

Contests

Contests are central to regions and divisions. For some they seem to be the centerpieces of meetings and a reason to go. For others they seem to be a source of controversy. For some they seem quite “ho-hum”.

Their connections to other regional, divisional and national activities are strong, especially to the Achievement Program. While there is agreement that it is important that the AP be consistently applied, there is no agreement about consistency in contests. Contests at the National level and many Regional conventions use AP judging for their judging and ranking criteria. Others don't. Although AP judging may be available, the contest itself isn't judged using those standards.. To provide for the need for AP points without using the AP rules, for example, the Coast Division of the Pacific Coast Region (PCR) uses popular vote for contests, but also has AP judging available for those who wish to get AP credit. Some people believe that the AP standards are the only true measures of models and others are appalled by the rigidity that implies.

For our purposes AP judging and contests are not the same. Further, we do not intend to make a judgment. The point for us and this handbook is how to use them to improve the organization..

There are quite a number of structures for contests: They can be based on the AP regulations, they can be popular vote, in some only the participants can vote, and there are other schemes. Beyond the structure for choosing there can be categories of competition (novice, most improved, senior, etc) and categories of models (scratch-built, kit, RTR, etc.)

Issues/Differences

1. Contest Judging vs. AP

Judging

Let us begin by discussing one of the most central questions to any sort of contests. Is it subjective or objective? A subjective contest is one where only ones opinions matter. Do you like it or not? The best example of this is the popular vote. If more people like this one than that one, it is the winner. The winner needs nothing except to be best.

Is it objective? An objective contest implies that there are a set of rules or standards that reflect the best of all ways of doing things. The winner is the one which most closely meets those standards. Clearly our use of the AP standards falls into this category.

Which then is better? The answer, as in many things, is a clear and consistent "It depends." A popular vote contest gives the average attendee much more ownership in the winner. A vote by other entrants gives the winner a sense of being judged by his or her peers. A winner selected by adherence to standards gives a sense that the outcome should be the same no matter where it was judged.

What are the problems? Well, the public and your peers can be fickle or uninformed. People can feel that the

standards are poorly designed or do not represent the best practices or, even, that they were not well applied in this case.

What follows is thought about the values and method differences between objective and subjective judging.

Pacific Coast Region

On the difference between AP assessment and Contest Judging. Generally contest judging is done "blind". That is, the judges don't know (aren't supposed to know) who the model entrants are. This sometimes requires some serious documentation, since the entrant has to answer any questions that the judges might have, without knowing what questions they might have – this could involve conformance, construction techniques, historical information, etc. In the case of pure AP evaluation, the folks doing the evaluation could possibly be sitting face-to-face with the modeler, so he/she could answer any questions they might have right then. This might reduce the quantity of documentation substantially, though obviously it would still be wise for the modeler to provide some fairly comprehensive information. That's a very broad-brush description of the differences. The key here is, if the purpose of the AP program is to help the modeler improve and receive an AP

certificate, the face-to-face technique would be the more effective of the two. Unfortunately, some in the NMRA seem to feel that receiving an AP certificate (and ultimately a MMR) is some sort of mystic ritual and should be as much of a challenge as possible -- which essentially defeats the entire purpose of the program, to get more modelers involved.

Pat LaTorres, VP

Central Indiana Division/Mid West Region

The Central Indiana Division/Midwest Region switched from "contests" to "Model Judging" about 7 years ago. Our rationale was that if three fellows entered models that each scored above 87.5 points it was a shame to rate them as 1st, 2nd, and 3rd. So we went to a scale where any model scoring 87.5 points or better would receive a Gold Certificate. Models receiving 87 to 76 points would get a Silver Certificate, and models scoring 75 to 50 points would receive a Bronze Certificate. Models receiving less than 50 points would receive a Certificate of participation. This would recognize the appropriate level of modeling achievement. Conversely there was also the concern that if only three models were entered in the contests and if they scored 60 points, 50 points, and 40 points on the old system they would receive 1st Place, 2nd Place, and 3rd Place although the awards were not particularly an accurate representation of modeling skills. We have also made giving feedback to modelers a part of the judging process. Entrants were informed of areas where their skills were

particularly strong and they were also given suggestions where they might have been able to earn more points. My observation of model judging in our division though is that we have not had a very strong interest from folks wanting to enter contests in the last few years. Our contests have been at our Train Shows and it seems that interest is more in browsing the dealer tables more than bringing models for judging. I am appreciating this discussion on Contests contests/judging and continue to look for ideas that might lead to greater interest in this area.

Thomas Cain, Superintendent,

Pacific Northwest Region

It appears that NMRA rules contests are not a major consideration at many division levels. That has also become evident over the past several years in PNR (and the divisions) as the number of models has continuously declined and "alternate" contest modes have been implemented. In PNR 4D a "module" contest and "people's choice" have become the predominant efforts. The "Module" contest varies from meet to meet and can range anywhere from a 1 foot by 1 foot module to a peanut butter jar put together with a specific theme for the meet. It brings out a lot of modeler ingenuity and increases entries of modeler work. More significant perhaps is the overall trend to emphasize AP as the real reason for people to bring work to a meet. At the most recent PNR regional convention we tried something different and it worked very well. AP assessment preceded contest judging. The modelers were encouraged to be

present for the AP work and there was a lot of communication back and forth. Many people brought stuff just for AP assessment but then left it for the contest which was both NMRA rules and People's Choice. The end result was that the modelers who were actually interested in learning how their work was considered and how to improve their skills and their end results got that input. Not only did that get the written AP assessment with comments they also got to talk with the people reviewing their work. Following completion of AP assessment, a complete new team of Contest Judges went to work looking at the items entered in the NMRA contest. A twist on the effort was that the Leader of the AP assessment team provided a copy of the marks assigned by the AP team for each model assessed to the Contest Chair. The only thing provided was the marks so the contest guys had to complete their own review. They were able to use the AP marks sheet any way they wanted. After all the contest marks were in, the AP Chair and Contest Chair got together to discuss the process. The conclusion was that:

- a. The modelers received greater benefit from the effort because they received positive feedback and were able to discuss their work during the AP session,
- b. The general opinion of all who entered items for AP or Contest or both was that the end result was more consistent with the overall quality of the work
- c. The contest judges appreciated having the AP scores to assist them in their efforts. Considering the time

that the AP teams spent reading supporting data and talking to modelers to sort out questions, the contest judges had a better feel for matrix start points for their deliberations. Interesting enough, the AP teams and the contest judges were in close agreement with respect to relative quality of the models judged.

- d. The potential for confusion between categories of models allowable or set up for contest and the requirements associated with AP was avoided.

Because the AP judges only looked at items that were offered for AP assessment and only within the categories covered by AP (no dioramas, modules, full trains, etc) there was no possibility of making Merit Awards to models that did not qualify for such award under AP. We are now working to formalize the process.

I am also working on a white paper that would more clearly separate AP and contest based on the separate objectives and processes of the two programs. Jack Hailton, President

Thousand Lakes Region

In the PLD the normal practice at our meets is popular vote contest, each registrant gets a "contest vote card" upon which they write the number of their favorite entry in each category, then drop in the ballot "box". These cards are then tabulated by the contest co-chairs to determine winners and awards, 1st, 2nd, & 3rd. NMRA judging, ie AP points and matrix, is offered to

anyone who requests prior to the meet. Any Merit awards are announced at the awards ceremony. The practice was to request notification of NMRA judging request in advance so necessary paper work could be mailed prior to the meet, which we still do if the person cannot download the forms. The prior notice also allows the contest chairs ample time to line up judges. As most meets have no request for AP judging, we don't normally arrange for judges. And as our meets are open to the public, finding enough NMRA members for a judging team can sometimes be a challenge (we only have 43 NMRA members in our entire division, and not all of them build models, and those who do are often the ones seeking AP judging).

This was the same practice at the area meets when I lived in the Mid-Cont region.

Doug Harding, Superintendent
Prairie Lakes Division

NMRA Achievement Program

No, it is not time to revise the AP. Contest and AP while they share some similarities they are different. We changed the AP a few years ago to accommodate the PM folks and they did not participate in droves, and I have the AP data to prove it.

The Prototype Modeler certificate is the least earned certificate in the program and I don't mean just total numbers. Since it is the newest certificate it would be unfair to directly compare the total number of MP certificates to the other certificate totals. What I see as AP Chairman is I seldom

get an application for MP but regularly get applications for all of the other certificate. The points assignment changes we made to "bring the PM modelers into the fold" are a rousing flop.

I would not support making changes to the AP just to accommodate people who won't participate anyway. Let's only make new mistakes and not repeat the one we made last time. The definition of insanity is doing the same thing and expecting different results.

Let's not practice insanity.

Paul Richardson, NMRA
Achievement Program Chairman

2. Consistency of Judging

As I implied at the end of my comments on the previous section, one of the serious problems of objective judging is the question of how reliable are the judges. It is important for all to have faith in the judges. The entrants must believe that the judges are well qualified and will apply the standards in a fair and unbiased fashion. If the judging is a sham, why submit something? Similarly, the attendees must believe in the integrity and training of the judges. If you don't believe in the judges, why accept their judgments? The organization needs to believe that the contest is working out the way it wants it to and promoting the values it believes in. If it doesn't draw people into the organization, why do it?

Here are some thoughts, mostly about the training of judges, about how

to get reliable judging. Remember to, though it occasionally gets beyond this, the focus of the discussion was to be on what the Regions and Divisions and not what National should do or how it should change.

Richard Hatton

I tend to agree that if the matrix is followed the judging is consistent. There are two issues that seem to show up at each convention I have been to.

Too many first time judges. Often they are looking for people to judge at the conventions. This is due to the vast area of our region. Inexperience can cause inconsistency. We need a training program (which I believe national is putting together) to establish consistency.

Too much or too little documentation. With all the wonderful scratch builders out there it can be hard to tell what's the kit and what's the Scratch built. I try to keep up but I cannot remember all the kits available.

As I see it we need to establish a series of judges (experienced) and perhaps set a standardized way of documenting your build so that it is quick and easy for the judges and simple for the contestant. Perhaps point form focused on special features?

Richard Hatton

Pacific Coast Region

I was hoping it would not be a necessity to put such a program into play, but I was proven wrong as I

already knew that I would be, unfortunately... I'm working directly with Bob Hamm using his clinic slides on both judging and in a complementary role his slides on filling out the forms, as well as a few "extra" slides of my own - It's a good 2+ hour long lecture//discussion clinic that should benefit folks standing on either side of the fence, so to speak. If you've got a 2+ hour clinic, then there's material that needs to be trimmed! We've been giving a clinic on judging at every PCR convention for over six years and we can cover it effectively in just over an hour -- and that's with Q&A. clinic which last over two hours will do more to put folks to sleep than teach them something effectively.

I'll stay away from my thoughts regarding how Mr. Hamm has changed judging in his contest since it strays beyond the realm of this list. I can guarantee that being an active Judge improves the quality of your modeling skills!

If one goes in with open eyes and an open mind, this is absolutely the truth!

Mid Eastern Region

Subject: [NMRAAP] Re: Who can be an AP Judge? I am new to the website also. Here is what I have and it is straight from the NMRA AP website. **

For those categories which require that someone act as a witness or a judge to the accomplishments of the member requiring certification, a qualified witness shall be:

1. Past or present National or Region

Officers; (Trying to figure out how these titles somehow qualify a person.)

2. Past or present National, Regional Contest or Achievement Program Manager or AP committee members;
3. Past or present AP National, Region or Division Manager or members holding the certificate; (Does this mean the certificate being judged/witnessed? If so, then that part makes sense, because they've already jumped through the appropriate hoops.)
4. NMRA members appointed by the Region or Division AP Manager as committee members, judges or witnesses. All witnesses must be current NMRA members and put their NMRA number on the witness form. (Unfortunately, none of these qualifications address the person(s) doing judging possessing any actual validated experience or real knowledge of judging.)

I hate to mention it, but being a judge does not include, require nor confer any special insight. The judging matrix makes it very simple to judge a given model in a specific area (detail, finish, conformance, etc.). The biggest issue that I've seen with most judges is that they judge a model against some perceived notion of "perfection". The fact is, the matrix gives them exactly what needs to be looked at, if they choose to go beyond these parameters then they are NOT doing their job correctly! My favorite example (as live steam modeler)

is, no electric model of a steam locomotive should EVER receive full conformance points, because it does not use steam for power (and yes, there are N and HO scale live steam locomotives). the most important tool that a judge has is his/her positive attitude, that they are there to help the modelers that have chosen to enter the contest (divisional, regional, or national). Any judge that feels it's part of the job to make it as difficult as possible to earn points in some misguided belief that that helps maintain some perceived "standards", would better serve the hobby by taking up knitting.

It is entirely possible to obtain certificates in their areas to be judged w/o ever doing any judging.

I would have a bit more faith in someone that holds the certificate (has done the work), but has the proper attitude than I would a judge that has never built a model, but has been "trained".

This is a topic that I have started to address in the MER in my position of contest chair by initiating an active training program for judging which includes a multi-hour clinic of lecture

Pacific Coast Region

The ONLY set of criteria that is valid is, can they read and do they understand the judging matrix, and do they have a positive attitude regarding their responsibilities to the modelers entered in the contest. Any other criterion is artificial (like Bob Hamm's artificial point restriction on "kit based" models) and is not in the best interest of

the hobby. This type of elitism is exactly why groups like the Railroad Prototype Modelers want so little to do with the NMRA. As long as we give preference to technique over the finished model, more and more of the younger modelers will ignore our contests as not relevant.

Pat LaTorres, VP

I entered two models at a PCR convention back in 2006 and received a certain point total. I entered the same two models three years later at the national convention in Anaheim and received the EXACT SAME scores. This tells me that the matrix seems to work pretty well. No, it's not perfect -- but no subjective judging system ever will be. The key is we use people and people sometimes make mistakes. Please note, I did NOT use the, "We're all volunteers" excuse, because I feel that this is quite probably the tackiest cop-out ever and I won't accept it -- for myself, or for others. In PCR we also stress using our divisional AP Chairs to get one's model scored away from the contest room, because then you have the opportunity to talk one on one with the judge(s) and find out where they may have questions -- which can't be done in the contest room -- which may allow the model to receive more points. The key is always, what can we do to help a member do better, not what will we do to make it harder to get AP points.

Pat LaTorres

As Harold has already mentioned, the key here is to put at least one experienced judge in each area it helps to provide a "coach" for the newer

judges. The other thing is at each regional convention we try to move judges to an area that they have not worked before. This gives them exposure to the entire matrix over time. We also present a clinic at the regional conventions on "How to be a contest judge", which always suckers in some unsuspecting novice and helps to broaden our base of available judges <g>. I'm finding that many of the newer judges are actually working out better, in that they don't have many of the old attitudes from the fifties and sixties about "how many points can we deduct" as opposed to "how can we support and help the modeler". Just my two bits worth.

Pat LaTorres

Rocky Mountain Region

In the RMR I have mandated that judges make comments in the category they are judging. We have received very good comments on this and has helped the modeler understand what the judge liked or didn't like, yes I encourage positive comments also. The contest chair has a list of judges and who judged what category so if a modeler has a question they can talk with the judges that judged that category. Yes, that opens up the judge for scrutiny, but in the long run it makes the judge think twice before making a decision.

Harold Huber, President

3 Kit vs RTR vs Scratchbuilt

This goes to the heart of the standards used for judging and the

purposes for the contest. What matters more, the final product or the process by which it was created? While both the Achievement Program and, for example, the Railroad Prototype Modelers are interested in faithfully reproducing the prototype, the NMRA's standards offers 12% of its scoring based on whether it is scratch-built or not. RPM simply does not care. If it is right, it is right and the process is irrelevant.

Prairie Lakes Division, TLR

Rick asks why the drop off in entries for AP judging.

- 1) to get AP judging the modeler must be a NMRA member.
- 2) Even if an NMRA member, much modeling doesn't qualify. I won a lot of popular vote contests because I entered a wood craftsman freight car kit where others entered a P/L Athearn boxcar. But neither model met the criteria to receive a merit award, Craftsman kits are not scratchbuilt, nor do they require much in the way of modeler generated detail, so the average modeler will not get enough points for an Merit Award. Witness also the large number of kitbashes at RPM meets, under previous AP criteria they could not earn enough points. Granted the AP standards have changed, but many modelers long ago gave up meeting a standard that did not recognize their modeling.
- 3) the first time I entered a scratchbuilt model at a local meet, where it

was awarded a Merit award, an NMRA region official who was visiting, informed me my model would not have qualified at the Region meet contest because my truck screw was too big and not painted. When I later took the same model to a National meet, I did not earn enough points for a Merit Award. Can we say judging was not the same everywhere. I can say I was discouraged from entering models at Region and National levels, and I have attended a number of meets at both levels.

- 4) Non-NMRA events, ie Narrow Gauge, RPM's, etc. attract a large number of entries. Many from folks who are not NMRA members. But more important you see a lot of kits and kitbashes. Winning models sometimes are a commercial product with a superb detail and finish.

Doug Harding, Superintendent

Regional Advisory Council

I think the issue is more of a change in the face of the hobby. When contests were heavily loaded with entries, practically everything on the hobby shop shelves were wood, metal or plastic kits. They tested your ability to CONSTRUCT an award winning model and you were proud of your accomplishment.

Today, you're hard pressed to even find a kit hiding amongst all the Ready to Repair models on the hobby shop shelves. The art form today is how well

can you detail one of the RTR pieces to make it unique and even more prototypical. Hence the move away from construction ability to detail ability. This shift in the hobby promotes the RPM movement amongst those who want to show their works.

You gotta face it, today's hobby is nothing like what it was 40-50 years ago. Its a Ready To Run world today.

Bob Ferguson, RAC Director

Pacific Coast Region

Until we find a way to make the contest more meaningful to all participants, entries will continue to decline. Perhaps it is time to make the contest fall in the lines opened by Bob Hamm and separate both the categories of entries and the judging criteria for those categories. If we want to accept kits for contests, we need a separate set of criteria for them as opposed to scratchbuilt models. And on and on.

While Bob's intention may have been well meaning, the execution falls way short! In the PCR we have had "Kit" and "Open" categories for several years now and it works well. Where Bob goofed is in introducing some sort of artificial restrictions to limit how many points a kit based model can score, and further that the judges will decide if the model will be placed in the "Kit" category if they decide that the model is more than 50% kit based. This is like not unlike a "separate, but equal" concept, it tells the modeler entering a kit based model that he will always be just a bit lower on the food chain. That is NOT the way to encourage someone to get involved. The

difference would be to let the modeler know that if their model is more than 50% kit based, he/she can enter either "Kit" or "Open" (note that the MODELER decides which category!) and that their model will be judged the same regardless of which category it is entered in -- though obviously it will be more difficult for them to earn "Scratch Built" points, unless they fabricated a large number of supplemental elements to add to the model. We routinely have kit based models earning merit awards, because the modeler has taken the time and effort to do this additional work. A good example would be many of the diesel locomotive models that show up at RPM meets. While these locos may be based on an Athearn loco, the modeler may have added a large number of Cannon detail and body parts, or Details West parts, but they're still not "scratch built" because the modeler didn't fabricate the parts himself. Since the frame and other parts of the model totaling more than 50% may be from these non-scratch built sources, the modeler can enter either "Kit" or "Open" (though only one) and know that the judging will be against the same matrix and so the total points earned will be the same. It may seem like a small matter, but this is exactly what has driven many of the very fine RPM modelers away from the NMRA contest room.

Pat LaTorres, VP

4. Possible Categories: Most Improved, Novice.

One of the ways to break the perception that the mountain is too high

to climb is to create partial goals. In this case an award for the most improved modeler or a category where beginners compete against each other creates a feeling that the beginner can win something, that the prize is not beyond his or her reach.

The purpose, of course, is to generate more entries in the contest. No matter how perfect the one winning entry in each category is, people like to see a table full of items. If "Model" is our middle name shouldn't we be trying to get more models?

Lone Star Region

I took over a Division in the LSR 4 years ago that was basically dead. We had once a year meet and that was about it. I kicked off monthly meetings and did clinics. My biggest challenge was just getting people to show up but we have a good crowd of 50 or so each month now. All that to say this...I would LOVE to have 10 or 12 people willing to build anything. Like you, we found that when we did anything it was the usual suspects with the same 2 or 3 winning it all. What I found was that it was all about keeping or getting them interested. You have to take the excuses they are giving you and remove a few of the roadblocks so they really can't complain. I wouldn't exclude the MMR's or the experienced guys because they were a great carrot for me to follow while I was completing my MMR. Also, having Dad a few steps ahead of me finishing up his MMR was also a source of inspiration to follow. And don't let the young guys talk about how they can't compete with the experienced crowd. I'm

only 40 now and I got my MMR when I was 37 so it can be done.

A 'Most Improved' is a great idea. A Novice award to go to the highest scoring modeler who hasn't won before might be another option. Getting the MMR's into their own category along with the rest of the 'Experienced Class' might do you favors on a couple of levels. It would kill the complaining that only they win and it might crank up a little friendly competition between them to build the better model. It does mean a few more awards, which means some extra costs however.

Duane Richardson, MMR, Contest Chairman

5. Hands On Clinics

On the face of it the following comment is not part of this discussion. A clinic on building something generally would not seem to be part of the Contests question. However, just as there are clinics on the paperwork to submit a model, a session on building contest quality models may well increase the number of models entered

Lone Star Region

Another good option that I had really good luck with was some hands on clinics for scratchbuilding and or kitbashing. Have them bring in their toolbox and work on something while being taught by one of the Experienced Class members. Lean on your MMR's here. We all agreed when we signed our paperwork that we promise help anybody else to learn how to follow in

our footsteps. If you break the room into a few groups where maybe one can lead the class then the others can float between a few modelers and mentor them. That takes some of the intimidation factor of talking in front of a crowd out of the equation for the clinicians. It also makes it easier for people to ask questions. Nobody wants to look stupid so more often than not they won't ask if they feel they are asking in front of the entire group. If they are only asking it in front of 4 or 5 guys it's not that big of a deal. It's even easier if you can put the groups together based on experience level. If the projects are back to back where you can keep the groups together with the same guys each time they will really surprise you with how comfortable they get and how much more they will open up. Once the projects are complete...judge them and offer up your awards.

I recently became the LSR's contest chairman and in talking with people I've found that the only legitimate reason anybody has given me for not entering is they don't want to have their work judged. I agree that it's not for everybody but I always tell that I PROMISE it WILL make him or her a better modeler.

Duane Richardson, MMP Contest Chairman

6. Win vs Lose

What is the point of having a contest at all. Some few of us thrive on the adrenalin of competition, though I don't see much call for "smash mouth" modeling. The point of this, as the point

of the whole section how to turn this activity to our advantage.

Pat's points are well taken and some of them go back to the first part of this and the judges' comments. How can you set this up so it is a useful and positive experience for more than the owner of the Blue Ribbon model?

Pacific Coast Region

One of the primary reasons for the fall off of contest entries is the perception that there is little value to entering a contest. You either win (one out of however many) or you lose (all the rest). Most modelers really want to win but equally important, they want to know why they did not make the cut. Unfortunately, in most contests, at almost every level, judges do not take the time (they probably don't have it either) to try to understand what the modeler was trying to do and what skills and effort were required to complete the model. The paucity of meaningful comments regarding the model in each of the five judging areas leads to frustration on the part of the modeler and eventually drop out.

This is one of the most important parts of the contest process. As long as some see the contests as a win, or lose proposition it is a useless event. It is critically important for the judges to take time (in all of the areas being judged) to make comments about why the model didn't score higher and what could be done (either in documentation, or actual modeling technique) to improve the score.

Pat LaTorres, VP

11. Special Contests

Arizona Division, PSR

At the Arizona Division meets, we have a table in the Contest Room called 'Lenny's Challenge'. This is adapted from the RPM concept for folks to come show their models. Not judged or voted on. At our meet yesterday in Sedona, we had models with sound being installed displayed as well as completed or under construction models. Lenny's Challenge has been growing and since it's inception a couple of years ago, the growth has been consistent.

We also have Favorite Train and Levity models. Each is voted on, and ribbons are awarded. Yesterday, the favorite train category was Intermodal of which we had four entries. Levity was TOFC, defined as anything that starts with 'T' on a flat car. Each is voted on and ribbons are awarded. The Levity entries had a outhouse 'Toilet' on a flat car and the other was a transformers on a flat car. One of the transformers was the kids toy.

For Favorite Model, we weren't getting many entries for the category. So Last year, the Contest Chair changed the format and assigned a Favorite Model number to each of the judged contest entries. That way folks get popular recognition as well as judged recognition. Interestingly enough, the Favorite Model winner was different than Best in Show. In my opinion, the result is more positive than if the Best in Show was also the Favorite Model. Two different criteria yielded two different winners.

Just a note: the Sedona meet is one of our smaller meets generating about half of what Phoenix or Tucson draw.

Rick Watson, Director

British Region

We had a popular "non AP" type contest category called 'Most Attractive Train'. Self explanatory really, but did bring in some really nice consists, loco to caboose (or tailcar). Obviously they tended to be short trains.

Years ago, when Tenshodo brought out their SPUD motorised trucks, for a laugh I mounted a small (kid's toy) plastic saucer on one, with a small potato on the saucer, and entered it as "powered Spud". (I think it won me a clout round the ear and a warning never to come to a convention again!)

Another interesting contest category we called Photo Match, a bit like RPM but the entrant brought a prototype photo and displayed the model with it, showing how closely it replicated that particular example of the prototype, with any oddities it presented.

Martin Boyask, British Region
Roundhouse Editor

Pacific Coast Region

We started with the popular vote concept in our regional convention contest room a few years ago and it has worked wonders. We actually have popular vote categories for Models, Photography, and Arts & Crafts (note, we don't have a "Non-Rails" category, because we've had more than a few

entries in the A&C that were from modelers and they've done quite well) and every item entered for judging or display is automatically entered in the popular vote. As Rick mentioned, the results are sometimes interesting. The popular vote winner in A&C at our last convention was a strong sentimental favorite, yet it was second in the judged group. By allowing the voters to look at all of the items in the contest room, sometimes a "non-judged/for display only" item can still go home with a prize. Also, we've added a "Meet The Builder" time after our convention banquet, when everyone is encouraged to drop by the contest room and talk with the entrants about what they did and how they did it. This seems to be a chance for everyone to extend the social session of the banquet and allowed folks to meet members of the region from the other divisions. We've also been lucky enough (i.e. enough registrants) that our last three conventions have actually included the banquet in the registration for the event, as opposed to being an extra fare activity. This has really increased the attendance at the banquet and made it a much more social affair.

Pat LaTorres, VP

Prairie Lakes Division, TLR

They say a photo is worth a thousand words. So I have posted a few images in the group photos, in the new "PLD" photo album. These are some images taken by our PLD contest director. They show the entries in a special theme contest the PLD held last fall.

The contest (idea stolen from somewhere out west) was called a 6x6.

Each participant who signed up at last year's spring meet was given a 6"x6" piece of plywood. Instructions were simple: build a model on your block with a railroad theme and no taller than 24".

We were extremely pleased with 6 entries out of the 12 blocks that were passed out.

I post these simply to demonstrate something we did. We took an idea from some other contest, adapted to our meet, and had a lot of fun in the process.

Doug Harding, Superintendent,

Pacific Coast Region

Along the same lines, over the years we have had a few "concept" contests in the PCR which might be fun for others. There is one which sticks in my mind as VERY creative. The contest was announced some three to six months before the convention, so folks had a little bit of (low) pressure to get things done. It was to build a module which had to fit in one of the standard 15 1/2" X 12 1/2" file boxes one finds at Staples or Office Max type places. The key here – and something which made it kind of fun -- was that side-to-side and front-to-back dimensions were controlled, but height was left open. The other feature was that it was to be animated. If you ever get a chance to see Kermit Paul's railroad, the King Kong scene in the middle of his city was one of the entries. Enjoy,

Pat LaTorres, VP

Scott Perry

One model that I really enjoyed (we don't use it any more) was the Popular Vote by Cash contest. Everyone put their models out on the tables with a small "tub" like a butter spread tub in front of it. Everyone voted with money...whoever got the most money in their tub won...and the money went to support the division. Often it was quite hilarious and the take got huge on several occasions. It also gave us an opportunity to encourage new modelers. Scott G. Perry

Pacific Coast Region

(This is more of a compendium than a specific item)

As has been touched on earlier, another concept to consider is the Special Contest. While these are especially good for local and divisional meets, they can be added to regional (or even a national) conventions, as long as enough lead time is provided for modelers to get their project(s) together. We'll list a few ideas here (again, some of these have been touched on earlier) and it's a pretty sure thing that creative minds will come up with more. These are also usually pretty easy to administer, just place a ballot box near the display table and go with a popular vote. Also, keep in mind that most of these ideas can be implemented at any level, from a divisional meet (or even on a club level) all the way up to a national convention.

A) Model-In-A-Box: This starts with the footprint of the standard computer paper, or a cardboard file box. The idea is that the model must fit within the

footprint of the box. The fun part here is that the rules specifically do NOT mention a height limitation — if the contest organizers want to point this out or not is up to them — so it creates a challenge but leaves creativity open. When the idea was tried at a PCR convention several years ago, one modeler spotted that omission and built a great model of the Empire State Building, with King Kong hanging on the top surrounded by airplanes.

B) Animation: This would require that all entrees have some form of animation. This could be something as simple as a ferris wheel, to something as complex as a working rotary dumper. The organizers would need to make sure that there was power supplied so all of the models could be plugged in. This is a fun concept, because spectators seem drawn to moving models.

C) Kit-bash Contests: Again, this can be as easy or complex as one wants. The easy way is to start with some basic Bachmann or Walthers building kit and give modelers a limited amount of time to do whatever they want with said kit. An easy way to limit the time is provide the kits at one meet, with the entrees due in at the next one. If doing it as part of a convention, just hold the announcement of the contest until three or four months before the contest and then put the word out

through newsletters or over the internet. A nice touch on this one is to have the division or region purchase the kits (or get them donated by a manufacturer) and then have them available for purchase at a nominal fee. All modelers that actually enter a kit-bash in the contest would then get their purchase price refunded. This puts their money on the line and gives an added incentive. This concept can use buildings, cars, or locomotives with equal ease.

D) The Scene Theme: This one uses a basic format (a 12" or 18" square of foam), which can be built up, cut down, or otherwise shaped by the modeler for the scenery base. The scene must include a section of ballasted railroad track or bridge and at least two of the following elements; a road, a piece of railroad rolling stock (car or locomotive), a building, a stream. Obviously scenic elements can be added to the list as desired. Multiples of any scenic elements would only be counted as one element. Again, this one would work well with a three or four month lead time.

E) The Rolling Stock Theme: This idea has been used by some of the On30 groups with great success. The idea is with a three month window, build a model of some type of rolling stock (flat car, locomotive, caboose. etc.). The only requirement is that the equipment must be able to be used on an On30 railroad, beyond

that it's pretty loose. The contest would be for the rolling stock, so loads wouldn't be included (on open cars) and coupling systems would be free (link-and-pin, Kadee, etc.). This concept could be altered to fit where needed, either scale/gauge specific or not.

F) Scenic Element: Much like the Scene Theme earlier, this would call for the building of one scenic element (on a scened base or not) that is chosen by the event coordinator. This could be a type of building like a gas station, or a an outdoor scene such as a bridge or stream. Again, this can be as open or controlled as the event organizer chooses, just be sure to allow a reasonable amount of lead time for the modeler to get the project done.

G) Themed Photo Contest: This would be a contest with a pre-determined subject of theme. It may be something as simple as a steam, or diesel locomotive to something based on railroad workers or members of the local organization out railfanning.

H) Scale Vehicles: MOW equipment, semi trucks, various road vehicles, etc. This one is pretty clear and wide open. Most contests have no category for road vehicles, but it can be an interesting part of the hobby.

As was mentioned at the beginning, these contests can be judged, popular vote, or both. Also, the modelers might want to enter their models in the regular

contest for AP judging. In the PCR, we have found that popular vote tends to work best for these contests, because it gets the spectators and event attendees involved since their votes make it work. One thing one division does is present some sort of merchandise prize (often donated by one or more suppliers) to EVERY person that enters, while NOT presenting first, second, or third prize (though there is still a popular vote, just to place things in some sort of order). This takes the competitive attitude right out of the contest. These are just a few ideas which have been shown to work, though I'm sure creative minds can come up with a few more. The key here is that you're only limited by preconceptions and conventional ideas. Once one starts thinking "outside the box, the sky is the limit. The idea is to "Keep it fun!".

Pat LaTorres, VP,

Region Contest Procedures

1. British Region

As contest chairman for British Region we do not have a set of information as to how we do our contests. Sufficient to say though that in April/ May time I give the editor of our Region publication "Roundhouse" some words for the magazine requesting members to consider entering model/s at our Region Convention which takes place towards the end of October each year. This request is always with some words of encouragement and to point out what enjoyment can result from participating. This is followed up with a further reminder to everyone in August/September and to request members to advise as early as possible information on the value of models so we can calculate any insurance issues. I am fortunate to have about 12-15 people who can provide judging expertise and these good folk are circulated with a request to assist at the forthcoming Convention. From the responses I work out if I have judges enough for the event.

We are a small Region in number - about 700 members but generally we see approximately 200- 250 members (plus some wives) attending the 3 day convention. However not all stay in the hotel for the whole weekend. The total number of contest entries is usually around 20-25 models spread across all

categories. We do not have sufficient input from members to hold other contests throughout the rest of the year - just the convention contests. Like National we have judges, in our case 2 who are charged with judging one of the 5 categories and they judge all entries for that category. When members bring along their model to enter in the contests they have already completed documentation and this is taken from them details are entered on a list and the model is given a consecutive entry number. The details of each entry is also logged onto a summary for each of the contests categories i.e. structures on-line, caboose etc. Once judging is completed the scores are checked on the Form 902 and scored transferred to the summary sheets. A further sheet of merit award winners is made for processing by the AP chairman. We have cups and trophies (which are retained for 1 year) for winners of each category (however most do not wish to take these home and keep the silver clean) and we are planning to replace the trophies with plaques as per NMRA National method. Winners awards are presented at the banquet at the end of the day. 2nd and 3rd place entries are given a certificate.

I am a regular judge at National and will be at Milwaukee in July.

We do have a leaflet which is available on our own Region Yahoo

Group where members can download this information to help them understand the requirements in respect of forms etc and which gives some guidance as to detail about contest entries and how members can take advantage of help from myself or the AP Chairman. I have attached this document to this mailing for your information along with some other details which may help you understand where we are at.

Do contact me if you need any other detail or information.

Kind regards,

Terry Wynne, Contest Chairman.

British Region Contest Information is on the CD

2. Mid Central Region

Mid-Central Region Contest Proposed Guidelines

May 14, 2004

1. Current criteria established by the NMRA Contest Committee shall be used. All entry forms should be in keeping with the National Standards. All forms needed are available on the NMRA website.
2. The National Contest Manager has developed a software package, which can easily manage the record keeping tasks associated with the contest. This program will tally points and select the winning entries by category. It also indicates Merit Award winners and can print certificates.
3. All Convention Registrants are permitted to be present while judging is

taking place. It is the responsibility of the Chief Judge to monitor and control the visitors during judging to assure no interference takes place with the judges. Quite should be maintained.

4. The Contest Room should be adequate in size and furnished with enough tables to display the models, craft items and photos. Access to the room must be controlled when closed for the evening.

5. Signage should be provided outside the Contest Room showing the schedule of times the room is available to the public, start and finish times for entries, judging times and pick-up time for entries. Signs should be on tables to denote Contest Category.

6. Awards: Plaques should be provided for First Place in each contest category. Some sponsoring Divisions provide plaques for second and third place, also. This should be their option. Second and third placers should be recognized in some manner.

7. Special Awards: The sponsors of Special Awards should be responsible for notifying the Contest Chairman of their intention to provide a particular award and the criteria for winning the award. Special Awards come and go depending somewhat on the geographical location of the event. It should not be the responsibility of the Region or Division to track down sponsors of these awards and solicit their intentions. The awards sponsored by the Region Board of Directors should be the responsibility of the Region Officers.

8. Qualification of Judges: The Regional Contest Manager is responsible for periodically presenting training sessions for judging.

9. Regional Contest Manager:

- a. Shall assist Division Chairman in operation and organization of the contest at Regional Conventions.
- b. Shall appoint the Chief Judge for the contests and assign judges to specific tasks.
- c. Shall conduct judges meeting and provide assignments prior to contest judging.
- d. Shall settle disputes and break ties on point awards.
- e. Shall provide adequate periodic training for Contest Judges and assist Division Sponsor in recruiting judges for the Contest Room

10. Division Sponsor:

- a. Shall provide adequate, secure facility for contest.
- b. Shall provide staffing for Contest Room during public hours.
- c. Shall provide and present awards to the winners at the banquet.
- d. Shall provide of display of photos, slides and arts and crafts.
- e. Shall provide entry/judging forms for participants.
- f. Shall log in and return all entries to entrants.
- g. Shall provide a listing of the award winning entries to the Editor of the KingPin and the Regional Secretary for publication

and recording. A listing of the Merit Award models (87.5 points) should be sent to the Regional AP chairman.

3. Mid-Eastern Region

Within the MER I am aware of how 2 Divisions do their contests, or at least some of them.

The Carolina-Piedmont Division 13, basically the Raleigh, North Carolina area, does a contest that runs from 6 months to a year. The Division contacts a local hobby shop and buys x number of let's say Walther's kits that the shop sells them at cost (close outs?). The Division then sells these kits to the members for a minimal amount and tells the folks to build it into something that the kit isn't, using at least 40% of the kit parts. The kits are brought back in say 6 months or whatever and judged by popular vote. They have recently started giving back 1/2 of the members cost IF the model is entered into the contest. Thereby ensuring more participation.

The James River Division 5, basically Central Virginia, will have a clinic at their meeting and the next meeting the contest entries are based on the prior meetings clinic.

Both work quite well. Thanks, Chuck Hladik MER

4. Mid-West Region

The Mid-West Region Procedures were downloaded from their website, and are on the CD.

5. Pacific Coast Region

Here in the PCR our divisions have a couple of different ways to run contests at the divisional level. In the Coast Division (my home div.) we use popular vote, with the category changing from meet to meet. We try to keep the same categories at the same meets throughout the year (ie Spring meet might be steam locos and cabeese; summer meet diesels and passenger cars; fall meet MOW, structures and freight cars; and winter meet is usually your favorite model) as well as a "Show and Tell" display to let folks see work in progress, or interesting techniques that you might have come up with. The photo contest is also popular vote with a different subject each meet. Our Sierra Division has a neat concept where there is prize for EVERY member that enters a model (picked randomly) and the Redwood Empire Division uses popular vote, again with a different area at each meet. We've had a REALLY good upturn in models being presented, because it's all kept very low key.

At our Regional Conventions we use the basic NMRA categories, with one twist -- in every category we have three "classes", Novice, Kit and Open. Novice is for anyone that has not placed top three in that category before, Kit requires that the model be at least 51% kit (much like the current national practice, except that we don't have any artificial limits to try and keep a kit from beating what they call a "Scratch Built" model), and finally the Open category which is for any modeler with any model. This last category is similar to the national "Scratch Built" category, except that national has decided to create some artificial limits to try and

prevent a kit based model from coming in first place overall. Our attitude is that the best model should be the best model, whether it's kit based or 100% scratch built. Again, we also have a popular vote and the show and tell group at the regional level. Most of our contest rules are available on the Pacific Coast Region website, though there were a few changes made last October which may not be listed on the web site yet.

Pat LaTorres, V.P., PCR/NMRA

Pacific Coast Region Contest Procedures are on the CD

6. Rocky Mountain Region

In the Rocky Mountain Region we run two contests. The model with the highest points from the NMRA Assessment wins its category. The model with the most ballots in its category wins. This is simple and it works.

My basic responsibilities have evolved to the following:

Provide security for the contest room.

Record the models that are entered.

Photograph the models for publication in the region news letter.

Record the results of the popular vote contest and any convention specific contest.

Assist the region AP chair with the NMRA judged contest.

Help the AP chair distribute the awards after the HoBo breakfast.

See that all models are returned to the owners.

There are usually three people responsible for the Rocky Mountain Region model contest at the annual convention, the region contest chair, the region AP chair and the convention contest chair if the convention has one.

This year's convention will have the following categories:

Display Only / Show & Tell where the modeler's current project, either finished or un-finished, can be displayed. The modeler will then have the opportunity to discuss his / her work with any interested attendees.

Mini Diorama where the only requirement is that the footprint of the diorama is 144 square inches or less. The only restriction on height or depth of this diorama is what you can transport to the convention.

The standard AP merit award judged contest would also be available.

Awards are given in the following areas:

Popular Vote where convention attendees choose their favorite model from all categories.

Convention Theme Vote where convention attendees choose their favorite model, which represents the convention theme.

The Caboose Hobbies award which is given to the modeler with the highest merit award score.

Mizels Excellence in Modeling award which is given to the modeler with the second highest merit award score.

All additional merit awards.

Bill Tulley Contest Chairman

7. Southeastern Region

The Southeast Region of the NMRA enjoys a cherished tradition of excellence in modeling by its members. The membership has excelled at the local, regional, and national levels within the NMRA. The following contest rules were instrumental in supporting the development of the modeling expertise of our members. They are a product of years of experience and have evolved over time. They also include special awards that also serve to motivate and recognize individual achievement in a variety of areas.

One of the important aspects of the model contest is its division into silver and gold levels. Silver level participation is reserved to new members. In fact, the region presents two best of show awards, one to a first time participant in the model contest and the gold level to experienced modelers.

The region model contest is part of the annual SER convention typically held in May. This year's contest will be unique for two reasons. The first is the division of the contest into two parts, kit built and scratchbuilt contests. Using the national guidelines, it will include

the same categories and processes including forms used at the national convention. In addition, this year we will have two additional "contests within the contest." The Spirit of the SER Award will be given on an experimental basis to the division within the region having the highest level of participation. In addition, a special "I-20 Award" will be given for the greatest number of entries into the three different levels of participation in the model contest by members of the Steel City Division from Birmingham which is serving as hosts of the convention and the Piedmont Division from Atlanta. These are the two largest divisions in terms of members in the region. The purpose of these contests within the contest is to have a higher amount of participation from the membership and more participation from each individual member. Emphasis is being placed on having a minimum of 100 entries either as part of the model contest, for AP judging or for display only. We have great modelers in the SER. We want them to show off their skills for the enjoyment and education of all. This was the Contest Chairman's idea and it is an attempt to expand the model contest which has always been a source of learning.

For anyone in the NMRA looking for good fellowship, a learning opportunity and beautiful Southern weather, please join us this year or any other year in May for our annual convention. Be sure and bring your models. They are eligible for participation in the model contest except for the special awards which are awarded only to SER members. We have several guests every year and they have take plenty of blue ribbons for first

place. Many are later seen in the national contest room and a couple have won Best in Show at the national. We look forward to seeing you in the Southeast!

Tom Schultz Contest Chairman

**Southeastern Region Contest
Information is on the CD**

Division Contest Procedures

1. Central Indiana Division of the Midwest Region

(Look at their contribution to the “Contest Judging vs AP Judging” subsection)

2. Coast Division of the Pacific Coast Region

The Coast Division Contest Procedures are attached. They are intended to provide a complete instruction set as well as transfer of knowledge, on how successful Division - level Model Contest and Show and Tell tables can be run.

The purpose of the document is not only to show the procedures, but much more importantly, to document the goals and objectives. Note that the focus of the Model Contest is **not** on contest results (although that is certainly one strong side benefit), but on:

Providing ongoing value **to the members** in the form of a strong set of models as an attraction, for all of the membership to enjoy, regardless if they participate or not

Provide a pleasant, worthwhile, positive experience for all members that do participate

In other words, to attract and display attractive models at every meet, for the

purpose of **entertainment and inspiration**

As the Coast Division states on our quarterly meet report web pages:

For us, NMRA contests are not about winning, rather, they are about the fun of participating, about sharing your pride and joy in modeling with all of us (your appreciative audience), and having fun self-inspiring and self-challenging yourself.

Winning, is, of course, a wonderful side benefit should you be the one chosen by your peers (:-)).

It's worth repeating here, what the first paragraphs of the enclosed document says:

Objectives of the Model Contest and Show and Tell

The current objectives of the Coast Division Model Contest are as follows, roughly in order of priority:

Provide an enjoyable showcase and venue for our membership to share their modeling with each other and the membership as whole, thus promoting fellowship

Provide an enjoyable attraction for our membership at Coast Division meets and events

Provide an inspirational vehicle for our membership's individual and collective modeling skills

Provide positive, fun, and worthwhile experience for all participants

Provide an attractive, well-run venue for fair, friendly show competition

Provide a venue and consistent mechanism for members wishing to improve their skills towards contest level, by interacting with and receive advice/coaching from the Division's most qualified and skilled members

The current objectives of the Coast Division Show and Tell table are similar: Provide an enjoyable showcase and venue for our membership to share their modeling with each other and the membership as whole, thus promoting fellowship, yet without the 'pressure' of being evaluated

Provide an enjoyable attraction for the membership at Coast Division meets and events

Provide an inspirational vehicle for our membership's individual and collective modeling skills

Provide positive, fun, and worthwhile experience for all participants

Provide a venue for Works in Progress to be shared

I hope you enjoy the information, and please feel free to contact the Coast Division or myself for follow-on conversations.

The best way to see how this has worked, is to see the online Coast Division Meet Report web pages for the past several years: NMRA PCR Coast Division Model Contest / Photo Contest / Show and Tell web pages:

<http://www.pcrnmra.org/coast/contest.shtml> I look forward to future conversations.

John Sing Division Photo Contest Chairman

Coast Division Contest Information is on the CD

3. Prairie Lakes Division of the Thousand Lakes Region

(See the contribution to the "Popular Vote" subsection)

E. On the CD

British Region Contest Information

Midwest Region Contest Procedures

Pacific Coast Region Contest Procedures

Southeastern Region Contest Information

Coast Division of the PCR Contest Information