

IMPROVING YOUR LAYOUT WITH TRASH AND VEHICLES

James A. Foster
1221 Hathaway Rd.
Dayton, OH 45419
fosterj51@yahoo.com

proprietor of:

The HOn30" Gophir Tram and its portable HOn30" buddies: the Little Fork & Pike, the Stine Lichen Utility Tram, the Atlantic & Ohio and the Euslis.

This is a hobby and whatever gives you pleasure should be okay. But how many times have you visited, or seen in a presentation in a magazine, a beautifully executed layout that has the jarring element of a cheap plastic unpainted automobile in it? Or a modern-day layout with cars from the 1940's being represented in everyday service? Or a supposedly gritty urban or coalfield environment that is spotlessly clean? An understanding of vehicles and an understanding of trash can improve your layout's believability!

* * *

CARS

Often the best way to establish an era, especially for the non-rail visitor

How long are they used? Depends a lot on the climate

- Michigan – hard on cars
- Upstate New York – just brutal
- Ohio Valley – better, but salt still used
- Desert and the high plains, or any place dry and not salty – much better

Cars are used as transportation for 20 or 30 years, presuming they don't just rot away

For a 1952-era layout

- Model A Fords would be fine, maybe a Model T
- 30's and 40's cars everywhere
- A 1951 Chevy would be almost new

For a modern layout (21st Century)

- Not much from before 1980 or 1985

For a 1940 Maine 2-foot module

- Three-year-old 1937 Chevy, brand new 1940 Ford Deluxe, nine-year-old Model A pickup (all dirty from dirt roads)

For an Appalachian-themed layout set in 1970

- A pre-war coupe is modeled as a derelict
- VW bus with blown engine, or at least the back of it stained black with oil
- 1957 Chevy in grey primer – just a used car then, not the icon it is now
- 1957 Chrysler 300C – *the* serious American car of the late '50's, so maybe someone is taking just a little bit better care of it even though it's 13 years old

What would citizens of an eastern Ohio coal camp buy?

- “The low-priced three,” mostly: Ford, Chevy, Plymouth. Or a pickup or maybe an older, deteriorating, American luxury car

Cars in regular service in the '30's and '40's did not usually have whitewall tires. Your layout will be more believable if they have blackwalls – paint 'em if they don't come that way.

Whitewall tires were much more common in the '50's, probably okay for a layout

TRUCKS

Sometimes used longer than cars although that is not a hard and fast rule

For an Appalachian-themed layout set in 1970, again

- Pickups from the '50's and '60's everywhere
- '40's okay, *maybe* the late '30's but a Model A is a stretch
- The 1948-54 Chevy/GMC pickups – one of the great values of all time, still commonly seen as a working truck until about 1985

Big trucks also used over a long time span sometimes

- W-Series White, 1940-58
- Mack AC “Bulldog” – looks old-timey but okay up to the early '50's maybe
- '50's and '60's B-Series Mack – the gold standard
- R and U-Series Mack – body style still seen every day

Derelict vehicles – don't be afraid to model 'em! I have lots. Do as good a job on them as you would on those supposedly operational.

Think about modeling vehicles in a natural “sitting” position. Vehicles on roads are certainly appropriate for photos, but the illusion is cheapened at a layout visit or operating session, if they *don't* move in a place the prototype *would* be moving.

Weathering

- Narrow gauge railroads not even competitive with paved highways (much less Interstates), so if you are a narrow gauge modeler, most of your roads should be dirt
- The only time a vehicle operated on dirt roads is clean is the moment its owner is done washing it
- Tough to make a truck in coal service too dirty; easy to make it too clean
- Model 'em dirty, model 'em rusty – even vehicles on paved roads operate in dirt, rain, salt or all three

TRASH

What isn't it?

- Not locomotive drivers or freight car trucks, at least where I model
- Not logging cables or boards, at least where I model
- These things not seen along public roads or even railroad rights-of-way

What is it?

- Junk cars and parts
- Fast food wrappers
- Household garbage
- Appliances
- Cans and bottles
- Newspapers

Go out and look!

Appalachia – not necessarily Trash Central

Dogs (if they run loose) and critters get into anything

Dumpsters – ersatz landfills if they are in rural locations, especially in places without trash service

- Sofas, full plastic trash bags, other stuff
- Will the dumpster man get out of his truck and load all this by hand? I don't think so!

Some folks just throw trash out the kitchen window – out of sight, out of mind

By the side of the road

- Washing machines, refrigerators
- Bottles and cans, especially in places without deposit laws
- Fast food wrappers
- Plastic trash bags full of something [now]
- In the creek and in the ditch!

Junk cars and parts – anywhere there is vehicular access

Sofa in the yard – after it gets rained on once you certainly wouldn't bring it back inside

- Maybe pair it with a tied-up dog, with a dog-cleared circular path

Modeling all this

- Junk mail cut into tiny pieces and mixed with fireplace ash
- Longneck bottles from Prieser
- Cans from dowel rods or tubing
- Model furniture readily available – but refrigerators needed!
- Cars and trucks – look for kits with separate engines, axles, doors, etc.

Two challenges

- Model a plastic trash bag full of garbage
- Model a wrecked car

An idealized, sanitized environment is okay as this is a hobby and whatever pleases you is good. However, trash is indigenous to many areas we model, especially around railroads, and therefore is an important part of representing the mood of those places.

Think about how trash and vehicles can contribute to your layout!

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Adams, Ronald, *Big Rigs of the 1950s*, MBI Publishing Co., St. Paul, Minnesota, 2001.

Adams, Ronald, *Big Rigs of the 1960s*, Motorbooks International, an imprint of MBI Publishing Co., St. Paul, Minnesota, 2004.

Foster, James A., "Trash and Garbage," *Railroad Model Craftsman*, vol. 74, no. 11, pp. 86-87, April, 2006.

Foster, James A., "Using Vehicles *Effectively*," *Railroad Model Craftsman*, vol. 75, no. 3, pp. 58-59, August, 2006.