N-Circle Railroad Update 18 – October 31, 2024

It has been almost a year since the last N-Circle Update, many things have gotten in the way of time for model railroading. However, I finally got back to my workbench in the garage in late September, before it gets too cold to paint and spray clear-coats!

The first priority has been to try to finish building my collection of vehicles kits for the 1950s, while the N-Circle Railroad is still set up for 1950s Vermont operations.

We will start by discussing some kit-bashing of semi-truck tankers for Shell facilities.

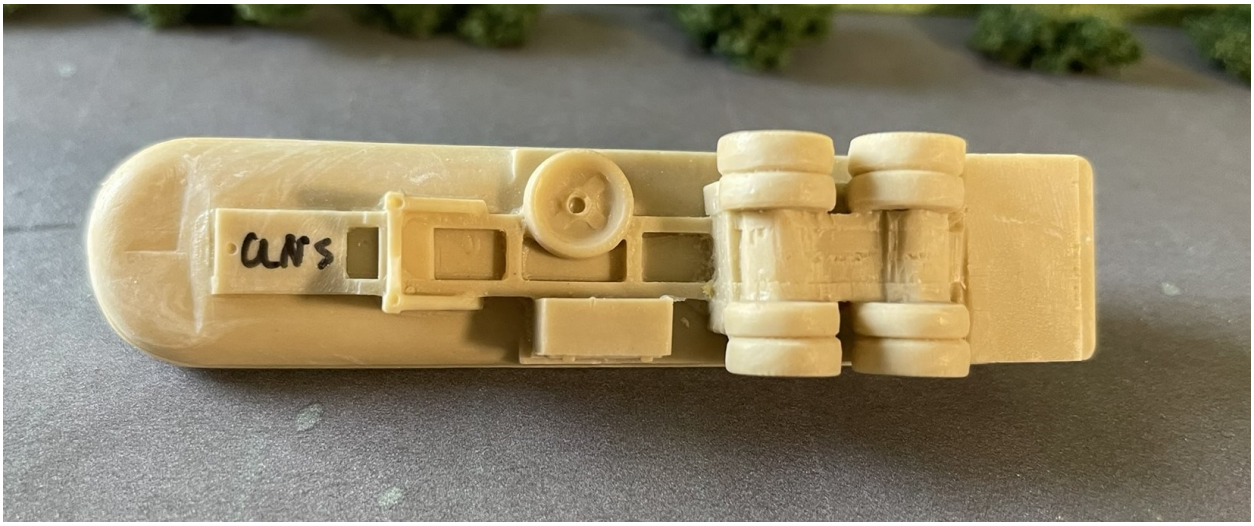
Modifying an Ultimate N-Scale Tanker Trailer

I recently purchased a 1950s 35-foot, 3,500 Gallon Fuel Tank Trailer made by Ultimate N Scale to use with a Classic Metal Works 1950s White WC22 Super Power Tractor that I was detailing for Shell Oil, to use at the Shell facility. However, as can be seen in this photo, when I opened the trailer kit and placed it next to the tractor, it was obvious the wheels on the trailer were too large for N-sale and the trailer underframe was higher than the tractor hitch, so the trailer would be slightly tilted forward, with the rear wheels off the ground.

N-Circle_24-09-19_UltimateNScale_TankTrailer_Before_1_Cropped

The spare tire was also over-sized, as can be seen here on the underside.

N-Circle_24-09-19_UltimateNScale_TankTrailer_Before_2_Cropped

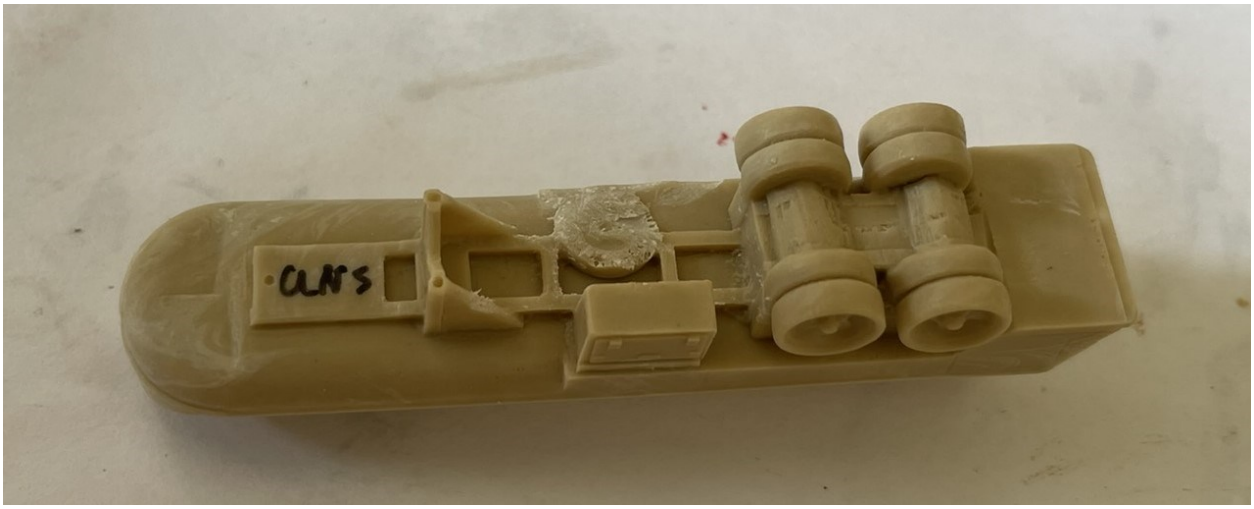


The first step was to use a small wood chisel to remove the spare, as shown here. I held the trailer in a vise for this work.

N-Circle_24-09-19_UltimateNScale_TankTrailer_Cutting_1

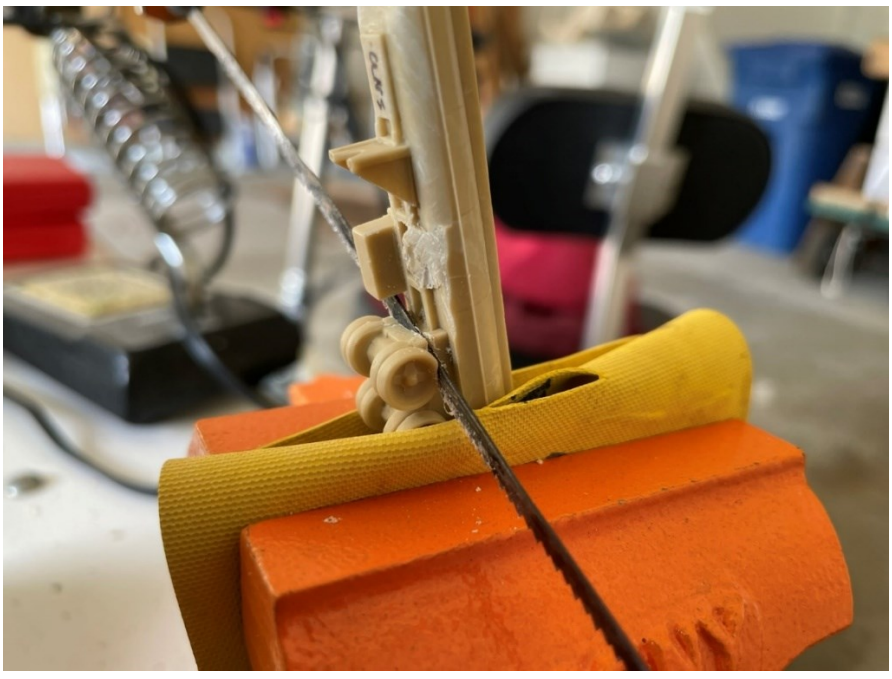
After some filing of the rough edge from the chiseling, the underside is prepared for later gluing a new wheel in place. I left the surface slanted downwards towards the center, as is sometimes seen on trucks. Only the outer edge of the wheel will be visible in normal viewing.

N-Circle_24-09-19_UltimateNScale_TankTrailer_Cutting_2_Cropped



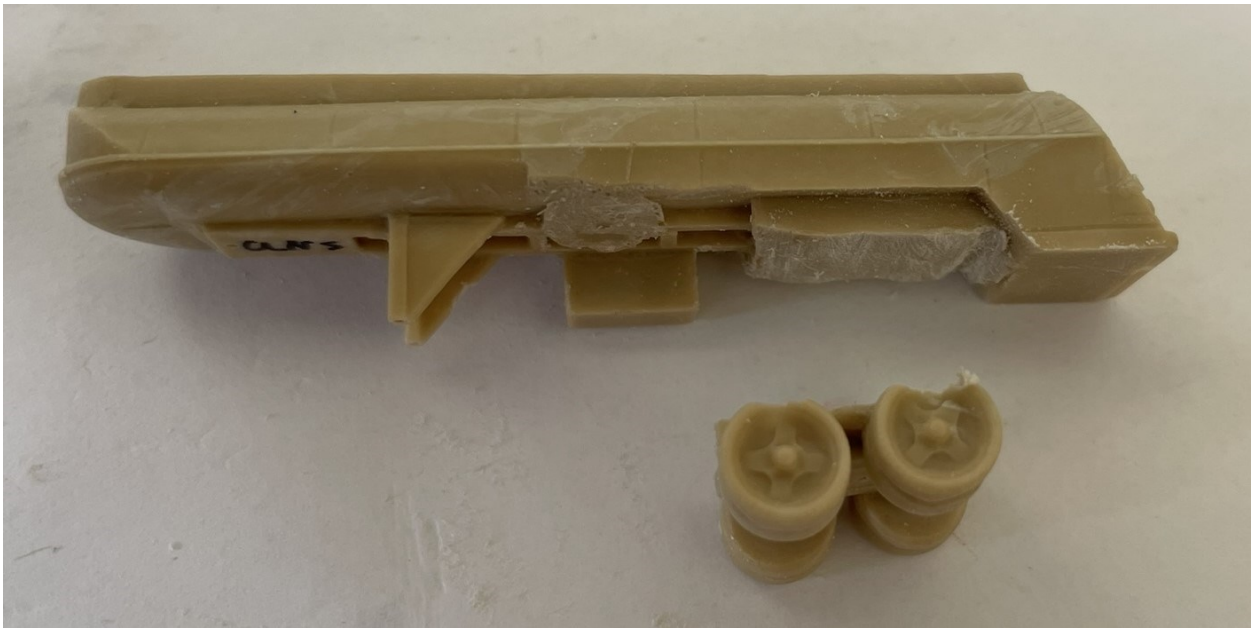
Next, it was time to cut the over-sized wheels off from the frame. The blade of a coping saw was just narrow enough to fit between the wheels and the box under the frame, so this task turned out to be easy. Once more, I held the trailer in the vise for sawing, using a rubber jar-opening pad to cushion the plastic.

N-Circle_24-09-19_UltimateNScale_TankTrailer_Cutting_3



After filing the rough edges of the sawed-off pad, the trailer is ready for rebuilding.

N-Circle_24-09-19_UltimateNScale_TankTrailer_After_1_Cropped



The next step was to add styrene “axle” shims to glue the new wheels to. These were necessary to raise the frame to the height of the tractor for these smaller wheels. I used dual wheel sets left over from the Hagen N Scale truck kits that I built in the fall of 2023, discussed in Update 17. Always keep extra parts leftover from kit builds and keep them organized where you can find them for a future project!!

This trailer did not have a hitch pin to attach it to the tractor, so I made one by snipping a short piece from a metal paper clip and gluing it into a hole drilled in the underside of the trailer. I checked the alignment and fit to the hitch plate on the CMW tractor before drilling the hole. All worked well.

Before starting to paint this trailer and the modern Shell trucks discussed later in this Update, I did some research on the web of paint schemes for 1950s and 1980s Shell tank trucks in the United States (the web shows many pictures of European Shell trucks, because Shell is a European company, so you have to be careful what trucks you are looking at!) I found:

1950s – yellow cab and tank, red fenders and lower panels of the tank trailer.

1980s – yellow cab, white or steel tank, red underframe. It is difficult to find good photos of US semi-trucks, so I took some artistic liberties with my trucks.

I hand applied Vallejo grey surface primer paint with a micro-brush on all the vehicles described in this update for better adhesion of the acrylic paints to be used.

I used Tamiya yellow paint on this trailer and many other vehicles in this set. I had not used it since October 2023, about a year, and when I opened the bottle, it was dried to a soft solid paste. But after adding a lot of water and stirring vigorously, it returned to a spreadable paint. Another advantage of working with water-based acrylic paints!

I also am using Polly-S paints, some purchased 25 years ago, and with a little stirring, they are good as new!! And they cover better than the Tamiya paints.

I used fine Micro-Brushes for all surface painting of the vehicle bodies, they work better than any of the brushes I have used previously. Their very small tip on a stiff, very narrow shaft allows one to reach into the very narrow spaces on the 3-D printed trucks and paint one surface without getting paint on the other. And they can easily be re-used, just dip in water and blot on a paper towel a few times. These are the super-fine micro brushes made by Alpha Abrasives, introduced in N-Circle Update 15 from October 2022.

Yellow can be very difficult to cover with hand brushing – I applied up to five coats for some trucks with the Tamiya yellow! I then used Shell decals from a Micro-Scale set for the lettering and my custom-made Shell pectin logos introduced in Update 15

After completing the painting and detailing, we see the final product here.

N-Circle_24-10-08_UltimateNScale_TankTrailer_Complete_1_Cropped

N-Circle_24-10-08_UltimateNScale_TankTrailer_Complete_3_Cropped

N-Circle_24-10-08_UltimateNScale_TankTrailer_Complete_4_Cropped

The tanker is now better aligned to the tractor, with properly sized wheels and spare tire in place. Unfortunately, the dual wheel depths are not well aligned and protrude a bit too much – I neglected to test their alignment to the frame before gluing.

Finally, we see the finished truck next to a commercially-made Trainworx set on the left – it is not as sharp as the Trainworx model, but no one else has one just like this!! And the Trainworx products are quite expensive at $50, a factor if you are modeling on a budget.

N-Circle_24-10-08_UltimateNScale_TankTrailer_Complete_6_Cropped.

Modifying a 3-D Printed Tanker Semi-Truck

While I said I was going to finish the 1950s vehicle kits first, I also recently purchased a pair of modern semi tank trucks 3-D printed by igMakes and decided to work on them while I had the paint colors and decals out for Shell Oil.

The 3-D printing detail on these models is very nice - good smooth surfaces and fine detail throughout.

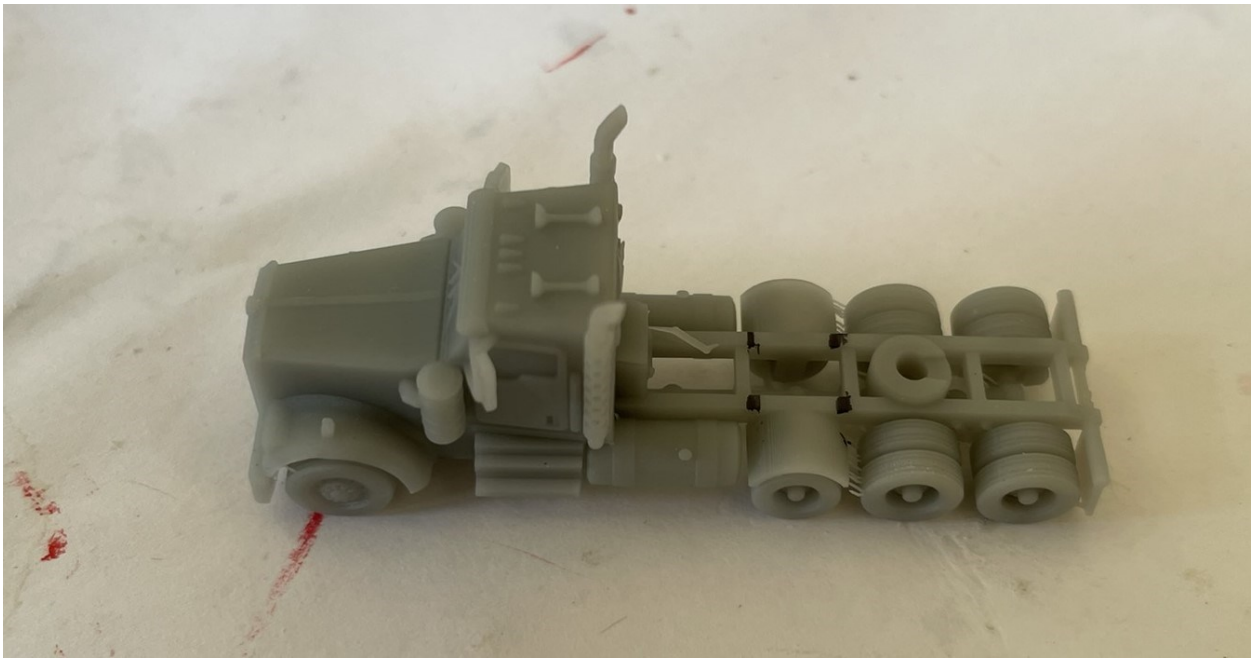
However, the tractor for this set is very long, with three rear axles. Not a configuration you commonly see in the United States.

N-Circle_24-09-19_igmakes_TankSemi_Before_1_Cropped

I didn't like the look and decided to shorten it to two rear axles. Upon examination, it was clear that the best approach would be to remove the axle closest to the front. This moves the trailer hitch closer to the cab, which looks better and preserves the mud flaps and rear of the frame.

The front wheelset is bounded by a cross-piece front and back which leaves a better surface for gluing the frame back together. And there is a clear opening to cut, as shown by the black marks on the frame here.

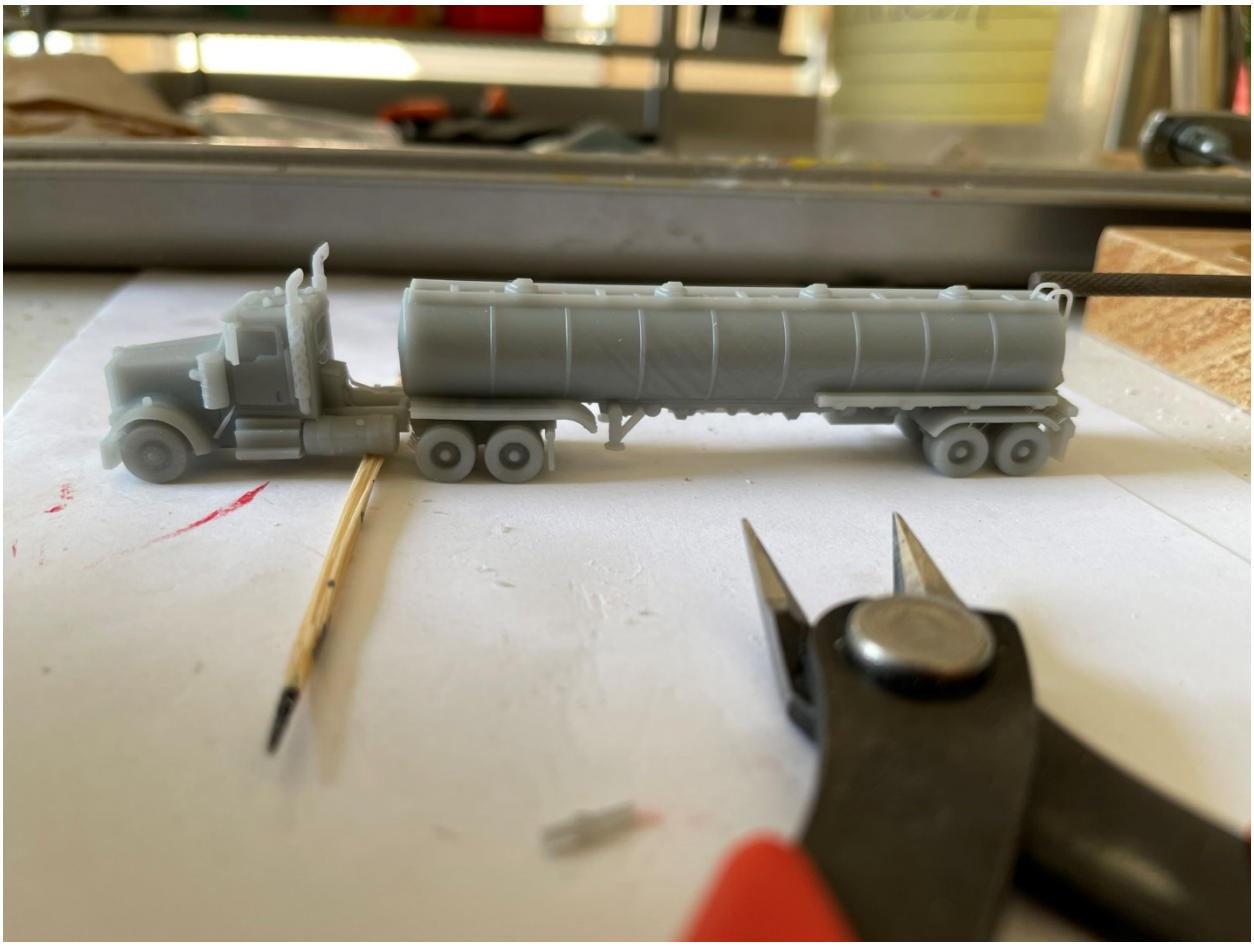
N-Circle_24-09-19_igmakes_TankSemi_Before_3_Cropped



I used plastic sprue cutters, with the straight edge towards the frame section to be re-used, to create a straight, flat surface on both sections to glue back together. The cutting was very easy – a quick snip.

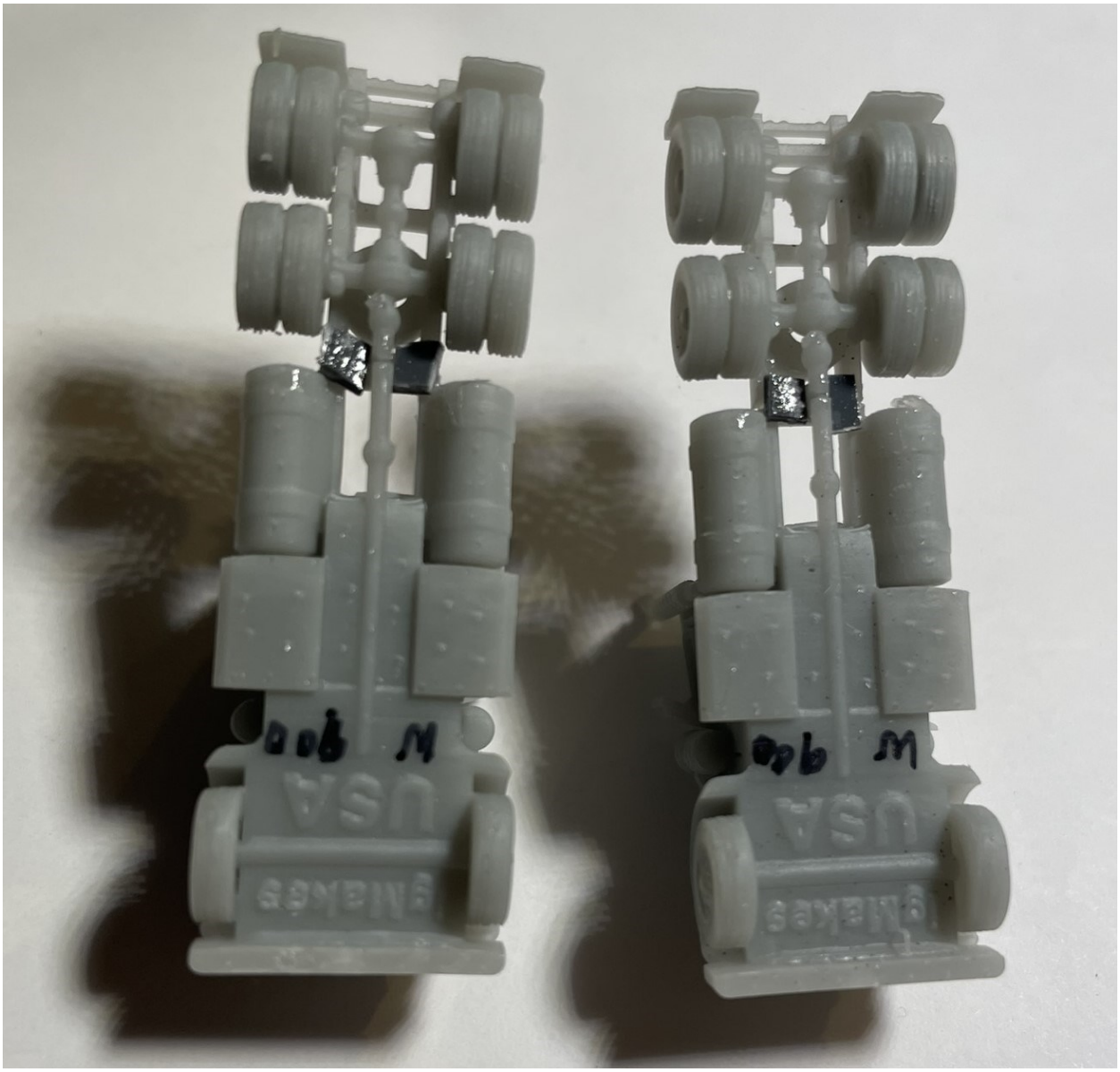
Here we see the set temporarily re-assembled, with a wood stick holding the rear of the cab up to align with the rear axles frame before glueing them back together. The plastic sprue cutters are in the foreground.

N-Circle_24-09-19_igmakes_TankSemi_After_1



I reinforced the frame joint in the tractors with a small piece of black styrene scrap glued over the underside of the joint.

N-Circle_24-09-20_igmakes_TankSemi_After_Cropped



I painted both trucks identically, so I will only show one here.

N-Circle_24-10-08_igmakes_TankSemi_Complete_2_Cropped

N-Circle_24-10-08_igmakes_TankSemi_Complete_4_Cropped

Like the 1950s tanker above, we now have a one-of-a-kind modern Shell tank truck for the layout!

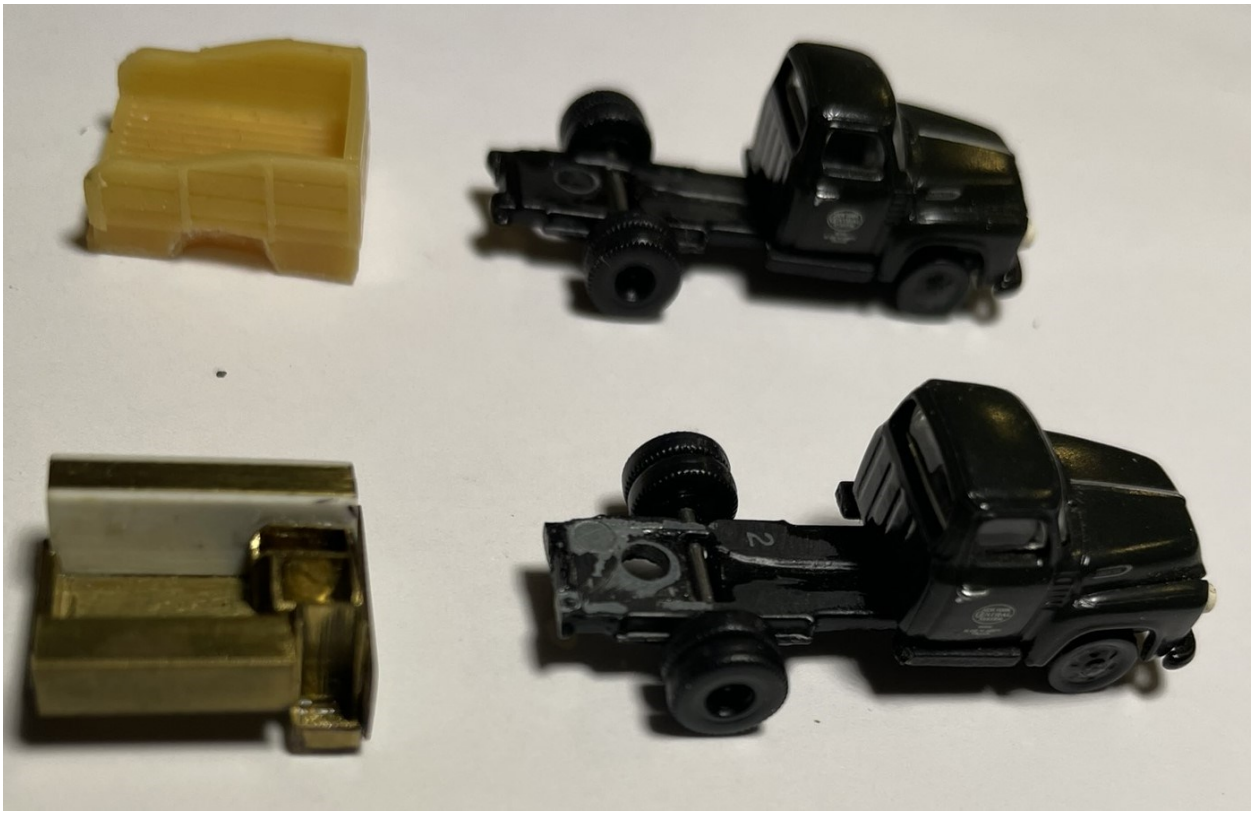
Here we see the rig next to a Con-Cor Shell semi-tanker that everyone has. In this case, this may be a better-looking model for 1980s operations than the old, inexpensive Con-Cor product! Though in fairness, I haven't attached the mirrors to the Con-Cor tractor yet, and with some detail painting of the wheels and all, their model could easily be improved. In fact, I purchased on eBay a while ago a version where someone did exactly that – repainted this Con-Cor set with a more colorful and detailed modern Shell paint scheme.

N-Circle_24-10-08_igmakes_TankSemi_Complete_5_Cropped

Kit Bashing Classic Metal Works Trucks

Last year I purchased on eBay a collection of unfinished truck kit bashes. Among these were two based on Classic Metal Works 1954 Ford F-350 trucks, painted for New York Central. One came with a partially finished tow truck bed, and the other with a custom-built brass bed for a welding truck. I don't need another 1950s tow truck, having built the Showcase Minatures Chevrolet tow truck for the Shell gas station, described in Update 11. Therefore, I decided to convert that to a work truck using a wood bed with slanted sides made by California Freight and Detail Company. The starting four pieces are shown here.

N-Circle_24-09-27_CMW_KitBashes_Before_Cropped



I don't model the New York Central Railroad; therefore, I was thinking I would need to repaint the cabs. Then I realized they are the color of the PRR Brunswick Green paint I was using on other vehicles. A quick swipe on each cab door covered the NYC herald perfectly, thus preserving the CMW detail painting on the rest of the truck!

At this point I decided not to decal them for a specific business, maybe later.

I painted the custom brass welders' bed yellow and added cans and gas cylinders. The cylinders were cut from the rounded ends of plastic parts sprues.

The beds are too narrow for these CMV chassis, so the rear wheels stick out more than I would like, but we will have to live with that.

N-Circle_24-10-21_CMW_KitBashes_After_2_Cropped

N-Circle_24-10-21_CMW_KitBashes_After_3_Cropped

There are two more kit-bashed 1980s trucks from this collection that may be completed for a future N-Circle Update!

Building California Freight and Detail Company Vehicles Kits

This was my first experience working with California Freight and Detail Company kits. These are basic cast resin kits, with good quality molding. I started with three generic small utility trailers, which can be used anywhere, in any time period. These are very simple kits that just require painting the solid resin bodies and glueing on the wheels.

Having experienced the challenge of how to realistically place a trailer behind a vehicle with no trailer hitch, I came up with technique to add an “invisible” tongue hitch stand to the trailers, so the tongue is at bumper height behind a car or truck without having to attach it. I used a 2 mm length round clear plastic sprue from the “Saved Sprue Scraps” box. Being clear, the stand is not too noticeable when the trailer is used behind a vehicle. The stand may be somewhat visible when the trailer is standing alone, but then it will hopefully look like a tongue stand from a distance…!

Here we see the trailers behind pickup trucks that do not have trailer hitches. From a distance, the trailers are seen as properly aligned to the back of the trucks, and the hitch prop is not “too” visible…yes, they are visible in the angle and lighting of this photo, but not as much on the layout.

N-Circle_24-10-08_Trailers_1_Cropped

And viewed from above, as they will more typically be seen, showing more of the details of the trailer loads and less of the tongue prop.

N-Circle_24-10-08_Trailers_2_Cropped

I added similar stands to the three trailers built in N-Circle Update 15.

N-Circle_24-10-08_Trailers_4_Cropped

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Next up were two California Freight and Detail Company 1975 Ford pickup trucks, which I decaled for Shell for future use in a fuel depot or refinery scene. I also finished a Road Apples 1972 GMC utility truck. I did not decal this one, just left it as a generic yellow truck for a construction site. I can always add decals at another time.

I painted barrels and bottles from the “Details Box” to create loads for these work trucks, similar to those described for the welders’ truck above.

Unfortunately, I messed up attaching the wheels, so the trucks do not sit level. You really need to trim out the wheel wells with a sharp knife on these kits and make sure the wheels align properly before you reach for the glue!

N-Circle_24-10-21_CFDandRoadApples_WorkTrucks_1_Cropped

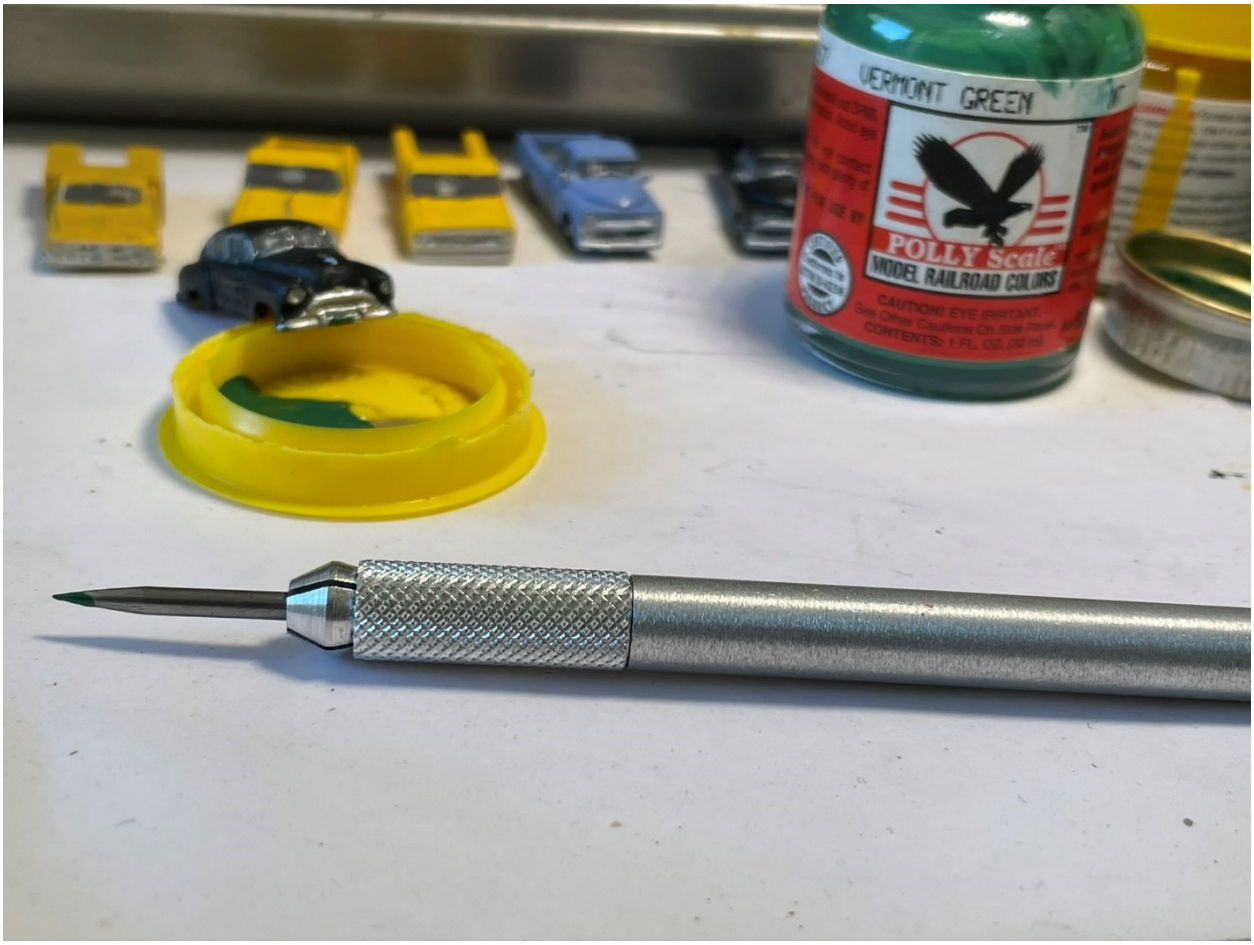
N-Circle_24-10-21_CFDandRoadApples_WorkTrucks_3_Cropped

Building More Road Apples and Cars N Scale Resin Car Kits

But to get back to the original topic of this update, a “final” round of mass-producing plastic resin vehicles kits for the 1950s period: three Cars N Scale kits and four Road Apples kits. Again, these are very simple kits, just paint the solid resin bodies, and glue on the wheels, using the same techniques as discussed in Updates 15 and 17.

I used micro brushes to apply paint to most body surfaces, and fine-point wood toothpicks for details. I tried a pointed awl blade in a hobby knife handle – it was a little easier to control than a straight pin like I have used previously, and it is easy to clean the tip. It is shown here being used to apply mind-numbingly tiny green license plates to cars! However, the sharp steel point does not hold a drop of paint well, so I went back to sharp-point wood toothpicks for most chrome details. The wood seems to hold a tiny drop of paint better. I still have not found a really good technique for applying a steady line of paint less than a millimeter wide for chrome trim around vehicle windows or body striping.

N-Circle_24-10-05_Detail_Painting



I used gray on the windows and added a few white highlights, which look better than the blue highlights attempted in Update 17. And again Kristal Klear on the headlights and windows as discussed in Update 13, to give the windows a better “glass” look

As discussed in Update 15, the Road Apples wheels are a pain to work with, as they come embedded in a thick plastic backing that has to be cut away. The Cars N Scale wheels are much easier to work with – they come on the four corners of a rectangular sprue and are easy to cut away. Fortunately, this same wheels mold was used as this brand became Bruce Richardson’s Cars, then later became Fine N-Scale Products, for those purchasing old kits.

I used the same attachment technique as introduced in Update 15 – glue on three wheels, then after they dry, attach the fourth with the other three resting on a flat, hard surface, to get them all aligned.

The wheels only partially overlap the inside of the wheel wells, so the glue joint is only part of the backside of the wheel. Therefore, I add shims cut from plastic sprues to reinforce the wheels, to prevent them from being knocked off during handling.

N-Circle_24-10-08_CarsNScale_4_Cropped

For the tires, I used Polly-S Night Black paint purchased in 1995! After adding a few drops of water and stirring vigorously, it worked fine! I then sprayed them with Testor's Dull Cote to protect them from chipping, before glueing them to the vehicles.

For the car bodies, Testor's Gloss Cote spray over these flat acrylic paints really brings these vehicles to life!

N-Circle_24-10-08_CarsNScale_1_Cropped

N-Circle_24-10-08_CarsNScale_2_Cropped

N-Circle_24-10-08_RoadApples_Impalas_3_Cropped

Knowing that people will be examining these 1958, 1959 and 1961 Chevrolet Impalas on my layout very carefully … I researched on the web their taillight colors. The following photo shows they are true to the protypes! 1958, 1959, 1961, left to right.

1958 – all three red – many with center white
1959 – all red
1961 – red, center of the three is white

N-Circle_24-10-08_RoadApples_Impalas_1_Cropped

I have not researched the manufacturer's original color options for all the cars I have done – I just picked colors I wanted – how many people know what colors the 1939 Ford Tudor was produced in?!

Building More 3-D Printed Truck Kits

I recently added to the collection three more 3-D printed trucks from igMakes: two 1957 Dodge pickup trucks and a Ford Tank truck. Again, no assembly required – they are printed as all one piece.

N-Circle_24-10-08_igmakes_DodgePickups_1_Cropped

These two pickup trucks were also shown in the photos of the California Freight and Detail Company trailers above.

Like the igMakes semi tank trucks discussed above, painting this tank truck was a challenge. With all the details already molded in place, applying different paint colors to all of the tiny detail areas requires a lot of patience and a steady hand, not to get paint in the wrong places! Applying different color paints to the rear of the cab and the truck bed is a real challenge without making a mess of both. I don't know how one would air brush these vehicles without doing some very precise taping and masking.

Also, how to paint the tread of a tire which is only 1 or 2 mm inside the wheel well, without getting paint on the fender? You need a really fine implement to reach into the gap. An airbrush could spray into the gap, but how to mask the round wheel wells? Obviously, one paints the tire first, then the vehicle body to cover any black paint on the fenders…without getting body paint back on the tire…

N-Circle_24-10-08_igmakes_TankTruck_1_Cropped

N-Circle_24-10-08_igmakes_TankTruck_2_Cropped

N-Circle_24-10-08_igmakes_TankTruck_3_Cropped

It would seem the next step in the evolution of vehicle kits to allow quality painting will be to 3-D print the major pieces separately, allowing them to be glued together after painting.

Nonetheless, we now have another unique Shell truck that will not be found on anyone else's layout.

And note that in the final steps of detailing, all these vehicles receive the N-Circle Railroad trademark Vermont/Louisiana green license plates!

It took 37 hours to complete these 21 vehicles kits, so 1.8 hours per vehicle on average. More than for most kits, due to all the details work on the Shell trucks.