

Maximizing Your Points in The Model Contest

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What is the NMRA Model Contest?

In its basic form, it is just that, a contest. It is a place where people can enter their work for competition against others. However, the NMRA Contest goes beyond that, and is structured not as much as a competition against others, as much as it is a competition against yourself. Basic "competition" contests, such as say, Chili cook offs, are purely up to the tastes and digression of the judges. This also holds true in many Art and Photo competitions.

The NMRA contest is first broken down into separate Entry Categories, one each for the various types of models typically found in Model Railroading. The Categories that are judged in the Regional and National contests are:

- Steam Locomotive
- Diesel and other Locomotive
- Traction
- Passenger Car
- Freight Car
- Caboose
- Non-Revenue Car
- Structure
- Display

Each model is entered with a basic data sheet providing information about the model and modeler. The second data sheet is the Judges Score Sheet. This form is what separates the NMRA contest from being just like all the others mentioned above. This sheet is broken down into 5 Judging Categories covering all aspects of a completed model. These Categories are:

- Construction
- Detail
- Conformity
- Finish and Lettering
- Scratch Built

By using this from and judging models using these separate categories, it changes the aspect of the contest from its basic form, mentioned above to a higher level, that being a contest where the model is judged against itself. Each model is viewed and scored individually, based on its own merits and not against the other models. Each of the above 5 Judging Categories has specific items which are judged and the model is inspected for each item, and scored according to how well the modeler performed them.

In this system, each model is scored fairly, based on the quality and quantity of work performed by the modeler, and not on the personal likes or dislikes of the judges. The modeler either did the work, or did it well, or he did not.

After all the Judging Categories are tallied, the model with the highest point total in each model category gets first place, the next highest score 2nd, and so on. The model with the highest point total from all the contest entries also gets the Best in Show. This is how the basic NMRA/MCR contest

works and how “winners” are determined. It has nothing to do with any one judge’s opinions or preferences. Each model is treated as if it were alone in the contest.

What else does the contest offer besides a nice ribbon?

In addition to a nice ribbon that one may receive as recognition for placing in the contest, there is also the Achievement Program Merit Award. To many this is the primary reason for entering the model contest. A merit award is given if the model receives a contest score of 87.5 points or higher. The Merit Award is highly sought after by contest entrants since many of the AP Program certificates require that Merit Awards be earned for models built in that category.

Lastly, and probably the most important thing that you can gain from the model contest is knowledge. Our skills as modelers are constantly being improved by the articles we read, the people we talk to and the models we build. As either an observer or a participant, there is a vast ocean of knowledge that is present in each model contest. Looking at or judging models, reading the material presented by the modelers, or simply talking to its entrants can give you ideas or take you in new directions, making your next model project even better than the last one. No one modeler neither has the ability to do it all, nor is his or her skills ever really complete, as we are constantly learning and trying new things. Every contest you enter or walk through should be considered a model railroad classroom. The sharing of ideas and techniques is what it is all about.

Participate with the Right Attitude

Expectations vs. Reality: Attitude and Perception effects the Enjoyment of Participation

Always have Fun

Expect Nothing

Do not Enter to Win Awards

Do not Enter with an Elitist Attitude

Never Enter Thinking That you Must Win or You will Not Enter Again

Enter to Gain Merit Awards

Enter to Display Your Work

Enter to Let Others Enjoy your Work

Always have Fun

Do not Enter Thinking you Deserve to Win

Do not Let Pride Keep you from Entering

Do not Enter Thinking You Know it All

Do not Avoid the Contest Because of Perceived Bias

Do not be Intimidated by More Experienced Modelers – Learn from Them

Enter the Contest for You – Do not worry about Others

Enter Thinking You will Finish Dead Last

Always Have Fun

Contest Paperwork

Always Do the Paperwork at Home

Study the Forms

Do not Think of the Forms as a Chore

Paperwork Should Compliment Model

Use Brief But Concise Statements

Always Complete the Paperwork at Home

Judging Categories

Tell the Judges What you Did
Bring Photos, Plans or Other Magazine Articles
Do not Write any More Than Necessary
Synopsise Your Descriptions
Be Descriptive But be to the Point

Construction

Describe How The Model Was Build
Describe Materials Used
Describe Difficulty in Construction
Describe Unusual Methods
Describe Assemblies
Describe Sub Assemblies

Detail

Describe Details Added
Describe The Amount Added
Describe Difficulty in Adding
Describe Complexity of Parts
Describe Working Parts

Conformity

Describe What You Built and What it is Meant to Resemble
Provide Photos
Provide Plans
Provide Articles
Provide Written Narrative

Finish and Lettering

Describe Application of Finish
Describe Application of Lettering
Describe Complexity
Provide Photos

Scratch Built

Describe All Parts Scratchbuilt
Describe Difficulty in Construction
Describe Special Features Added
Describe Construction of Exempt Parts Where Applicable

What The Judges Are Looking For

Construction

Quality, Skill, and Workmanship
Handling and Selection of Materials
Quality of Assembly
Neatness of Glued Parts
Fit of Components
Squareness and Plumb
Uneven Parts
Unsanded And Rough Parts

Excess Glue
Fingerprints
What Did the Modeler Try to Do?
How Well Did the Modeler Do It?

Detail

Amount and Complexity of Details
Number of Subordinate Parts
Refinement of the Model
Evaluate Quantity Only
Consider Amount of Underbody Detail
Consider Safety Appliances
Check for Board by Board as Opposed to Scribed Sheet
Examine for Bolts, Nuts, Rivets, Nail Heads
Consider Accuracy of Colors and Placement or Lettering

Conformity

Attention to Prototype practices
Logic of Design
Appropriate Attachment of Parts
Proper Documentation
Proper Photos

Finish and Lettering

Consider Artificial Lighting Effect on Models
Quality of Application of Paint
Look for Brush Marks, Unevenness, Runs, Thickness of Application
Consider Glossiness or Flatness of Paint
Consider Amount and Application and Difficulty
Quality of Decal Application
Straightness, Even Spacing, Air Bubbles, Decal Sheen, Excess Film
Consider Amount and Appearance of Weathering
Quality of Separations of Colors
Consider Amount of Work
Consider Number of Colors and Separation Lines

Scratch Built

Evaluate Quantity Only
Quantity Built from Raw Materials
Difficulty in Producing
Consider Planning and Design

After the Contest

Keep a Positive Attitude Regardless of Your Outcome
Review your Score
Talk with Judges Regarding Your Score
Find Items You Could have Done Better
Review the Judges Comment Sheet
Take all Criticism Constructively, Not Destructively
Plan On the Next Contest