Dave Round

Creating an S & D 7F

About 4 years ago, a chance remark at a Tuesday evening modelling session at the Wimborne Railway Society, lamenting the fact that a 7mm kit of the famous S & D 7F no longer existed, led to the purchase of a very old kit at the next Wimrail exhibition! How strange is that!

It had been started and the chassis was fitted with an old dinosaur of a motor, long loved by the elder statesman within the hobby. It was not up to modern DCC standards. So a deal was struck, to have the kit, but not the motor. It was also not complete. I did not find that a problem, as I have scratch built many locomotives in the past. Mainly in 4mm scale.

The vendor, a well-known gentleman, was selling this kit on behalf of one his friends. Fortunately a week later some of the missing parts arrived in the post. Great service! So I started out with a chassis with wheels attached, a machined – yes machined – boiler barrel and smoke box, together with various etches. The kit was then put on the back burner for a while.

Eventually a start was made with the obvious place to begin being the locomotive body. I like to see progress and having sorted out the etches, discovered that size is everything!

I have a drawing for the locomotive and on checking basic dimensions the cab front spectacle plate was 2mm too narrow. I folded up the one-piece cab sides, the roof assembly and the firebox, which confirmed the shortage of material on the cab front width. So out with the brass sheet.

Modern kits use mainly the tab and lock system to aid assembly, but 20 years ago that principle had not been adopted. The weight of this locomotive is rather on the heavy side, with heavy-duty frames and a solid cylinder block. To aid a long life in service the footplate angles were soldered and then secured with 12 BA studs, filed off flush and loctite'd in place. Handling of model locomotives can show up any weakness in construction!

So with a bit of tweaking and help from one of our members (who took the boiler / smoke box unit into work and put a radius on the 90% machined edges for me), the body slowly came together. So having built up the smoke box mounting saddle and got the thing sitting level in relation to the footplate, I could relax a little.

As you may know the later batches of the 7Fs had a chequered history. As they became due for boiler replacement, dimensions from the originals were suddenly dis-regarded, with the adoption of new smaller diameter boilers. This meant an alteration to the smoke box saddle, with all of them (except No 7) being built up with additional angles and an in-fill ring, to close the gap.

So here the fun started, I made two closure rings, each of a different thickness, to assist in get the relationship right. Once happy, I could then set about construction of the reverse angles on the cylinder block sides.

Back in January, a group of us went to the Bristol 7mm Show. As is usual, the Gauge O Guild had a member's sales stand there. On it was a rather forlorn looking brass tender, very much like a Fowler 3,500 gallon type. The price was just £10. So I thought it best not to barter! It was filthy dirty and the soldering was a bit agricultural. But it could be salvaged. I did have the kit etches in reserve, if necessary.

So back home some cleaning fluid quickly removed the grime. The body is pretty strong, being made from 1.25mm thick brass. Usually it is around 0.4mm, if etched. After doing a complete dimension check, I had certain areas to re-profile. The stand-alone chassis it came with was put to one side and a new one manufactured, much stronger than the original.

Here was the basis of a tender for the 7F, without too much work. The new chassis was compensated on the first two axles, using sprung horn blocks. Detailing, using parts from the etches, to give the basic structure a lift and some scratch building, gave it a semblance of a locomotive tender.

The current lockdown of the population, with the Covid 19 pandemic, is a serious problem, but it does have its upsides too. Being self-isolated at home, now the garage has been sorted out, means I can spend the mornings with a soldering iron. My wife is home too, so I can't spend all day in total isolation! Daytime TV, is not something that interests me. I need to be doing something, to exercise my brain and relax. Building things is a great way to achieve this.

It could be this locomotive may be up and running, waiting for the paint shop, before this national emergency comes to an end. Testing can take place on my Shottesford Mill layout at home, once again set up in the garage, following the house renovations, last year. So lots to look forward to and who knows, a start could be made on my DJH A4 kit, the family bought me, for my 65th birthday… Whenever that was!