

PRODUCT REVIEW

Amity Star - Big John Hopper - Stan Stokrocki

The Amity Big John hopper kit utilizes traditional craftsman kit construction. It is the time-honored "box of wood with set of plans", the only castings being a standard AB brake set. While not using state of the art techniques, the kit does produce a reasonable-looking car whose appearance depends entirely upon the amount of care & effort furnished by the modeler. On a car with all of the nooks & crannies of this one, a good deal of that effort should be directed towards sanding & sealing the wood before assembly. Detail beyond the scope of the kit is also necessary in order to create a car that is up to contemporary modeling standards.

Unfortunately, the Amity car also features the traditional limitation of many craftsman kits: its plans & instructions. No prototype photos are provided, & the scale drawings (dimensioned in actual inches, not scale feet) leave out brake gear, grab irons, hatch & hopper door detail, etc. The instructions say such things as "the kit contains brake levers" without specifying where or how to install them. Not being able to locate sufficient prototype data, I "imagineered" such things as hopper door details & brake gear placement, using typical hopper hardware as a guideline.

I also noticed that the side braces, if spaced according to the plans, would not allow the decal word "Southern" to be evenly spaced. I suspect that the problem lies in the decals, not the plans, but I followed the line drawing in the Walthers decal catalogue, slightly shifting the braces to accomodate the lettering. I also substituted Trainstuff ladders (soon to be restocked, I hope), since these are the only ones long enough for a modern height car. Incidentally, the aluminum color of this car makes decal film difficult to disguise, even after applications of Dullcote & weathering, so I would advise very careful trimming of all decals.

A Southern Railway fan would no doubt find many faults with my completed car, but I think the overall effect is convincing. This specific prototype was built in limited numbers and had a short service life (S scale manufacturers seem to have a gift for picking oddball cars to model). Nevertheless, this type of hopper fills a large hole in any modern car roster. I think that experienced modelers of the current era should be glad to see this kit back on the market.