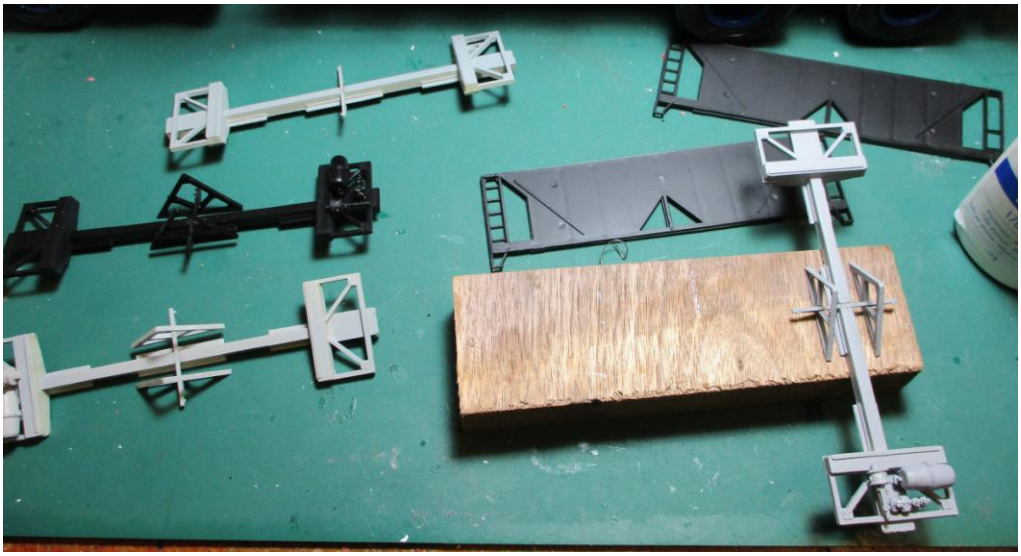
E&B Valley ACF 70 Ton Covered Hoppers (Plastic Kits)

The project that has kept me entertained over the past 10 days or so had its genesis in an eBay auction that I won 2 weeks ago, 4 E&B Valley ACF 70 ton covered hopper kits. These kits were made in the early 80's and were of the "flat kit" style. I have assembled them before, and knew that they'd be a challenge to build, so I decided to do them assembly line style. When I started building I remembered that I had another E&B Valley car lettered for the B&M, so it joined 3 of the 4 cars I bought on eBay on my workbench (there were 2 D&H cars with identical numbers).

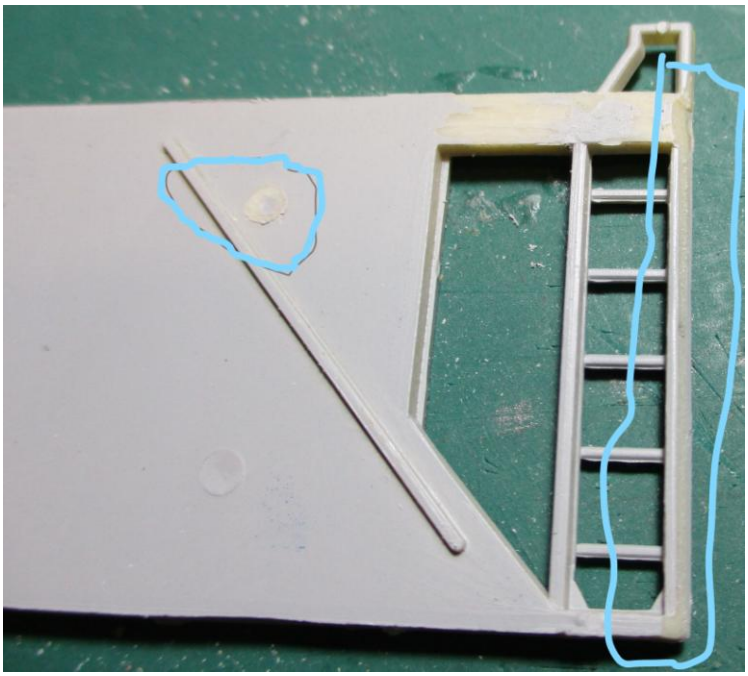
These were decent kits in their day, as the only other 2-bay covered hopper was the MDC PS-2 kit. Since then Kato and Bowser have released ACF covered hoppers that are generally better than this E&B Valley model. Also, Bowser has both open and closed side versions (some railroads had both styles while others had only one or the other). In retrospect I would recommend the Bowser cars over these kits, but who doesn't like a modeling challenge? Besides, the 4 kits cost me only $20 with shipping & one Bowser will cost you that much.

So, here goes!

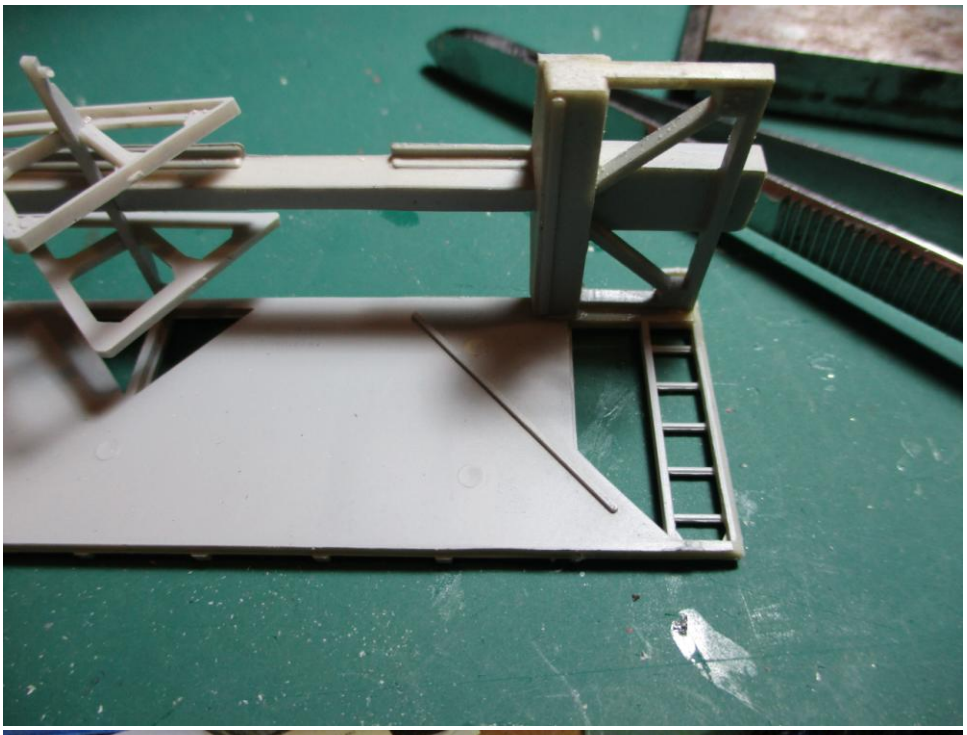
1. The first steps involve assembling the brake gear and frame components. The triangular slope sheet supports are a pain because they don't have much support, so I put the frames on a block of wood to put pressure on the parts while the glue dried (I use mostly Faller Expert cement, occasionally some Plastruct liquid).

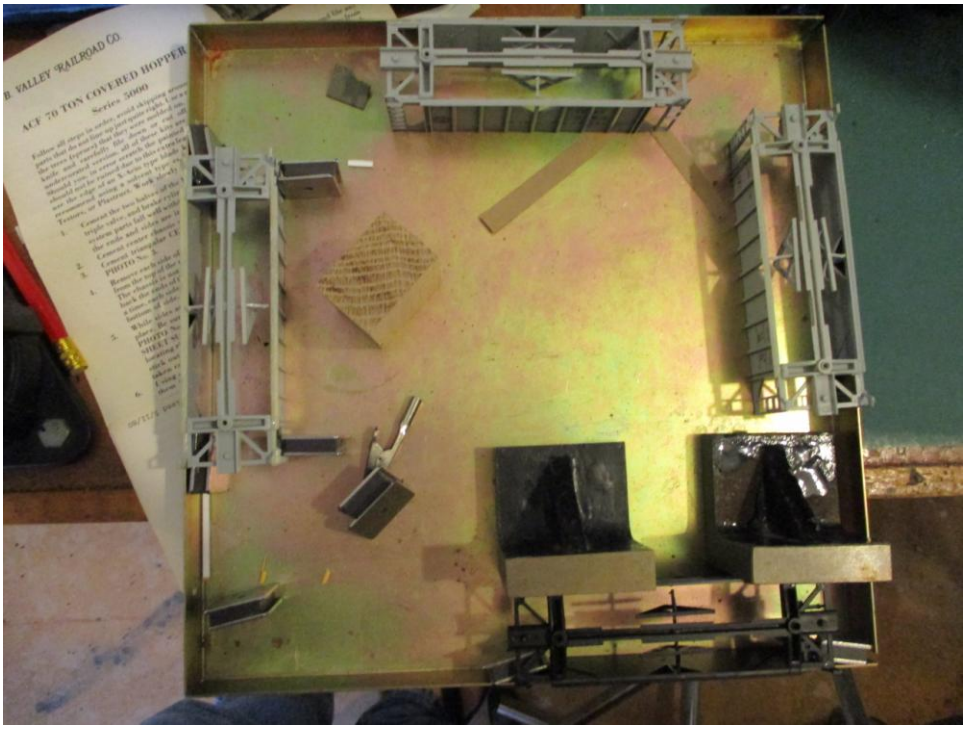


2. Now it's time to get the car sides ready, so I had to put a 45 degree angle on the ends so they will match up with the car ends later. Why they didn't make the molds do this is beyond me. Also note that there are ejector pin marks on the back of the sides that will get in the way of the hopper casting, so I filed them off.



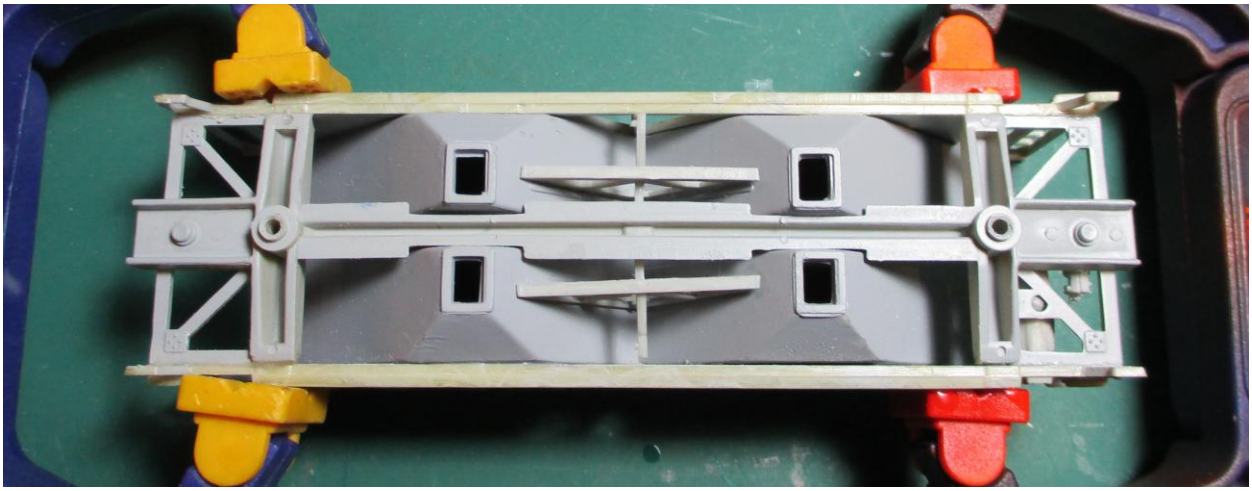
3. Now the fun really starts! I glued the sides to the frame, making sure they meet at a perfect 90 degree angle. The instructions aren't clear what height the frame meets the side.



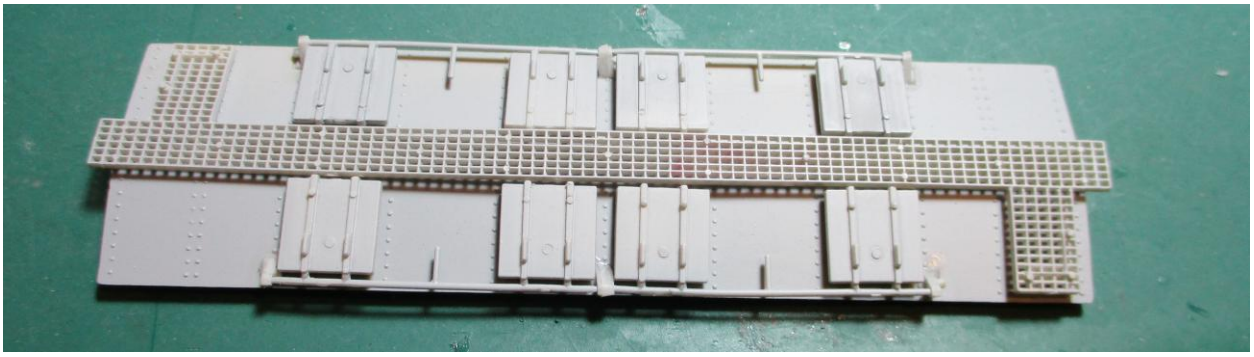


In spite of my careful alignment a couple of cars were off and I had to rip them apart and put the hopper castings in place to force them into alignment.

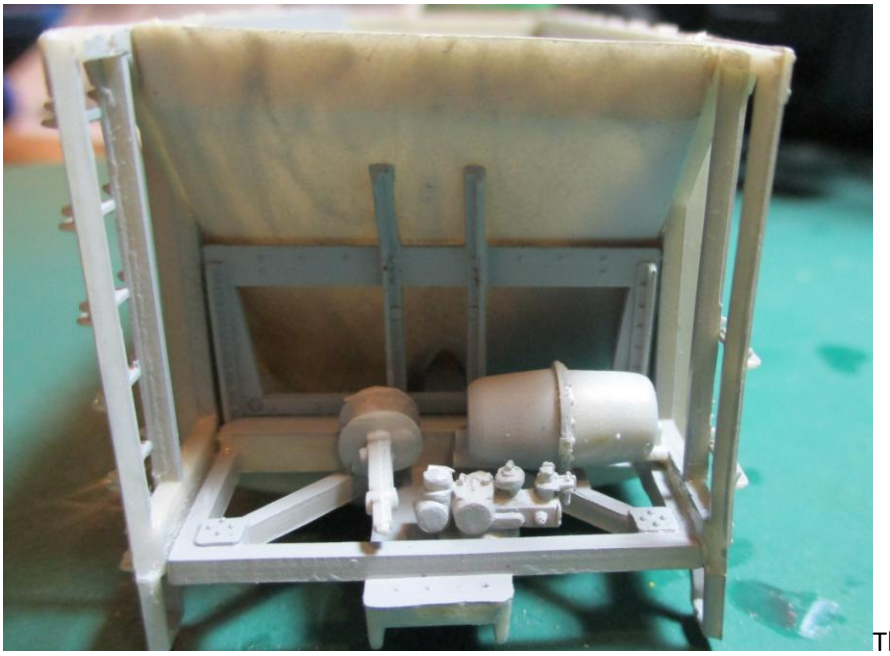
Note that bottom edges of the sides aren't completely painted. I addressed this later.



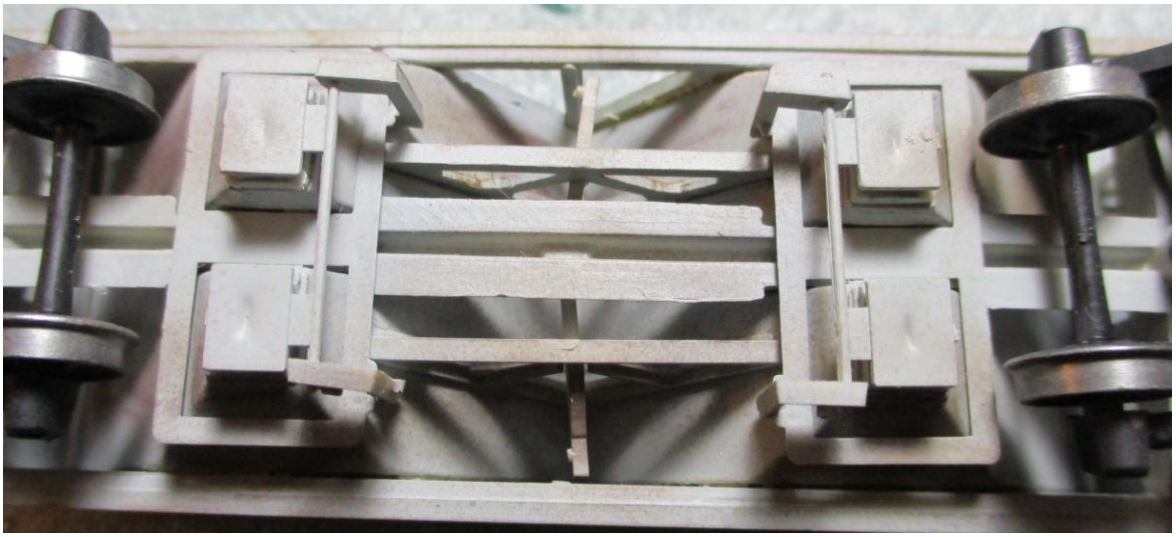
4. Next I assembled the hatch hinges & hatches to the roof. They are supposed to work, but the hatches don't line up, so I just glued them closed. Then, I added the roofwalk casting.



5. The slope sheet supports have to be glued in place, and they don't really want to cooperate, so I used clamps to force them to the correct angle.

 This image also shows the brake gear glued in place in step 1. The instructions aren't clear on how to locate them & I had to file into back of the brake cylinder to allow space for the actuating arm.

6. Now is time to work on the hoppers. I added the 4 small frames to the bottoms, then the 2 larger frames. The 4 L shaped hinges are glued on to the large frames. The instructions say you can make the hatch bottoms work, but once again I glued them in place. I didn't take any pics of these so here's an image of a completed car:



7. The instruction says that you don't need to add weight. To bring the model to NMRA recommendations I added 1.5 ounces of wheel weights.
8. Then I glued the roof in place, added Kadee couplers (the brake end of each car was too high, so I had to file the truck cross beam to lower the car), then put Kadee metal wheels in the trucks and screwed them in place.
9. As mentioned earlier, these kits weren't painted very well, so to cover the white molded plastic I airbrushed very thin light gray (Folquil Primer) paint as needed to the gray cars. The black NKP

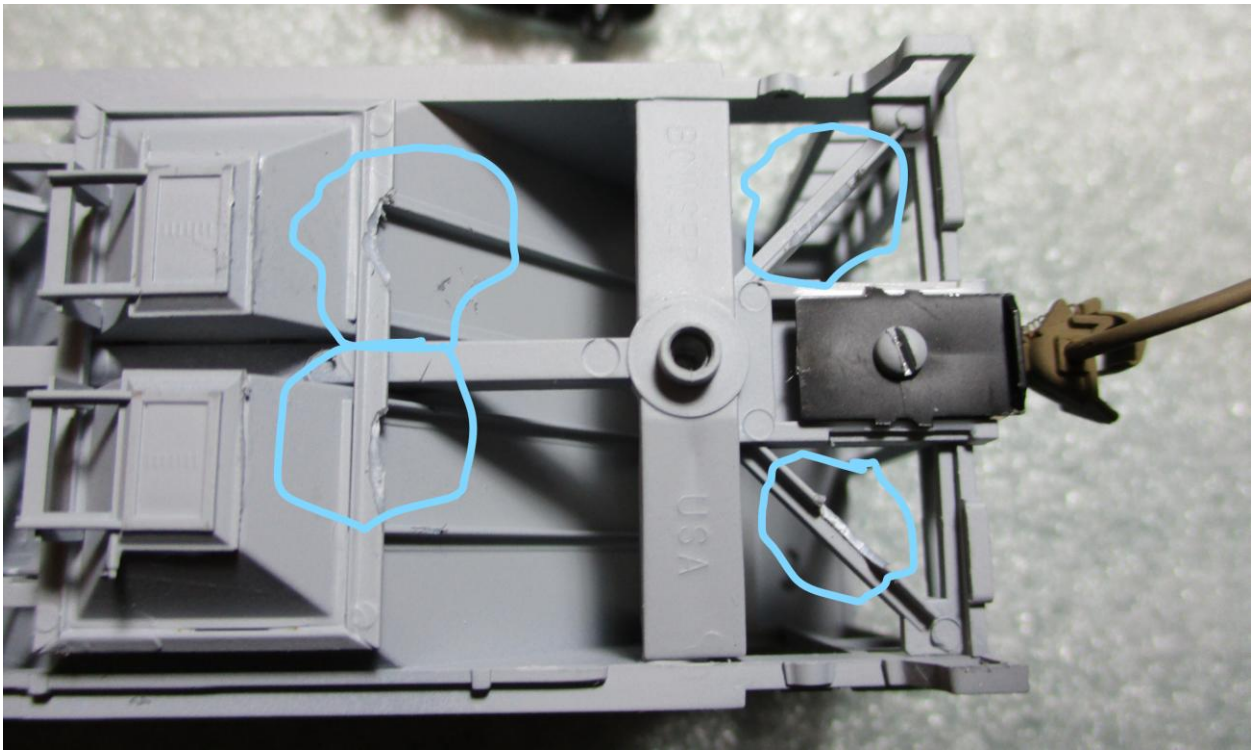
car is molded in black, so no touchup was needed. I then airbrushed a coat of Testors Dullcoat to cover the glue spots and give a uniform finish.

10. I weathered the cars by dry-brushing Floquil Rail Brown here & there, then used browns & black eye shadow to put dark streaks of dirt & rust on the sides and roof. Then I used white eye shadow to imitate cement/lime/sugar/grain/whatever. I then added more Dullcoat, another layer of chalk to look like powdered material, then more Dullcoat. I finished with some very thin brown/black to depict wheel spray around the ends and underframe.

Here's the completed B&M car. I model the mid 60's so try to weather it to look like it's been in service for a decade or two. It might need more grunge!

While I was doing the 4 E&B Valley kits I remembered that I had a Bowser undecorated kit, so decided to build that too! My best guess is that this one kit took less time to assemble, paint & decal as one of the E&B kits. I also think the Bowser kits look better too. It's a kit that has much better fit, better instructions, and generally looks better.

I ran into (only) 2 issues with this kit: First, the wheels rub the hopper underframe at 4 spots on each end, so I had to carve a little away. Second, the coupler pocket doesn't work for Kadee #5 couplers, so I used the coupler box cover to hold in place.



In this image you can see where I had to remove some of the frame to clear the wheels (the hopper frames at left & the diagonal supports at right), and how I used the KD coupler box screwed in place.