



IPMS/USA

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Introduction

The purpose of our society is to promote the hobby of scale model building, a hobby of individual achievement and significant artistic content. We take great pleasure in displaying our models to fellow modelers and to anyone else who might appreciate our work. We meet to do that in each other's homes, at displays arranged in schools, malls, and shops and at local, regional, and national meetings and conventions. A natural outgrowth of such displays is competition.

This handbook is designed for the use of all modelers, competitors and non-competitors alike. For competitors, it outlines the basic principles that guide IPMS/USA model contests. For all modelers, it is a good reference on how to look at models objectively, to know what to look for, to know what others are looking for, and to learn how to set personal standards of satisfaction and accomplishment.

We encourage modelers to enter our competitions because when properly conducted, they are one of the best ways to improve one's modeling skills. In addition, participating as a judge allows a modeler to look at models in a new and objective fashion and has been declared almost unanimously to be the single best way to become a better modeler. Whether or not you judge or even enter contests, this handbook can help you recognize some basic, objective truths about models and modeling.

How We Judge

An IPMS contest, at any level, should be guided by the proposition that every entry is a modeler's creative work of art. Not quite the same as a great painting or famous musical composition, but art nonetheless. Pieces are assembled, painted, and finished, producing a result in which the builder takes pride. In a contest, each piece needs to be evaluated. The question of how to evaluate art has been around for centuries. As all judging is done within the framework of the biases, opinions and preferences of the human mind and since that framework varies from person to person, all judging, by definition, is subjective.

For that reason we do not use a system of numbers to measure quality. Numbers are often used to create the appearance of objectivity, but the assignment of a 4 or 7 to an entry by a judge is essentially subjective as it is that judge's opinion. What we do is look at the whole model and try to determine how well the modeler did in bringing his project to completion. In addition, there is also no "National Standard" against which all models are compared. The best model in a category on any given day is just that, no more, no less. There may be other models somewhere that are better, but that does not matter. Only what is present on the contest table can be judged. The final result of the judging says only that, of the models entered in this particular category on this particular day, this one is better than that one.

IPMS/USA does this ranking by using odd numbered person teams to avoid ties in instances when the team's decisions are not unanimous. We try to have each team made up of judges from different sections of the country to avoid even the appearance of impropriety such as two pals from one chapter giving a friend an award or to avoid any category being skewed by a locally favored technique. In one area, for example, it may have become quite the rage to heavily weather or shadow-paint a model. In another area, the current fashion might be sparkling new finishes. While neither of these is "right" or "wrong", we don't want the contest results skewed by these kinds of constantly changing fashions. Another reason we judge in teams is so that the preferences/biases of one judge are balanced out by those of the other two. When evaluating a model, a judge may think that "X" is a more important on an entry than is "Y" on another. However, the other judges on the team may have different opinions and through the ensuing discussion a consensus is sought to pick the better entry.

Throughout the judging process, the first and most important things the judges consider are the **basics**. The judges first identify models that exhibit flaws in basic construction and finishing and then through a series of "cuts", eliminate entries with flaws. They continue narrowing the field until the winners have been decided. Only when the basics don't allow for a clear-cut ranking do the judges begin to look deeper.

As a modeler works on his model, he should keep in mind that the level of workmanship should be consistent throughout the model. In other words, the modeler who adheres to the basics throughout his model will be judged more favorably than one who does not. It's not ok to detail the cockpit but not blank off the engine intakes because that's "not as important". With the basics, it is all important.

Which leads to the question: what are the criteria used for judging models? For specific classes of models, such as ships, automotive, etc, these are outlined in sections later in this document. However, there are some criteria that apply across classes. These are listed in the section entitled "Modeling Basics" and apply to **every** class of model.

An IPMS Contest brings many different kinds of models and modelers together in a single competition. Since it's not just for aircraft, or cars, or any other single kind of modeling, we've tried to evolve a set of rules and standards that enable us to have a contest that's consistent across this broad range of classes, skills, and interests. That's not always easy to do, but we will continue to strive to maintain the broadest and most integrated modeling society in the world.

What Qualifies Someone to be a Judge?

Let's start at the National Level.

To be a certified judge at the IPMS/USA National Contest held in conjunction with the annual IPMS/USA National Convention, a person must:

- Hold a current, **Adult** membership in the International Plastic Modelers Society.
- Serve their first year as a judge in an OJT (on-the-job-training) capacity, working with a team of experienced National judges.
- Participate as a judge in at least one National Contest every five years. Failure to meet this currency requirement means that a judge has to repeat his OJT training in order to re-qualify and be considered eligible to judge at the next convention.
- Help train any OJT judges assigned to work with them. In the process, they will also evaluate the OJT's suitability to become a National judge and report any problems to their Class Head Judge or the Contest Chief Judge.
- Be available to spend some of time working with modelers who would like critiques of their models. The judges' names appear on the category cards of the categories they have judged so that modelers who would like a critique after the judging has been completed, currently on Saturday, can identify and approach a judge for information on their model. Judges will not, repeat **NOT**, compare one modeler's work with another's, nor will they unfairly criticize. The experience is intended to be positive and helpful, and this requires judges to have an ability to explain their approach and conclusions to concerned modelers.

If at all possible, those wishing to become National judges should have first gained judging experience at lower-level IPMS events such as Regional Conventions, local shows, etc.

There is one overriding requirement for IPMS/USA National judges, **INTEGRITY**. The National Contest Committee has a zero-tolerance policy toward those who violate that requirement. Judges have been, and will be, removed from the National judging ranks for proven breaches of integrity. The following are some examples of how the integrity of the contest is protected:

- All judging is impartial. In the Contest Room, judges have neither friends nor enemies. Knowledge of who built a particular model must not influence the outcome of the judging in either a positive or negative way.
- A judge will never judge his own work, nor will he attempt to influence other judges who are evaluating his work. This includes not observing the judging of his work by "hovering" around a category and needing to excuse himself from judging any special awards for which his entry may be a candidate.
- All judging is done using the same set of rules and applying the same criteria to every model.
- From the time that judging begins, **and until the conclusion of the awards ceremony**, judges will not disclose the outcome of any portion of the contest to anyone other than those directly involved in recording the results.
- As judges point out and discuss a model's pros and cons, they will do so in a way that is not disparaging to either the model or its builder.

The foregoing are only examples and are not an all-inclusive list of what constitutes judging integrity. While the standard is strict, judges can meet it easily by using basic common sense and by continuously applying the judges' Golden Rule: Judge the work of others in exactly the same way you would want others to judge your own work.

Now let's look at the Regional and Local level.

Regional and Local shows may not have the body of trained, experienced judges the National has. They are hostage to whoever volunteers to judge. If the Contest Chairman is at all worth his salt, he will brief his judges effectively, but frankly, once those volunteers start judging there are no guarantees. Most will have some judging experience, but others will have none. We do not say these things to discourage you from entering contests at this level, but rather so you can be prepared for any unusual situations, should they occur. Your best bet is to know what the rules and categories for that particular contest are in advance. If there is something unique or different about your model that you feel may cause a problem under the rules and/or categories the contest is operating under, it's best to speak with the Head Judge **BEFORE** judging. This can avoid confusion and problems during judging as after judging it may be impossible to get anything changed. However, if despite doing all this you do not agree with something, approach the contest chairman in a respectful, polite manner and voice your concern. They will usually work with you to resolve the situation, but be prepared to accept what has happened and move on.

Contest Rules

At the National Contest level, the Official IPMS/USA National Contest Rules are used. These rules are set by the National Contest Committee which consists of the Chief Judge, the eight Class Head Judges and in ex-officio capacities, the IPMS/USA 2nd Vice President and as a recorder, the IPMS/USA Secretary. To accommodate changes in the modeling community and industry, the rules are updated from time to time by that committee. Look at the IPMS/USA web site to find the most recent rules update to be used at the next National Model Contest. These same rules are also published in a pre-convention issue of the IPMS/USA Journal, the official publication of the organization.

However, while all IPMS/USA chapters and Regional sponsored contests are encouraged to employ the IPMS/USA National Contest Rules, they are not required to do so. If the Forlorn Hope, Arizona chapter hosts a contest, they set the rules for that show. The same holds true for Regional sponsored contests. Make sure you know the rules before you enter. Check any Regional Contest's entry form and/or web site to see what rules they are using.

Model Categories

It would be difficult to compare a ship model to a figure, or a car to a diorama to determine which is "better", so in an effort to compare "apples to apples", IPMS/USA uses a system of classes and categories. Classes group the major divisions of types of models such as civilian vehicles or figures or ships. Within these Classes, models are entered into categories that group like subjects and scales, such as 1/72 scale single engine aircraft, together so an entry can be judged more fairly against other like models. These categories are set by the National Contest Committee annually and are published before each National Convention. Again, however, these categories are not required at local or regional contests. Indeed, they may not even be possible. The National Model Contest may have dozens of entries in a given category that may draw only two or three at the local level, so local sponsors sometimes combine categories to make their contest more manageable. Check local or regional contests' web sites and/or entry forms to see what categories that particular contest is using.

The Modeling Basics

These basic construction/finishing criteria are held in common by ALL CLASSES OF MODELS. Note, however, that each class also has additional basics criteria specific to that class. These are listed under each class's individual section further below.

Construction

- Flash, sink, mold, ejector-pin marks, Trade Marks and any provisions for motorization, etc. are eliminated.
- Any openings are blanked off or have the field of vision obstructed (a figure that blocks the view through an armored vehicle's open hatch for example.) to prevent a "see-through" effect or if not, show the appropriate detail inside.
- Seams are filled if not present on the actual prototype. If depicting a subject with visible seams, such detail should be uniform and to scale throughout the model.
- Correct cross section of round/cylindrical/oval parts is maintained.
- All components are appropriately aligned.
- The underside of the model, if visible, should have the same attention to these criteria as the rest of the model.
- Any clear parts present (i.e. windshields, vision blocks, canopies, etc.) should be free of glue marks or scratches/cracks unless they are part of the weathering of the subject.
- Detail removed while filling seams, removing sinkholes etc. is restored to a level consistent with the rest of the model.
- Aftermarket parts and kit bashed or scratch built additions/changes should blend in with the rest of the model.

Painting

- The model's surface once painted should show no signs of the construction process such as glue, file or sanding marks, fingerprints, etc.
- Unless irregularities in the actual subject's finish are being duplicated, the finish should be even and smooth. Exceptions should be documented.
- There should be no brush marks or hairs, lint or dust in or on the finish.
- There should not be any "orange peel" or "eggshell" effect and no "powdering" in recessed areas. Any exceptions on the actual subject should be documented.
- There should be no differences in sheen of finish or whitening caused by the misapplication of final clear coats or glossiness caused by washes.
- Paint edges that should be sharp are sharp (i.e. framing on aircraft canopies) with no effects of bad masking. Edges that are supposed to be soft or feathered should be in scale and without overspray.
- Dry-brushing should not be apparent as such.
- Paint colors can vary due to variations from paint batch to batch, different operating environments can change colors in different ways, paints fade from the effects of weather and sunlight, and viewing distance can change the look of virtually any color. Poor initial application and subsequent maintenance compound these problems. Therefore, **color shade should not be used to determine a model's accuracy**. Models with unusual colors or color schemes should have appropriate documentation.

- Any bare plastic, resin, etc, that is visible should not be recognizable as such. i.e. If the plastic is the correct color for the model, even if a modeler does not paint the model, he should apply a gloss and/or dull coat to make the plastic "look" painted.
- "Weathering" is inherently neither good nor bad. When comparing a model with a weathered finish to a model with a pristine finish, the judges will concern themselves with the degree of success achieved by each builder in depicting the intended finish. An exception is in the diorama categories where appropriate weathering may be necessary to render appropriate realism.

Decals

- Decals should be aligned properly. If the real prototype had a markings anomaly, the modeler should document it.
- There should be no silvering or bubbling of decal film.
- Decals should "snuggle down" around detail/corners smoothly.
- Decals should blend in with the rest of the finish to look painted on.
- Decals should have the same sheen as the rest of the model unless they are simulating a different type of surface such as a glass window on a brick building.

Class Specific Basics

Aircraft

These are specific to this category and are In addition to those listed in the section on Modeling Basics.

Construction and Painting

Construction

- Wings/tail planes have the same dihedral or anhedral on both sides.
- Wings and stabilizers are aligned correctly with, and identically on both sides of, the centerline.
- Fin to stabilizer angles are correct and aligned with each other in front and side views where appropriate.
- Engine nacelles/cowlings lined up correctly in front, side, and plan views.
- Landing gear components are properly aligned with the airframe and with each other in front, side, and plan views.
- Ordnance items such as bombs, rockets, pylons, etc, are aligned correctly with the aircraft and with each other.

Painting and finishing

- Weathering, if present, should show concern for scale (e.g., size of chipped areas), be in accordance with the conditions in which the real aircraft was operating and its age (a factory-fresh interior would be unlikely on a 100-mission aircraft) and be consistent throughout the model
- Some modern aircraft use decals rather than paint for standard markings. If the real aircraft suffers from problems with decal application, such anomalies should be documented if duplicated on the model.

Detailing

- Contour errors have been corrected.

- Wing trailing edges, ordnance fins, landing gear doors, edges of open panels, etc. are thinned to scale or replaced
- Gun barrels, exhaust stacks, intakes, vents, and similar openings are opened.
- External stores are built to the same level of quality as the model to which they are attached.
- Stores/weapons combinations on a model represent only those combinations actually carried by the real aircraft.

Armor/Military Vehicles

These are specific to this category and are In addition to those listed in the section on Modeling Basics.

Construction

- Any gap/overlap at the point where the track ends join is eliminated.
- Machine guns, main guns, exhausts, vents, etc. are drilled out/opened up.
- The track pattern faces in the proper direction on both sides of vehicle.
- The suspension parts such as idler, drive, and return rollers on tracked vehicles are in correct alignment and sit appropriately on the track.
- The tracks are vertical (i.e. not leaning in or out when viewed from the front or back of the vehicle) and parallel (i.e. not toed in or out when viewed from top of vehicle).
- All wheels/tracks sit appropriately on the ground.

Detailing

- Parts are made to be of scale thickness and texture.
- Weld marks are simulated where applicable.
- Small detail parts such as rivets, nuts, bolts, tie downs, grab handles, windshield wipers, hatch and storage compartment handles/latches, valve stems, etc. are added/simulated.
- Stowage, such as tarps, bedrolls, chains, fuel cans, etc. have been added and have some method by which such items are attached to the vehicle such as a hook, rope, or tie down.
- Photo-etched parts that require forming are precisely shaped and any surfaces requiring building up to a thicker cross-section should be smooth and uniform.
- Cable and electrical lines are added to lights, smoke dischargers and other electrical equipment where appropriate.
- Molded-on parts that simulate things separate from the subject such as tools, cables, etc. are undercut or removed completely and replaced.
- Molded on screening has been replaced with real screen.
- Track "sag" on tracked vehicles is duplicated where appropriate.
- Head, tail and spotlights are hollowed out and have lenses added.
- Instrument faces on dashboards have detail picked out or added and lenses added.
- All crew positions in open topped vehicles have been appropriately detailed. e.g. Gas and brake pedals, gearshifts, etc. for drivers' positions.
- Molded on grab handles, tie downs, hatch levers, etc. have been replaced with separate parts.
- Any parts with inaccuracies in shape and/or contour have been corrected and/or replaced.
- **Weathering is not required.** However, if present it should be consistent throughout the model and be in accordance with the conditions of how and where the real vehicle was operating. Extreme examples

should be documented. Weathering should not be used to hide flaws in construction or finishing.

Automotive

These are specific to this category and are In addition to those listed in the section on Modeling Basics.

Construction and Painting

Construction

- If not found on the actual vehicle, seams are filled. This is especially important on the car's body.
- The mold seam is removed from rubberized kit tires that have one.
- Gaps between the body and chassis are eliminated as applicable.
- Where applicable, external items such as mirrors, exhaust pipes, etc, are aligned appropriately.
- Internal items (e.g., seats, some engine/drive components) aligned properly.
- All wheels touch the ground and aligned properly when viewed from the front or rear of the vehicle.
- If turned, the wheels should be aligned in the same direction.

Painting

- Chrome parts should be correctly represented and should be just as free of surface blemishes and evidences of the construction process as the painted components.
- Although weathering is gaining more acceptance in the automotive ranks, especially with some trucks and certain types of racing cars such as the Rally types, it is not standard practice. Most auto modelers build what is considered a "show" car or restored car, and because of this, weathering will be the exception rather than the rule. If present, however, weathering should show concern for scale, be in accordance with the conditions in which the real vehicle was operating, and be consistent throughout the model.

Detailing

- Contour errors corrected.
- Exhausts, intakes, vents, and other objects that have openings are opened.
- Detail added to the vehicle, such as door-lock buttons, tire valve stems, dashboard gauge detail, fabric surfaces on interior components, etc, should be as close to scale as possible.
- Engine and chassis detailing is consistent with the level of detailing on the rest of the model. i.e. Do not completely plumb and wire an engine but not add the gearshift and driver's pedals.
- Working parts, if any, such as opening hoods or doors, should match the level of workmanship of the rest of the model. Such parts should operate realistically and the operating mechanism(s) should be in scale if visible.

Ships

These are specific to this category and are In addition to those listed in the section on Modeling Basics.

Construction and finishing

- Superstructure components (platforms, cabins, funnels, etc.) aligned with the vertical when viewed from stem to stern.
- Masts parallel to the vertical axis of the ship when viewed from stem to stern. Rake of masts uniform,

unless the real vessel's masts had varying rake angles. Rigging tension must not cause the masts and spars to bend.

- Paint should have a matt finish, unless a different sheen is being used to create a special effect
- Color schemes should be correct for the era being modeled.
- Weathering should be kept to a minimum because of the small scales involved.

Detailing

- The ship's configuration should be correct for the time depicted by the model.
- Contour errors corrected.
- All small parts (including masts, bulwarks, splinter shields, railings, and rigging) should be as close to scale as possible.
- Small details sanded off during construction should be replaced with scratch-built or aftermarket material.
- Gun barrels and vents should be drilled out whenever possible.
- Sailing ship rigging and lines should be correct for the era being modeled.
- Deadeyes should be right side up, and rigging lines and blocks should be in proportion to each other.
- Photo-etched parts:
 - Nubs and burrs where parts are removed from fret must be eliminated.
 - Parts should not be unintentionally damaged or bent.
 - Glue marks and buildups should not show.
 - Parts (e.g., rails and stanchions) must not overlap.
 - All railings should be straight, no wavy railings.
- Railings must line up horizontally and vertically where they join.
- Corner seams created when parts are bent to shape should be filled.
- Paint should cover brass completely including areas at bends and cuts.

Figures

These are specific to this category and are In addition to those listed in the section on Modeling Basics.

The underlying premise of a miniature (that is a figure) is that it should look like a small version of a real person. The closer the figure comes to that goal, the better the figure will appear to the judges.

Construction and Painting

Construction

- Where construction seams have been filled, creases that cross these seams restored.
- Equipment is properly attached, e.g., holsters not hanging in space, canteens attached to belts.
- Straps hang properly. Rifle slings, horse harnesses, etc. hang/sag properly to depict their weight.
- Feet touch the ground/surface properly.

Painting

- Cloth, leather and metal should have the proper sheen, e.g., a matt finish for wool, leather, other than in shoes, should have a slight sheen.
- Blending of highlighted and shaded areas with the basic color should be smooth, gradual, and subtle. No demarcation lines should show.

- Shadows should be present when two surfaces meet (e.g. belts over tunics) and on undersurfaces (e.g. between legs and under arms).
- White should not be used in eyes in order to avoid a pop-eyed look.
- Eyes should be symmetrical; figure should not be wall-eyed or cross-eyed.
- Weathering of feet or shoes, if depicted, should be appropriate to the ground cover.
- Headgear shadows should show on the figure's face.
- Equipment such as swords should have a shadow shown on the figure.
- Flesh tones should reflect the climate in which the figure is depicted.

Detailing

- Straps should have proper thickness.
- Gun barrels should be drilled/hollowed out.
- Accessories and equipment should be in proper scale for the figure.
- Ground bases should show footprints.
- Foliage should harmonize with the figure (e.g., no flowers present when figure is in winter clothes).
- Lapels and collars should be slightly raised whenever possible.
- Slings should be added to weapons where necessary.
- Figures shown on ground should have feet/footwear slightly indented in the earth to depict weight.
- Equipment being worn by, or slung on, the figure should be given an appearance of weight, e.g., by indenting straps slightly into the shoulder.

Note: Additional equipment such as a desk, bar, etc. will not be judged unless such equipment is included with the original figure casting/kit.

Space and Science Fiction

These are specific to this category and are in addition to those listed in the section on Modeling Basics.

Space and Science Fiction models depict a wide variety of subjects, from real vehicles to complete flights of fancy. In so doing, they run the gamut from sleek "rocket ships" to boxy satellites, from robots to alien armored vehicles. The incredible range of science fiction subjects, however, would seem at first glance to defy any attempt at systematic judging. Models of actual spacecraft are typically judged much like aircraft or vehicle models and even a model that represents a builder's total flight of fancy can still be judged on the basis of basic scale modeling skills.

Painting

- Reentry vehicles (Space Shuttle, Apollo, etc.) should show some aerodynamic weathering if depicted in a post-reentry or landing mode.
- Rocket engine nozzles generally should show some sort of weathering, particularly on the inside; but check references, as such weathering can vary greatly from one nozzle to another.

Detailing

- Overly thick parts should be thinned to scale or replaced. This is especially true of the antennas supplied with many kits. Kit versions often appear too "fat" and lack detail.
- Scoops and other such openings should be blocked off to prevent a "see-through" effect.

- Weapon barrels, exhausts, intakes, vents, small thrusters, steering rockets, etc. should be drilled or opened.
- Details added to the model should be in scale or as close to scale as possible.
- Science fiction and fantasy modeling can entail a fair amount of scratch building or kit-bashing. Items or areas added in this fashion should look useful and truly part of the vehicle, and should be similar in fit, detail, and overall finish to the rest of the model. Parts used from other kits should be sufficiently altered or disguised so that their origin is not immediately apparent in order to avoid the appearance of a haphazard assemblage of spare parts (sometimes known as the "Panzer IV in Space" syndrome).

Dioramas

A diorama is a combination of one or more models in a believable setting that tells a story, sets a mood, or creates a charged atmosphere. In addition to evaluating the diorama's individual elements, the judges will consider the strength of the diorama's story line or mood and the overall presentation of the diorama. These three factors are equally important. A diorama with superbly modeled components but a weak story line and presentation is not as strong as a diorama with well-modeled components and strong story and presentation.

Model Components, Ground Work, Scenery, etc: The individual model components of a diorama will be judged according to the criteria specified in the Modeling Basics and the appropriate individual class. For example, armor pieces will be subject to armor judging criteria while figures will be evaluated according to the figure modeling guidelines. The basics of construction and finishing are of prime importance not only with the model elements, but also with the terrain, roadwork, buildings, and accessories that set the scene of the diorama. These are given equal importance to the primary model components and consistency of workmanship will also be evaluated. Well-done vehicles may not overcome poorly done figures and mediocre groundwork.

Presentation: The diorama base should comprise individual elements that combine to form a realistic and/or plausible setting for the primary model component(s). Each of the elements also should be believable in its own right and consistent with the action or mood being depicted. The degree of imagination and inventiveness used to pose the main elements will factor into the overall presentation evaluation. The base should provide a focal point for the scene and fit or enhance the story line or mood of the diorama. Dioramas with a well-defined focal point highlighting a simple story generally will have a stronger presentation than those attempting to portray an entire battlefield.

Story Line, Mood, Atmosphere: This element is what separates a diorama from models merely set on a base. A simple derelict vehicle rusting away in a field could set a mood as well as a complete recreation of the Battle of Waterloo. The story, mood, or atmosphere created by the diorama should be obvious; the judges shouldn't have to strain to see it. Stories can incorporate historical or even humorous aspects. Imagination and inventiveness in telling a story or setting a mood can lift a diorama above the ordinary.

Juniors

The Junior Class is unique in two respects. First, as opposed to the other classes where only one kind of model can be entered, any type of model, such as a car, plane or ship, is allowed. Secondly, it is the only class that has a breakdown by age of the modeler. The assumption is that the skill level of the modeler increases with age so we group modelers with similar skill/age levels together.

Since any class of model is eligible, we recommend that the modeler go to the things the judges look for in the Modeling Basics and Class Basics section of the type of model that he/she is building (i.e. aircraft, ship, etc.). Note that in the Junior Class there is much emphasis on the Basics, such as alignment, gluing, filling, painting and decaling. If you build a model that goes beyond the Modeling Basics, the additional things that are listed in the Class Basics section will be considered but remember that a model completed with attention paid the Modeling Basics stands a much better chance of doing well than one with photo etched controls added to a 1/72nd scale cockpit without the Modeling Basics being taken care of.

Judging and Competition FAQs

Why didn't this model win?!

One comment heard at times in the Contest Room after the awards banquet is, "How could this model *not* have won? Look at the detailing in the . . ." The simple answer to the question is usually the "basics". An AFV with a super-detailed open turret on a suspension with pigeon-toed tracks is like a mansion built on sand; it's beautiful, but it's sitting on a weak foundation, and that will be its downfall. When modelers casually look at entries on the table, they are usually taken with the extra detail added or the unusual or perfectly executed paint job. When they are walking through the contest room, they are admiring the models in general and they don't look at the model in the same way the judges do. Judges look first to see how well the model is made and they notice flaws the casual observer may overlook.

These Models Are All So Beautiful. How Can The Judges Possibly Pick a Winner?

Judges hear sentiments like this at virtually every National Contest. The answer is simple. The judges are trained to look at and evaluate the models using the criteria set out in this handbook. They spend time evaluating all the entries in a given category and discuss what they see and find. Using their experience and training, they come to a consensus amongst themselves as to the ranking of the winners. It's not always easy and, as a matter of fact, it rarely is. A category might have three to five excellent models that the judges have to rank, or it might have only six entries, all with major flaws. In either case, they use their training and experience to make their decisions.

Accuracy

Absolute accuracy is a noble, but probably unattainable, goal. Despite the fact that no scale model is ever 100% accurate, some people urge that models be judged principally on their accuracy. This is a real minefield. While gross inaccuracy is easy to spot in some instances, the situation quickly becomes murky past obvious things and can lead to unfairness in judging. For example, suppose one of the aircraft judges spent the better part of twenty years as the crew chief of a particular aircraft. That judge will probably be able to find inaccuracies of one sort or another on every model of that type of aircraft entered in a category. But, there's a real risk he will unfairly penalize those who entered those models if he judges solely on the basis of accuracy as he can readily spot their flaws while he may miss inaccuracies in other aircraft types with which he does not have the same level of expertise. Along the same lines, modelers who know the minute aspects of a subject often mistakenly believe judges also have similar detailed knowledge. This may or may not be true. It's simply not possible for all IPMS judges to match the expertise developed by our disparate and incredibly

knowledgeable membership. The Chief Judge and Class Head Judges take pains every year to remind the judges to be aware of these problems and to be fair to all on this issue. You can also help yourself by not assuming the judges know all the details you know. Help them and yourself by putting such information on the entry sheet or any other display material you put with your model. Judges are instructed read that stuff and it could make the difference for you.

Lest we get too wrapped up in the accuracy debate, remember that IPMS/USA judges concentrate first on the modeling aspects. A model with every component built absolutely accurately probably still won't win if seams between the components aren't filled properly. Conversely, a superbly built model containing an inaccuracy could win if it is, in all other respects, the best model in the category.

Know Your Own Model

At every National Convention, judges spend time before they begin judging a category checking for misplaced models and moving the ones they find to the proper category. This causes trouble and wasted time if the proper category has already been judged because the judging then has to be done over again. Much of this misplacement could be avoided if entrants would take a few minutes ahead of time to determine the proper category for their models. Remember that the folks working the model registration desk aren't always model builders and even if they are modelers, they may build one type of model and not know a whole lot about other types. If an entrant knows ahead of time, for example, that his twin-engined aircraft doesn't belong in a single engine category because it has two engines, he won't let a registrar put it there. Spend some time at home checking out in what category your model belongs and you may save yourself some hassles, keep your model from being moved more than it absolutely has to be, and earn the gratitude of registrars and judges alike.

Are the Judges a Bunch of Nit-pickers?

Some modelers have accused the judges of negativism and of being nothing but glorified nitpickers. All of the models in any category are on the table to be ranked and that's what we have to do. Modelers have brought their models to be evaluated and to compete for prizes. At the level of most of our contests, the differences in ranking are probably going to be the result of some pretty small issues and as has been emphasized repeatedly, we rank the models principally by a close look at basic modeling techniques. However, when that doesn't result in a final result, we've got to go closer and examine even more critically. It's hard, but there is no other way and, really, it's a compliment to the incredibly high standards that are being set by IPMS modelers.

If The Judges Aren't a Bunch of Nit-pickers, Why Do They Use Those Darn Little Flashlights?

In some cases, especially in earlier years, the penlights were often needed to even SEE the models in contest rooms that were far less than well lit. Fortunately, that's not the case nearly so often these days, although it does still happen occasionally. Beyond that, however, a good penlight is an invaluable aid in highlighting such things as poorly finished seams, unsanded ridges and poorly finished interior areas. An old judge's technique is to shine the light across a seam area at an angle. Nothing will pop out an incorrectly filled seam more quickly. Serious competitors would be wise to examine their own models with a penlight before coming to the contest. They might be amazed at what they see!

My model box slipped off the seat in my car and it was damaged just before I

got to the contest. What can I do?

Accidents happen and usually do at the most inopportune times. If the damage is minor, such as ordnance knocked off a pylon or a hatch snapped off, just note on your entry form that the item was damaged in transit. The judges are instructed not to hold such damage against an entry. However, if the damage is so extensive as to make the model unjudgable, such as the top wing of a biplane being snapped off with attendant damage to struts and rigging, you may want to take the model home to repair it and bring it another day.

Judges' Decisions

Players and fans love the umpires or referees when the calls are in their team's favor and hate them when their calls favor the opposing team. Modelers often have similar reactions to IPMS National judges. Many National judges have been cornered after the Awards banquet by a modeler with fire flashing from his eyes demanding to know why his model didn't win. That's not a good way to begin a dialogue and it almost guarantees that there will be no useful exchange of information.

Before jumping a judge like that, take a moment to consider who these National judges are. They're modelers. Collectively, they exhibit a wide range of modeling interests, skills, background, experience, temperament, and personality, and they're also imperfect human beings. In short, they're just like any other member of IPMS, but with one major distinction: they volunteer to spend a significant chunk of their convention time working hard well into the wee hours to make it possible for the National Model Contest to exist. The vast majority of judges is also more than willing to share their expertise, discuss your model with you, and give you some tips on things to do and not do to give your next model a leg up on its competition. All you have to do is ask, but please do so in the same way you'd want to be asked if you were in the judge's shoes.

And, if you *really* want to learn what separates the winning models from the rest of the entries in a category, next time you're at a one-day show or a Regional Convention, volunteer to judge. Get yourself assigned to work on a team with experienced judges. Tell them you haven't judged before but want to learn how, and they'll take you under their wing. The vast majority of folks who've done so have found that they've learned more about judging--and model building--in one afternoon than they could have in a whole month of Sundays.

What's a Hypothetical Vehicle?

The Hypothetical category was established both to provide a competition slot for models that don't fit into the standard categories, and to take some of the pressure off the Miscellaneous category, previously the only place such models could compete. Think of Hypothetical as something akin to the "Science-Fiction Vehicles" part of the "Space and Science-Fiction Vehicles" category. It's a place to enter models of aircraft, cars, ships, etc. that never made it off the drawing board (e.g. Luftwaffe 1946, futuristic auto designs), or models in markings that the actual vehicle never wore (e.g. a Royal Navy F7U Cutlass, Go/Ho 229 flying wing in squadron markings), and for vehicles that have never existed except in the mind of the modeler (e.g. an Indy Car with a body fashioned from a MiG-29 fuselage). What about a full-size, 3-D mock-up of a prospective vehicle? Well, if the builder produces a model of that mock-up, the modeler has made a model of a real thing and the model should go in the appropriate standard category. However, if he paints and finishes that mock-up as it might have looked if the prototype had reached production, then it is a hypothetical vehicle. In other

words, if the model is a true, scale representation of something that actually existed in three dimensions, it belongs in a standard category. If it doesn't fit that description, and it isn't a space or science fiction subject, it belongs in Hypothetical.

What about Weathering? Are weathered subjects looked upon more favorably than non-weathered ones?

Weathering is inherently neither good nor bad. When comparing a model with a weathered finish to a model with a pristine finish, the judges will concern themselves with the degree of success achieved by each builder in depicting the intended finish. An exception to this could be, say, in the diorama class. A World War I tank with a pristine finish set in the middle of the mud of the Western Front would be inappropriate.

Will the judges pick up my model?

The short answer is "yes" and for two main reasons. First, since models are three-dimensional representations of full size three-dimensional subjects, models need to be judged in three dimensions so judges may have to handle models to evaluate all sides of an entry in a consistent manner. Secondly, as the number of entries at any given model show cannot be predicted in advance, it may be necessary to move models to make appropriate space available on the tables. In both instances, the judges are thoroughly cautioned to use the greatest care. However, accidents do happen. If a model is damaged during judging or while being moved, the judges will note that on the entry form and any damage will not be held against the entry during judging.

What about putting my model on a base?

There is both a practical and esthetic reason to do so. Esthetically, in the Diorama classes judges do consider the base an entry is on, but only in this class. As a matter of fact, if you make your base too elaborate, your entry may be moved to a Diorama category. Check the rules of any given contest to see what is allowed on a base in any given class of model to avoid a problem.

On the practical side, however, one thing to keep in mind is that if your model is on a base, it may be easier to move if the need arises. Just make sure you note on your entry form whether the model is actually affixed to the base or only just sitting on it. That can avoid it slipping off and crashing to the floor as a judge moves it from one table to another to make room in a category.

What is an Out of the Box model?

Basically, this is a model that is built using only those parts supplied by the manufacturer in the box the model comes in or any extra parts that may be called for in the instructions, such as a stretched spru antenna. There are also limits as to what you can do with these parts. In some classes you can drill out gun barrels, in others you can add rigging, but you may not be able to thin a part or open a vent. These limits are established as representing more or less what the "average" modeler would do to a model. To make sure your model qualifies as Out of the Box, make sure you check the rules for the specific contest you are entering. Also take note of the fact that the instructions for your model must accompany it. At some contests they need to be on the table under the model, at others they just need to be "available". Whatever the case, make sure you bring them along. As no judge can know every model, he may need to refer to them to make sure that what they are looking at is, indeed, out of the box.