly in place while it's glued. Needless to say, I no longer store my metal tools alongside magnets.



Satisfied that everything was in order, I decided to tackle the car frame ends first. Finding it easier to hold frame ends while they were still attached to the casting sprue, I drilled and mounted the end grab bars.

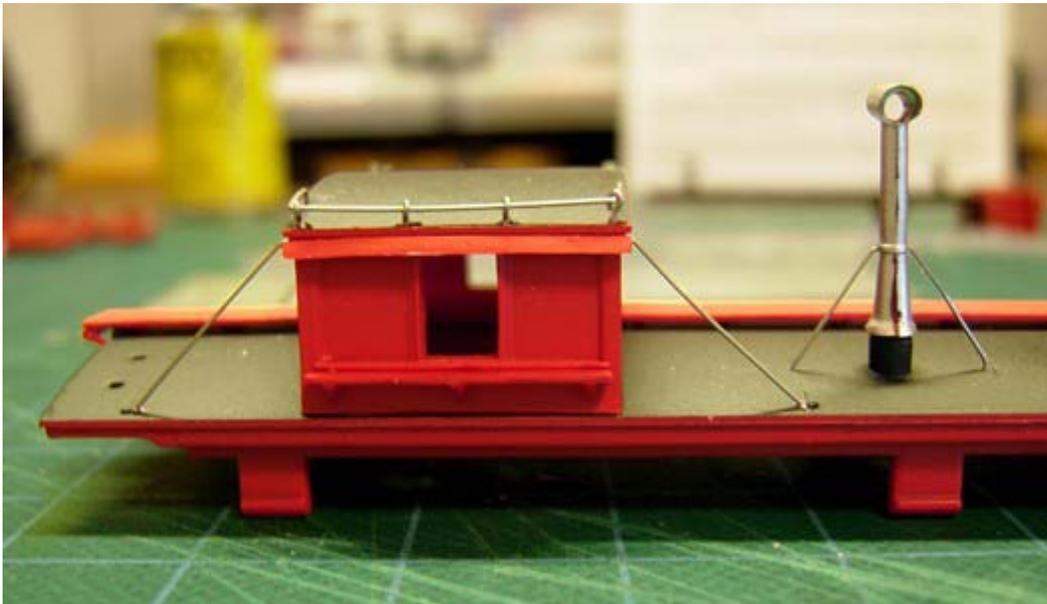


Once in place and secured with ACC, I trimmed off and filed flush the legs of the grab bars that protruded out the backside, all the while scoffing at Walthers instructions to simply press the grab bars into the drilled holes. Throughout the build of this ready-kit-to-run, all the grab bars and guy wires will require trimming off the legs. This is necessary to keep the details mounted in a proper position without poking through the back side in an exposed location. When done securing the grab bars, I cut off the sprues and mounted the ends to the car frame.

Moving on to the roof section, I removed the cupola to deal with it first. It was a seemingly innocent piece. But don't be fooled. This little demon has 16 holes to drill. That's more than one fourth of the total right there. Oh, and remember the magnetized tweezers? Every time I tried to coax one of those rings into a hole, the end would stick right to the point of my tweezers. I spent a half hour doing battle with this on one side. Four rings in, one would pop back out. Five rings in, two pop out. Ahhhhhhh!



Following the battle with the cupola roof, which I feel I lost, I feared the guy wires. I thought these were going to be a pain. Pleasantly, they cooperated. The stovepipe does require a hole to be drilled completely through the stack where the guy wires attach. To insure that my hole would be drilled straight, I started from one side and drilled about halfway through. Coming from the opposite side I completed hole. Here the guy wire legs will need to be trimmed considerably to fit properly. Being in the hole-drilling mood I decided to open up the top of the flue. Following the same technique above, I drilled a pilot hole from each side. It took two more passes with consecutively larger bits until I achieved an acceptable opening. This added three more drilled holes, by the way. To finish off the roof section, I painted the cupola grabs and guy wires flat black, with the guy wires on the smokestack being silver.



Attaching the grab bars to the body went quickly; I didn't even break a sweat. I did need to trim the legs again, however. The body was reattached, along with the car weight. After some experimentation with the caboose interior piece, I opted to leave this out. You just can't see it. With the body attached I painted the grab bars Caboose Red.



Here the kit, er, model has been fully assembled, minus the windows, for completion of a weathering job. This would end up being a quick weathering job with a one color powdered chalk bath. AIM powdered black was used. My first step was to apply a coat of Dullcoat. I feel that gives the AIM powders something to stick too. Once dry, I placed the car in my weathering box. When working with the AIM powder, I've found it helpful to work the material into the car while it's in a shallow sided box. This keeps everything neat, and I can reclaim the leftover material at the same time. When I'm satisfied with the look I've got, I shoot the car with one more coat of Dullcoat.



Fresh out of the dust box. The final step for this ready kit-to-run was to put the windows in place. I felt the stock windows came off as being too thick, so I opted to simulate the glass with pieces cut from a left over hunk of glazing from a DPM model building. After snapping the roof back on she was ready to roll. Or, should I say, Ready-to-Run.



After doing battle with this car for a total of six hours, and 63 drilled holes, I did eventually win the war. It did not come easily, or without casualties. One wounded, my patience; and three #80 drill bits were killed in action. Which reminds me: don't curse your tools. In the end, I realized that I have never learned more from a ready-to-run model. All it needs now is some marker lights.