

Number plates and boiler bands

Robbo Ormiston-Chant shows you how to add the finishing touches to locos

BOILER bands and numberplates often present trouble to the less skilled modeller and my own methods may be of help. I am concerned with the making of boiler bands and the finish painting of both these and the plates. The difficulty with the plates lies in their small size.

My sketch shows the device clearly enough, a small piece of glass is secured by Evostik, etc. to a piece of wood or similar material. I have used a scrap of Sundela as there was then no fear of the base warping and breaking the glass; it has lasted seven years without strife to date.

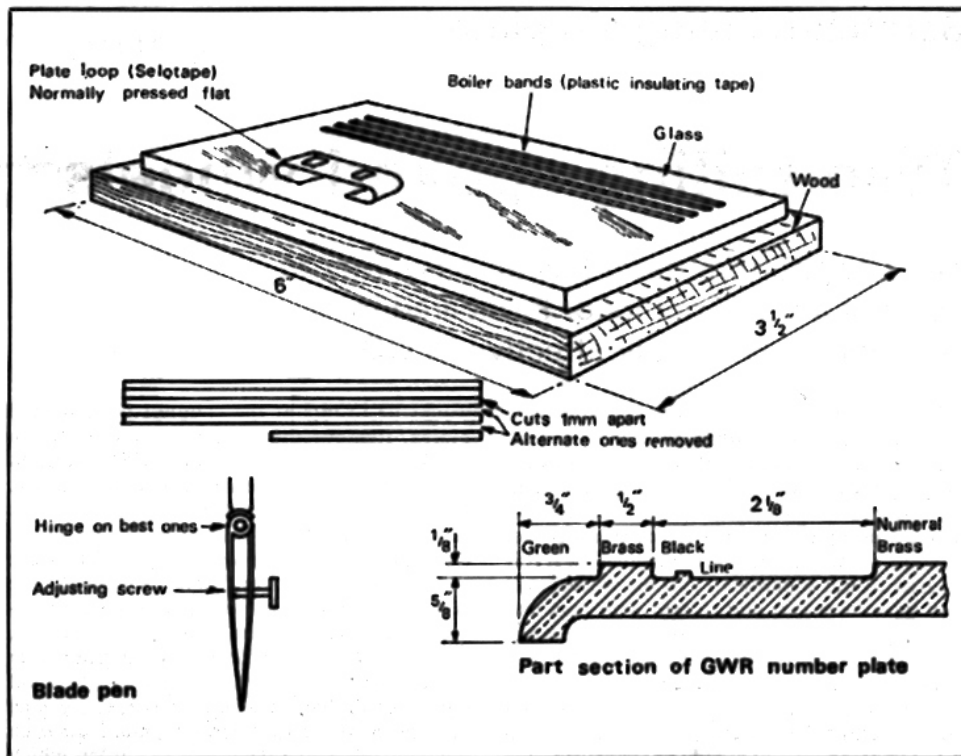
Numberplates.

Plates are the simplest. Cut about 4in. of contact tape and stick to the glass as shown, in an odd corner. Note that with the tape ends folded under the mid-part, it sticks to the glass yet has an adhesive surface uppermost. Place the plates on it and press home. Now you may simply paint the plates as usual, making sure that the edges are covered. On G.W.R. and some other locos, the edges of the plates are the colour of the background. This shows in gauge O plates and is worth the extra trouble. When the plates are dry, ease them off the tape and wipe a little Pafra on the back and place them on the model after it is painted, but before varnishing. You should, of course, clean off the raised work of the plates before fixing.

Boiler bands.

When I make up a metal kit I remove the cast bands. This will doubtless send the manufacturers braying their hearts out, but the fact is that cast bands, and a lot of "super-detail" ones, are inevitably thick. Look at any photo of the normal rather than the posh kind (where lining, etc. is very showy). [In fairness to manufacturers we should point out that if the kits didn't have boiler bands cast on, everyone would complain. The point is that some cast detail can be improved by skilled hand work. Ed. R.M.]

My bands come from Woolworth's in the guise of plastic insulating tape. Any such will do, but avoid the Apex brand made in Manchester; it is beautiful PVC and stretches like "Billy-O", keep it for its stated purpose, where it excels all others. Most bands are really black, especially in 4mm. scale, e.g. the G.W.R. full livery bands are 1/4in. mid-chrome green, 1/4in. chrome orange line, 1/4in. mid-chrome green, 1in. black, then as before in reverse, from one edge of band to the other. The mid-chrome is the G.W.R. livery colour. Obviously, in 4mm. and even in 7mm. the black dominates by its width and the chrome orange by its brightness, the green is so sparse as to vanish in small scale. This makes life easy. L.M.S. bands and L.N.E.R. and late S.R. ones are similar in layout, but have



straw-yellow or white instead of chrome orange. Would someone say what early (Brunswick green) S.R. loco bands were lined and how? Clearly some sort of yellow but what and where?

Back to the makings. Slowly draw out a 5in. strip of tape from the reel; slowly so as to avoid any stretch at all, and lay the strip as straight as possible on the glass; you may do several strips thus. Using a true steel straight-edge and a very sharp knife, cut a wee slip along one edge of each strip, peel this waste away; it need be only about 1/4mm. Now mark with knife at each end, 1mm. inland, and make a similar cut. Repeat this across the tape. Peel out each alternate slip, so that you have strips 1mm. wide the same distance apart from each other. These are your bands. If they are to be plain, when the model is ready and primed, peel off enough band to go round boiler, etc., cutting the length with a press of the knife tip first. The necessary length can be guessed or else measured with cotton, 2 1/2in. will get round most British boilers. Feeding the band under handrails, etc. is tricky, but remember to keep the outer face rubbing against the rail and thus clear of the boiler. If in doubt, chop the band as you reach the obstruction, the gap will not be seen. But if any clever type looks behind the handrails you can zonk him with a mallet as he bends over.

Lining other bands needs only one thing. A really good draughtsman's pen, the spring-blade type. This will cost money, but it is needed to successfully line the rest of the model anyway. I paid 24/- for one and it is no good, but I am told that ex-Government ones seem to be very good. A typical ex-government D.O. set costs anything from 3/6 (!) to about 15/-, depending on retailer. If the pen is hinged, cleaning will be easy; otherwise when you have done clean the pen in paint stripper and wash and dry well, to make sure caked paint is got rid of. The paint is ordinary Humbrol or your own to taste. I do not like water paints though many do; I find it very hard to avoid rubbing off the line during varnishing, so I use

Humbrol. (CPR yellow is L.M.S. straw). Consistency—well, I just cannot describe this. It depends on the nature as in the tin, usually a little "thinner" is needed but I often find newly opened tins just right. Try a few runs on a spare bit of tape to find the right degree. Load the pen with a No. 2 size brush, and carefully wipe all paint off the outside of the blades. Do not dip the pen in the paint. This rule applies to drawing ink anyway. A bevelled square or top-quality rule makes the best guide; you may wish to make your own from .060in. styrene sheet or 1/4mm. three-ply.

Press the pen lightly on the strips of tape, keeping the line as close to the edges as possible, the speed of ruling will partly govern the thickness of line and test strokes on spare tape will show you what is just right. If the line does not take, go back and try again very lightly, once it starts you are o.k. for the rest of the run. Should it fail briefly, you can later gently touch in with a No. 000 brush as used elsewhere for curved lining. If the line repeatedly fails then the tape is not ideal and you should clean it off and apply a coat of flat varnish, allowing 24 hours to dry. You may do so anyway if you like.

When the lines are laid put the lot away for 24 hours, then apply a thin wash of flat varnish. Finally, cut and peel your bands as wanted. You may build up a stock of bands for several locos in an evening and they will keep on the glass indefinitely so long as it is kept in a plastic bag in store. The object of the glass is to keep the adhesive of the tape intact for applying to the models. Therefore, before you lay any tape you should carefully clean the glass with a lint-free rag wetted with methylated spirit—I forgot to mention this beforehand (which shows that you should always read the whole article before rushing into action). Plastic-tape boiler bands look quite splendid and you are sure of a clean straight line on them by the above methods, because you are drawing the line on a flat surface, not round a curly boiler shell, with fittings of various kinds in the way.