

# Using Fast Tracks Tools and Fixtures as related to the NMRA Achievement Program

*E-mails from Frank Koch to the Region AP chairs and the Yahoo NMRA AP group*

There are two questions here.

1. Does the use of any jig or fixture or tool have anything to do with construction score or scratchbuilding score or level of complexity?

NO, and there should be no penalties in these areas for the use of any tool or jig or fixture. We evaluate the work and not the tools or methods that were used. The parts would still be considered scratch built if they started from rail. For complexity, it is the arrangement of the rail components (three-way or double slip switch versus spring switch as an example) and not HOW they were constructed. Construction is the quality and complexity of the work that was done with no consideration of the tools or methods that were used - the use of tools, jigs, and fixtures is irrelevant except that they might give me better fit and finish on parts...and that is good.

2. (Paraphrased) If only a "stripped down", with "nothing else", turnout is built, can it earn a Merit Award even if it is operational?

Remember that it is not our opinion of what is or is not Merit Quality; it is how the model is evaluated against the criteria which make no mention of tools or methods. So, forget the how and focus on the finished product.

In this case, as all others, it depends on what "nothing else" means and how far it goes. In many cases, the answer can still be "yes". Suppose I build a three way or double slip switch or a crossing to a prototype drawing (high complexity and must get some conformity points), finish it appropriately (it can score high if I do a good job of finish), have perfect construction techniques (it is complex and done well so it should evaluate well, construction has nothing to do with conformity...I'm evaluated on the work I did do), scratch build all the components (if I scratch build all the parts it should evaluate well), maybe don't add any detail (low score here), and it meets the NMRA standards as determined by the gauge and operation of a locomotive (pass/fail). Sounds like a

Merit Award if the points add up to 87.5.

OK, what can I leave out and still earn a Merit Award? If it is mounted on a few PC ties, I give up some conformity points and maybe a few detail points because I don't have ties. I have to not earn 38 points to drop below Merit Award level. I could score zero points in detail and finish/lettering and still earn a Merit Award if I did very well in the other three areas (don't need to be perfect as I still have 8 points to play with) Again, consider what has been done and not how it was done.

If there is no paint or finish, it cannot score points. If there are no ties, it cannot earn points for only that aspect of conformity, but if everything else conforms, then it must earn points in the area. Conformity can be tricky in track as the prototype does not have rail joiners or feeds or gaps like we do, so we treat them as necessary and exempt from the evaluation.

Bottom line, if one scratch builds an operating turnout on PC ties, adds little or no detail (only 20 points), and does no finishing or painting (only 10 points), the model can (not that it absolutely will) still achieve a Merit Award evaluation score if it earns 87.5 points.

On the other hand, a simple scratch built example constructed poorly, to no prototype and with no documentation, detailed poorly, no ties, and not painted will likely not earn enough points to earn a Merit Award. Judge the work and not the methods, tools, or the modeler.

**THIS IS THE OFFICIAL POSITION OF THE NMRA AP DEPARTMENT:**

This has previously been addressed in this and other forums. The use of "FAST TRACKS" AND **ALL OTHER** SIMILAR TRACK JIGS AND FIXTURES to prepare turnout parts is considered SCRATCHBUILT as they are tools and the modeler has to do the fabrication and forming of the parts from basic materials (rail).

If any Region AP Manager is suggesting otherwise, he is mistaken. They are just tools and do nothing other than to help with alignment and cut lines. By this logic, a miter box would disallow any cuts in wood and a NWSL Chopper would disallow any cuts made using it.

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