

Aster UK News & Views

Autumn 2009

Hello and a warm welcome to Aster News & Views, the newsletter from Aster Hobbies (UK) LLP. I should explain to anyone unfamiliar with Aster News & Views that it is an occasional newsletter sent to Aster customers in the UK and also available online at our website. However, with so much going on in the World of Aster we thought that a wider audience might enjoy what we have to say and so with the help of some of our Aster customers and friends we present some words and photos for all.

The Great Western Castle Class

The most recent model introduced by the Aster Hobby Co Inc is probably the best British outline model so far produced in the long history of Aster. The reason for saying 'best' is simple. Performance on the track is exemplary with the loco easily able to pull a prototypical train at realistic speeds and with the most amazing beat from the chimney. But not only does the loco run like a dream, it looks perfect too. From whichever angle you view it the new Aster Castle really does look like a Castle!



St Mawes Castle, kit built and photo by David Stick

If you are familiar with the Aster GWR King George V produced in 1990 then you will be amazed by the difference nearly 20 years can make. Not only is the appearance of this latest GWR locomotive much improved but the technologies used in the manufacturing of the various parts that go into the models are entirely different. More accurate parts means better performance and less wear over time - important considerations in a compact 4-cylinder design with fully functioning Walschaert valve gear. This is not to disparage the earlier KGV model which is of course wonderful but the new Aster Castle is significantly superior in all respects.

Ready to Run or Kit?

The Aster Castle class locomotive is available as factory built-up Ready to Run (RTR), or in kit form for the owner to assemble. Factory built Ready to Run are available in GWR livery as 5015 'Kingswear Castle'. Kits can be supplied in GWR livery or BR livery and name / number plates are included for 5015 'Kingswear Castle'. However it is a simple job to obtain alternative names and numbers from Messrs Guilplates if you wish to name your Castle after a particular favourite.

An alternative to factory built RTR is to purchase a kit from Aster Hobbies (UK) LLP and enjoy the thrill of building your own locomotive or to have it built up to your personal requirements by one of the small team of experienced Aster kit builders. A list of builders appears elsewhere.

A review of the Aster Castle kit appeared in the Gauge One Model Railway Association's Newsletter and Journal issue No. 220 - a copy can be provided on request. This informative article by experienced builder David Stick is a useful adjunct to the kit construction. It should also be mentioned that many kits have been constructed over the last few months and there no particular problems or issues that require attention. In fact many builders have remarked to me about the ease of assembly.

These models and kits are available from stock for immediate delivery

Castle Specification

Cylinders: Four: 10mm bore x 20mm stroke

Valve gear: Walschaert valve gear with rocking levers to outside cylinders, reversible from cab

Boiler: 'C' type with superheater. Two siphon tubes in firebox for additional fuel economy. 254 cc at 80% full.

Boiler fittings: Regulator, blower, pressure gauge, water gauge with blowdown, clack valve and safety valve.

Axle pump: Fitted to loco with bypass valve 5mm bore x 6mm stroke

Lubricator: Oil tank in cab under footplate - Roscoe displacement type with pressurizing valve.

Tender: Lift out fuel tank, 258cc meths. Water tank with hand pump. 250cc

Dimensions: Length of loco & tender overall = 628mm. Total weight 5.38kg

GWR Castle class 5015 Kingswear Castle Kit £4250.00 Factory Built RTR £5150.00
Castle class in BR Livery (kit only) Kit £4250.00



A great line-up of Aster Castles all built by Geoff Calver and photographed by the builder



Aster GWR Lamps are available again. These are suitable for the Aster Castle, Aster BR 9F / Evening Star and of course for the Pannier Tank and King George V of former times. Price £20.00 for 3 inc P&P.

Also please don't forget that a signed copy of Chris Ludlow's limited edition print "Castles in Gold" accompanies every Aster 'Castle' kit and factory built model sold in the UK. If for any reason you have not received your copy with a purchase then please get in touch with Aster Hobbies (UK) LLP



The Aster Bulleid Light Pacific

This has been a widely acclaimed model which is still available although in reduced quantities in both Southern Railway Malachite green livery with high sided tender (illustrated) and in the later BR style with cutdown tender. A splendid 3 cylinder design with fully operational Walschaert valvegear and multi-jet exhaust.

Kits (SR or BR)£2935.00
Ready to Run (SR or BR).....£3675.00

Photo David Stick

Why buy an Aster?

Well quite simply Aster are the best Gauge One live steam production locomotives that money can buy. Many satisfied customers from around the World have discovered this for themselves. Although cheap imports may look quite attractive on the surface, they don't match up to the World's favourite Gauge One live steam from Aster Hobby Co. So let's explain why.

Quality: If you have built an Aster kit yourself then you will not need to be told about the quality. They are simply made to the very finest tolerances from the very best materials. No compromises are made. Cylinders are bronze or gunmetal and frames are steel. Wheels tend to be cast iron nowadays for excellent grip and blackened and lacquered for improved appearance. Everything in an Aster kit fits together with the minimum of fuss. The more recent models benefit from cutting edge CAD / CAM technologies which have brought new standards of fit and accuracy to the hobby. Parts are painted with paint that stays adhered to the surface and is the correct colour too! Lining is per the prototype since much careful research has gone into the model's development.

Performance: On the track Aster models really come into their own. They run well with a prototypical train and look and sound great! But performance is not just about pulling heavy trains at prototypical speeds; it is also about pulling a short train at low speed and looking visually convincing in all situations. Performance is also about economy of fuel and water and since all Aster's large and medium size models have correct working valve gear, they can be 'notched up' to get that extra dimension of operation like the full-size counterpart.

Kit or RTR? It is Aster Hobby Co Inc desire that customers should build up an Aster kit. The customer will then not only enjoy the pleasure of ownership and operation of the locomotive, but also a sense of achievement that they have constructed something of value and beauty with their own hands.

Having built an Aster model, the builder will fully understand how a steam locomotive works. They will also feel confident to adjust the locomotive should some maintenance be required in the future. A book of instructions and a book of drawings accompany every kit to show each step of the construction job. In the UK a telephone helpline is available 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday. And if we cannot solve your problem by phone (or a personal visit) then further help is always available from experienced UK builders.

Although we would like you to build your own kit, we do understand that for some owners this is not always possible or practical. For that reason Aster's famous 'Factory Built-up Ready to Run' continues to be available. For the collector and investor it is the Factory Built-up Ready to Run that is still the most attractive option

Kits can be built in the UK by one of several experienced Aster builders. See the recommendations elsewhere. Similarly if you have a partly made kit or need to have a model repaired or checked-over, then please use one of the named builders.

Spare Parts: The Aster Hobby Co Inc operate an unrivalled service for spare parts as a part of their desire that your model should give a lifetime of pleasure and service. If you require a replacement part then let us know the identity of the locomotive concerned, the part number and part description. It matters not if the part is from the original Aster 'Schools' class of 1975 or the very latest GWR Castle or any of the 82 Aster models produced in the intervening years, Aster Hobby Co will do their very best to supply that part to keep your model fit and active!

In the UK we order parts once per month so the service is not 'instant'. However, we keep many of the common nuts, screws, O rings etc in stock and can often provide a next day service. We also aim to keep a kit of the current UK outline models available in case you encounter a missing or damaged part to ensure a quick 'by return' replacement. All part of the unrivalled Aster service!

Value for money: There is no way that an Aster can be described as cheap but they are good value for money. The time and energy that has been taken by the designers to get things just right is unmatched. It is a point of honour to get the best looking and best running that can be achieved with modern production methods. No stone is unturned.

Innovation: Aster live steam models are not cheap copies of someone else's hard work; they are cutting edge all-new designs. Since Aster's first model back in 1975 (the 'Schools' class), they have consistently improved the technical sophistication with each successive model. In the early days it was the Smithies boiler whereas today it is a Type C variant which is far more efficient than its earlier counterpart. Axle driven pumps, fully working valve gear and more recently Piston Valves with working drain cocks keep Aster far ahead of the pack!

Investment: It is an undisputed truth that if you look after your Aster model then it will keep its value over time. In some cases it will increase in value like the Aster A4 'Mallard' and 'Sir Nigel Gresley' which show 4 fold increase since 1984. Even the recent models like the BR A3 'Flying Scotsman' and LMS 'Duchess of Sutherland' are creeping upwards and the BR 9F Evening Star is proving hard to find after only two years! There are no guarantees of course but frankly speaking why leave cash in the Building Society earning 0.5% interest when it could you could enjoy the splendid sight and sound of a real steam locomotive!

I hope these few notes convince you that to buy the best and that means Aster!



Baldwin B1 Side Tank

Expected late 2009. A complete rework of the Baldwin Side Tank locomotive has been undertaken. This representation is from the Japanese forestry railways, and very handsome too. Scale of 1/20th full size. Expected cost of kit £1800. An optional conversion kit to add inside Stephenson valve gear will also be available. Price TBA



Pre-owned Aster Models

Aster Hobbies UK do occasional take pre-owned models in part-exchange for new. We only take Asters in mint or near mint condition and if kit built then only from a known quality builder. A full guarantee is given with each model. At the time of compiling these notes we have the following available;

Berkshire kit built unsteamed	£4300	SNCF 140c (green) Display model unsteamed	£3250
BR A3 Factory built MIB	£4950	DB BR03 Pacific MIB	£3500
GN Stirling Single Factory built steamed once	£2950	A4 LNER Mallard Factory built mint	£6500

Please call for latest availability

Aster Kit Builders

Mr Peter Alliot (Northants)	01604 858467	alliot49@waitrose.com
Mr David Baker (Walsall)	01922 416932	
Mr Geoff Calver (Suffolk)	01638 566498	geoff.calver@btinternet.com
Mr John Lawrence (Isle of Wight)	01983 875543	
Mr David Stick (Cornwall)	01726 816291	davidstick@btinternet.com

NB. The above are experienced Aster kit builders who offer a service to UK customers. They can also provide repairs and adjustments to Aster models. Aster Hobbies (UK) LLP publishes these details in good faith but can take no responsibility for loss or damage however caused.

New South Wales Government Railway AD60 4-8-4+4-8-4 Garratt



In June 2009 the long awaited limited re-run (with detail enhancements) of the New South Wales Government Railway AD60 4-8-4+4-8-4 Garratt arrived. Several of the kits have already been built and the performance acclaimed by all that have seen these massive models in action! A video available on YouTube shows 110 wagons totalling 276 axles without problems! Just two more kits are available in the UK; no further inventory is available in Japan. Kits in stock are unlined but identical in every other respect to the example built and photographed by Geoff Calver. Whichever may you look at the Aster Garratt it is a most impressive locomotive. No less that 41 inches long but can take a 6 1/2 foot radius curve! Convertible from coal to alcohol in about 20 minutes and will pull everything you own. Full specification and price on request. A fully built example is available for inspection. An example was shown by invitation at the Garratt Centenary exhibition at the Manchester Museum of Science & Industry 14th - 16th August when 100 Garratts both large and small were present. Please get in touch for price information

Abbreviated Price List

Liverpool & Manchester Railway 'Titfield Thunderbolt'	Kit £760.00	RTR £875.00
BR or SR West Country / Battle of Britain class	Kit £2935.00	RTR £3675.00
GWR Castle class 5015 Kingswear Castle	Kit £4250.00	RTR £5150.00
Castle class in BR Livery (kit only)	Kit £4250.00	
Great Northern (USA) S2 in Glacier Green	Kit £5250.00	RTR £6400.00
Suction Fan £70.00, Trackside Pump £80.00, Steam Oil in dispenser bottle £2.50, Treadmill Rollers (4) £100.00.		
Aster Catalogue £6.00 (+ £2.00 p&p) includes 40 page live steam guide.		

All the above available from stock for immediate delivery (Full Price List on request)

Remember: UK VAT is due to revert to 17.5% (or even 20%) on 1 January 2010. Order before year end to avoid the increase!

For more information please contact the sole UK importer & distributor:

Aster Hobbies (UK) LLP
PO Box 61. Abbots Langley WD5 0ZJ
Tel 01923 269662



www.asterhobbies.co.uk Email: asteruk@gmail.com
 Visitors welcome by appointment. Visa / MasterCard / Switch / Maestro