

# Documentation, Inspection and Repair:

Three Keys To A Higher Contest Score

article by *Michael H. Siegel*

**A**s NMRA Achievement Program Chairman of the Sunrise Trail Division, I act as both a contest judge and “overseer” of the other judges. One thing I have learned since I have been “in office” is how important good documentation is to achieving the maximum number of points for your contest entry. Here’s why:

## Documentation is Mandatory

The key questions that judges consider when scoring your model are:

1. What did the modeler try to do?
2. How well did he/she do it?

NMRA judging guidelines state that the entrant’s documentation is the primary means for judging conformity to prototype (conformity being how well the model reproduces the prototype). If there is no documentation, the maximum number of points you can achieve in the 25 point conformity category is 15 — you will have lost 10 points before anyone even looks at your model, and that’s just the beginning. Judges also have the right to refuse to judge an item that lacks documentation. According to the NMRA instructions for judges:

“High scores ordinarily require the support of reference [material] ..., photos and/or plans ... Judge the work accomplished, the effort made, and steps taken beyond what may have been done by a manufacturer or a kit. You [the judge] should not need to guess about conformity ... It is up to the entrant to explain and demonstrate conformity. ...”

## Judges Don’t Know Everything About Everything

Even Master Model Railroaders are not expert in all areas of model and prototype railroading. They need your documentation to have an idea as to how well your model succeeds in portraying the “real thing.” Here are some examples from my own experience:

**The SD80MAC:** One of the two other judges commented that the modeler had done a sloppy job because the cab of this model did not appear to be flush with the

body. As the resident diesel expert, I advised him that the prototype locomotive has the EMD “whisper cab” — the cab that sits on a rubber donut to isolate it from the rest of the body for the purpose of noise suppression.

Another problem was that the weathered paint was a color none of us had ever seen on a Conrail diesel. We could not find it in a book of Conrail diesel pictures we consulted. None of us had any idea whether this color was prototypically correct, nor did any of the other individuals we asked. The modeler, therefore, lost points in the conformity category even though several weeks later I actually found a photo in *Railpace News* of a Conrail SD80MAC with paint faded to the exact color of the model.

**The Crooked Air Tanks:** There were three of us judging a model of a GE Dash-9 locomotive. The other judges (both “steam engine guys”) commented on the fact that the air tanks were crooked. I advised them that this is as standard design feature on modern GE locomotives — the air tanks are mounted on an angle to reduce condensation.

**The Country Inn:** This was a very nice large scale model. However, the only documentation present was a picture of each of the two kits used in the “kitbash.” Because none of the three judges had any idea what the model was trying to accomplish, whether or not there was a prototype, and how the model was built, this entry received a very low score.

Accordingly, you should bring any plans, photos, and other materials that will help demonstrate to the judges the accuracy of your model. This is especially important if your model departs from ordinary prototype usage or is totally freelanced. You do not need every plan or photo available, but you should have sufficient documentation to show that what you did is reasonable.

## Judging Grids Vary in the Amount of Points to be Awarded

More points are awarded for a greater number of scratchbuilt items, more complex construction techniques, and higher level of detailing. Your documentation should list all

items that were super-detailed and scratchbuilt. You should describe in as much detail as possible the construction techniques you employed — sawing, scribing, punching rivets, casting, machinery, and so on. In addition, specify how each item was finished (air brushed, stained, computer prepared building signs, and so forth) listing all the materials used. While plans or photographs taken at various stages of construction are not mandatory, if you have them, include them in your documentation because they will earn you additional points.

## Prepare Your Paperwork in Advance: Have Time to Inspect and Repair the Model

You should arrive at the contest room with your entry form and documentation completed so that you can spend the time inspecting and, if necessary, repairing your model. In my experience, many modelers have lost points because a part (or parts) has come loose or fallen off in transit. If you inspect the model prior to actually entering it in the contest, you can repair the item(s) in question. (If you do not have glue or other materials necessary to effectuate the repairs, if there are modular layouts present, talk to one of the club members — they usually carry glue, soldering irons, and all kinds of miniature screwdrivers, pliers, and files.)

### Editor’s Note

AP QUESTIONS: If you have questions about the AP program or requirements, start with your local or Region AP manager. If you still have questions, contact Frank Koch at [fjkoch@hotmail.com](mailto:fjkoch@hotmail.com). If you prefer to write, contact Frank Koch at 4769 Silverwood Drive, Batavia, OH 45103.

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