[N-Circle Railroad Update 11 – December 2, 2021]

This update discusses building a rail/truck fuel depot from three basic plastic Con-Cor kits. We also are building and detailing vehicle kits from multiple manufacturers to accompany these structures and Shell gas station projects that are in progress now. In conclusion, we discuss "rehabbing" an existing built structure and the resultant unhappy revelation about an eBay purchase!

Vermont Fuel Depot

I built three Con-Cor kits from their "Cambria City" series to create a simple trackside fuel depot for Vermont, we will build a much larger, more complex Shell Oil refinery scene for Louisiana later, having accumulated many oil refinery kits to kit-bash for this

N-Circle_21-11-24_Con-Cor_FuelDepotRack_1:

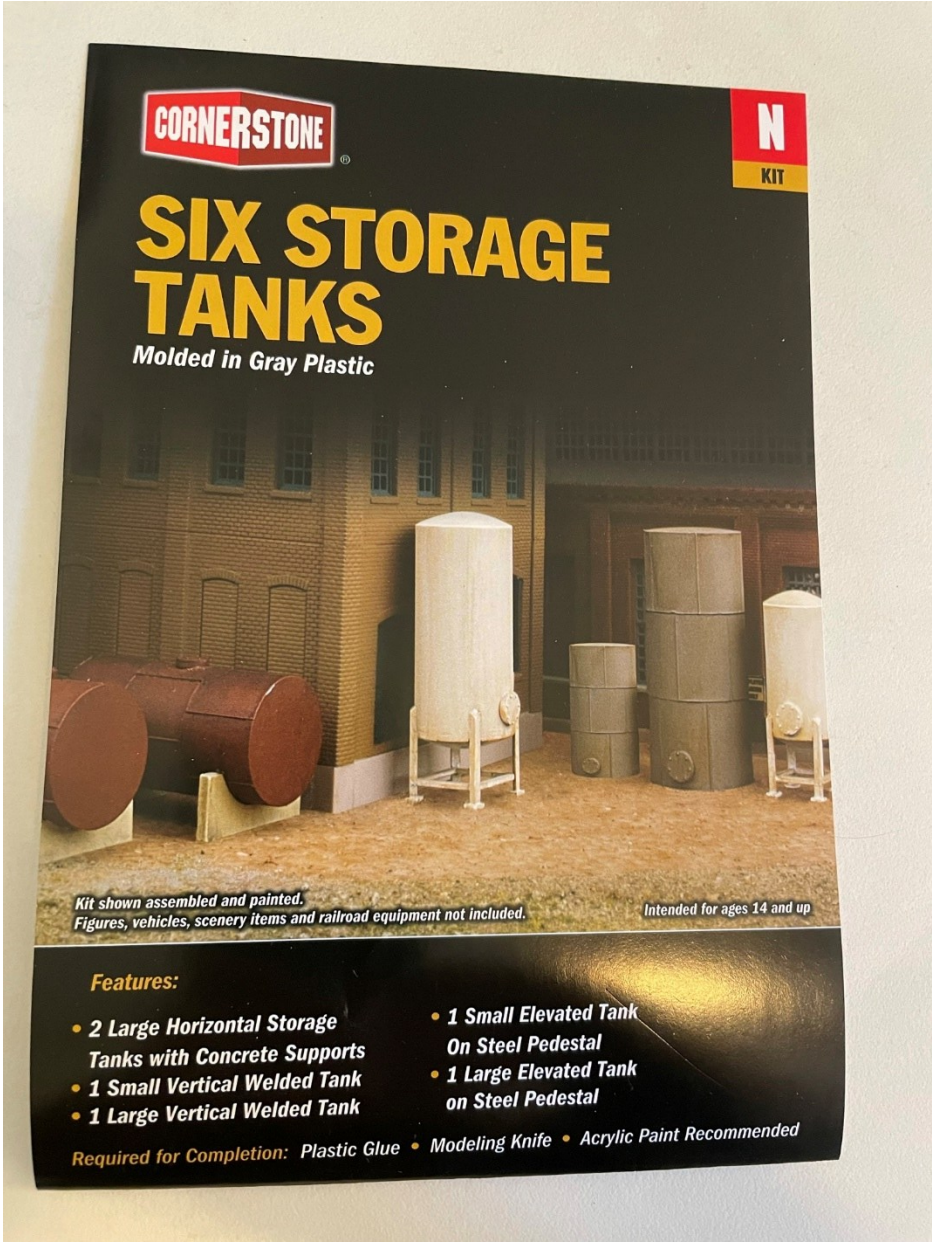
I did not take “in progress” photos of the Fuel Rack and Depot, as I built them pretty much to plan, and they were fairly simple, except the railings on the rack were tricky to align and cement. The various tanks and details for these two kits are molded in bright, toy-like colors, so one needs to go over them with brown and gray paint washes to make them look more realistic.

Given the Depot has a large clear front window, I glued some of the detail tanks, etc. to the back wall inside before attaching the roof. I also left off some of the railings included in both kits as their purpose was not clear, and if not attached straight and square, they would just detract from the appearance of the structure. I also did not use all the tanks and barrels in the rack kit, as they just clutter the platform with no realistic purpose.

The Depot kit includes a loading hose to attach to the roof which doesn’t make much sense, as the kit does not attach it to anything inside the building. Therefore, I attached a “pump” tank on the ceiling below it and used a section of round plastic sprue to create a pipe from it to the wall. I then built a vertical storage tank from a Walthers six tank set to route the pipe to.

The Walthers tanks were a simple build, except the two vertical tanks with legs were tricky. In the process of removing the legs from the sprue and filing off the nubs, I ended up breaking one leg on each. However, I glued the three good legs and the square support between them, then after they set, I was able to glue the two pieces of the broken piece into place. Anyway, I used the one vertical tank here, and stored away the other five unpainted for future use.

N-Circle_21-11-24_Walthers_Tanks_1:



I allowed for modular flexibility in how this scene may ultimately be structured with and without a pump house between the storage tank and the depot. I created a structure cut from a square styrene bar to support another “sprue pipe” exiting the wall and cemented it to the side of the building. The storage tank can then be placed at the end of this pipe. However, I also have a small shack purchased pre-built on eBay a while ago, which may be used as a pump house, so, I built a second pipe support to run between the tank and this pump house. The following photos show these two scene options. At this point none of these adjoining structures are permanently attached.

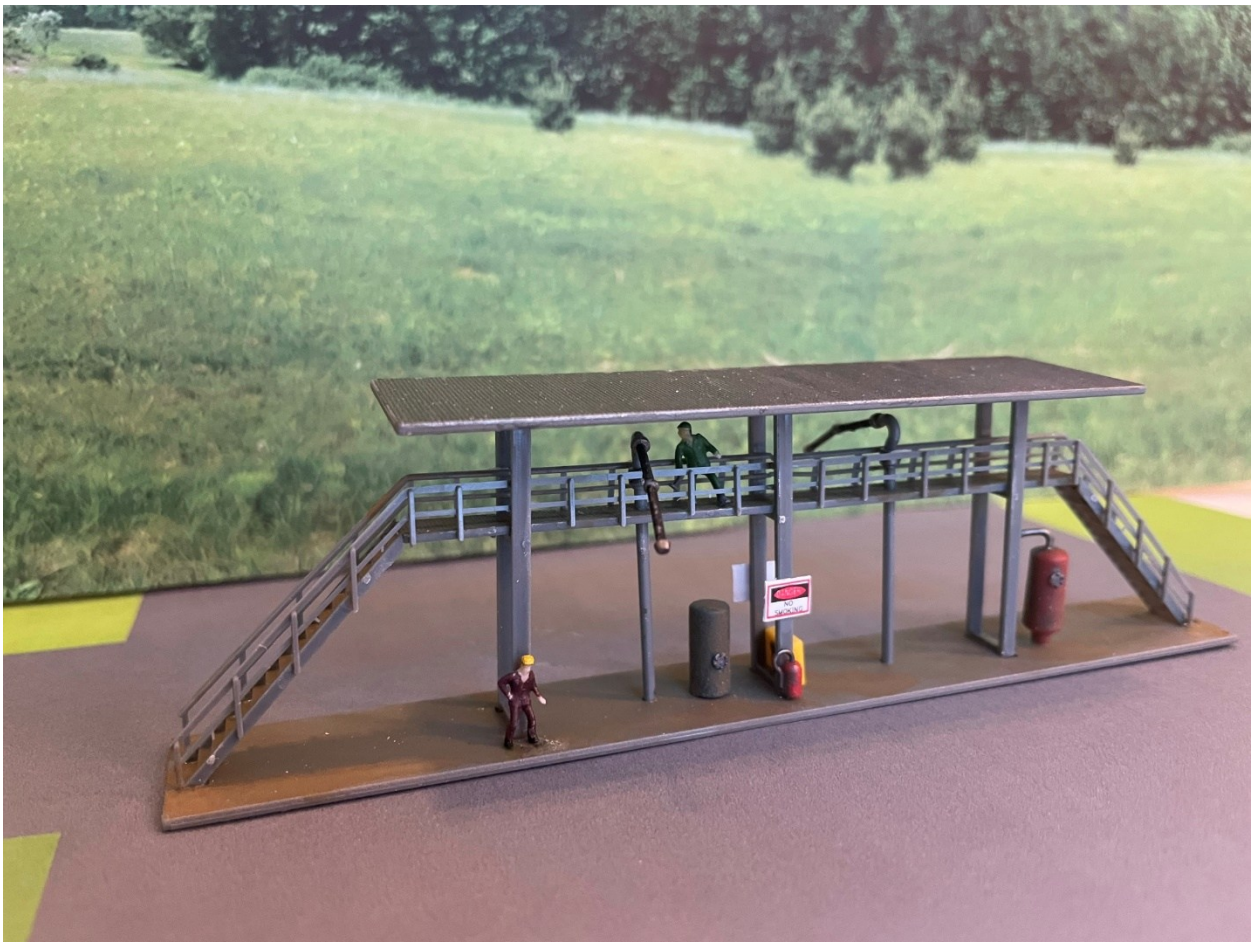
N-Circle_21-11-30_Con-Cor_FuelDepot_2

N-Circle_21-11-30_Con-Cor_FuelDepot_3

In these photos you can see the structure added beneath the roof pipe, and the piping from there to the exterior. Some oil drums and tanks and two figures in Shell yellow hard hats complete the scene. The interior details are only slightly visible through the window in these photos.

Next is a photo of the completed loading rack, with warning signs and more figures with hard hats added. As with the depot, I used signs from Microscale and Blair Lines, as those which come with the kits are not great. Also, as noted above, a much more spare use of tanks and clutter on the platform than provided in the kit.

N-Circle_21-11-30_Con-Cor_FuelRack_2



In contrast to the Fuel Rack and Fuel Depot kits, the Con-Cor Cambria City Fuel Tanks is one of those “you have to love N-scale” kits to build. Numerous kits for large storage tanks have been released over the years, I have purchased three (so far!). I liked the look of the curved walkways up the side of the tanks of this kit, not foreseeing that one has to build those walkways using many small pieces…

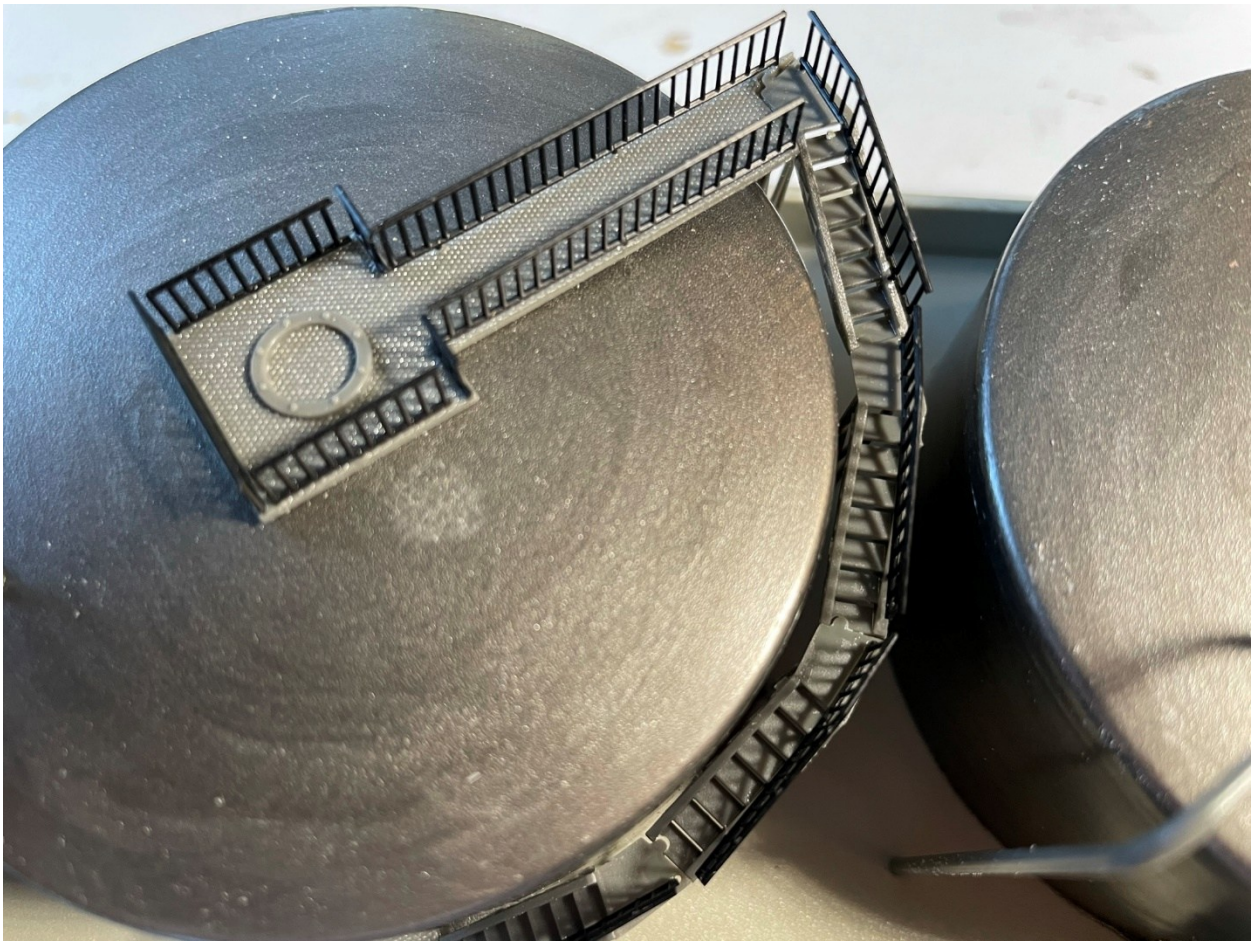
N-Circle_21-11-24_Con-Cor_FuelTanks_1:

Surprisingly, assembling the walkways and their supports went better than expected, even for the inner set between the two tanks. The small holes and notches for aligning the upright supports and the sections of walkway worked well. Unfortunately, one cannot build the left tank first, then the right, because the front walkway needs to be assembled and aligned to both tanks first, so the curved stairways can then align to it.

However, the handrails were a much bigger challenge. For some shorter pieces, the pins on the bottom of the sections would align perfectly with the tiny holes molded into the walkway. But for the main walkway across the front of the model, expecting seven pins along a section of railing 3.5 inches long to all align within a fraction of a millimeter each to their respective holes in the walkway is beyond plastic molding accuracy. Therefore, I ended up cutting them into shorter sections than in the directions, so only two or three alignments were required per section – that usually worked well, with the pins fully engaging into their intended holes. A liberal application of liquid cement to the holes also softens them enough to allow the pin some tolerance to work it in.

The handrails for the stairway were a special challenge – the sections of railing are straight, but the three holes in the stairway for the pins are not in a straight line – the intent is for the railing to be curved. Perhaps a person with the dexterity to hold the railing with two pairs of needle-nose pliers and maneuver it into place could do this, but I could not. After doing a few, I went to cutting off the center pin and then the two end pins could be inserted into their respective holes and attach the railing fairly solidly. The result is that the railings look a bit like an 80-foot boxcar on a small radius curve, but from ten feet…

N-Circle_21-11-10_Con-Cor_FuelTanks_2



In retrospect, I would go over all the walkway sections and open the holes for the railing pins with a sharp needle before installing the walkways on the model. I did this for the straight sections on the top of the tanks, and they went quite well.

Note that one has to cut the long sections of railings provided to short lengths to fit each section. The instructions provide a cut diagram, but still to get this right without gaps between sections requires cutting to an accuracy of a fraction of a millimeter, which is not easy, and I did not perfect the technique.

I painted the tanks with a dark “oxidized aluminum” color and applied a brown wash t bring out the mortar lines on the block wall. I did not paint the handrails, which would have improved the realism of the structure. But if painted before assembly, I suspect much of the paint would have been chipped off the tiny, shiny plastic rails and spindles while trying to get the sections into the mounting holes. Painting them after assembly without getting paint on the walkways would be very tedious and difficult.

In this completed photo, the Flammable sign artfully conceals the gap in the lower walkway railings… I used Microscale decals for the tanks, with 1950s logos directly decaled to the tanks, and did not attempt to make “personalizable” signs for the 1950s versus 1980s operating scenarios of the N-Circle Railroad, as this may only be a temporary structure until we build better tanks. For 1980s operations, one will just have to imagine that the tanks haven’t been repainted for years…

N-Circle_21-11-30_Con-Cor_FuelTanks_1

If you again observe the “looks good from ten feet” rule and ignore the sag in the walkway (the kit provides no center support nor warning to watch for this) and the gaps in the railings, it came out pretty good.

However, I would not recommend this kit to anyone who is not an experienced and talented N-scale modeler. When almost done, it occurred to me to look on You-Tube for a how-to video on building this kit. I couldn't kind one for these Con-Cor tanks but did find one for the similar Kibri kit that I also own. So, one of these days I will watch that and build a replacement for these tanks. The walkways on the Kibri kit look easier to work with!

The instructions for these three Con-Cor kits just show blow-up diagrams for how the numbered parts fit together, grouped together by the major steps of assembling the sections. But there are no written details of the best order and technique to assemble the parts within each section, so some foresight and planning are required. For the Rack and the Depot, this is not a major problem, but for the tanks more detailed guidance would have been helpful.

To accent this Shell fuel depot and the Shell gas stations we are in the process of building now, we built and detailed Showcase Minatures pewter metal 1950s fuel delivery trucks and a 1950s wrecker. These were built to plan, we did not modify them, they are brush-painted with Polly acrylic paints. As most folks who have done this kind of detailing know, it is much more efficient to do multiple vehicles at the same time, reducing the number of times one has to prep red and yellow paints, etc…

N-Circle_21-11-30_ShowcaseMinatures_ShellTrucks_1

These Showcase Minatures trucks were a major challenge, like the oil tanks kit, I would not recommend them for any but the most skilled N-scale modelers. There are no diagrams or instructions included, parts require a lot of detailed filing to fit, and some parts are very fragile to work with. I never could figure out how to install their clear windshields, even though cryptic instructions were included. I gave up and used Krystal Klear in the windows, then later found a YouTube video which shows how to install the windshields, but it would require such precise cutting and alignment of the pieces that I would still recommend just using Krystal Klear. I never did find any on-line guidance on how to assemble the boom structure for the wrecker truck, so I had to just wing it.

The 1955 Chevy with its hood up is from Alloy Forms and will be used in the gas station scene.

Here is the final completed fuel terminal integrated into the southeast corner of the N-Circle layout. A nice manufacturer-detailed Trainworx semi-tanker and the two Showcase Minatures fuel delivery trucks described above complete the scene, with a handful of different style Shell tank cars.

N-Circle_21-11-30_South_East_FuelTerminal_4

In a future evolution, the temporary PowerPoint underlay will be replaced with real scenery, but this provides a good working scene for now, and a visualization of how these structures can align to the railroad. It's a major improvement over the two large, toy-like Shell oil tanks that occupied this space in photos taken earlier in the summer (they have since been sold on eBay). Note that together with the grain mill and golf course reported earlier this fall, this east side of town is nearly complete for a first pass. The remaining open space on the endcap to the right will eventually contain a park scene.

This fuel depot scene took about 18 hours to build and detail, not including the vehicles. The tanks consumed about half of that time, with all of their handrails to install.

Restrooms Building

Last year I purchased on eBay a public restrooms building for eventual use in a park scene. I have not seen this structure before or since, but it appears to have been built from an old German plastic kit. Whoever built it did a reasonable job and applied some appropriate signs.

However, when placed next to other N-scale buildings, it appeared too tall and out of proportion, as can be seen in the following photo when we placed it next to the ticket shack for the mini-golf course. The doors appeared to be about the correct height for N-scale, so I proceeded with that assumption.

N-Circle_21-10-28_Restrooms

The upper level was very tall, with a steeply sloped shingled roof. Who has a second floor with a window over an outhouse?! So I decided to cut down the sides, and replace the roof with

steel roofing panels left over from building the RIX grain unloading shed, described in a previous N-Circle Update.

It was easy to remove the two roof panels and the two second-level end peak sections without damaging the pieces. I used a sharp knife to cut down the peak ends to a much shallower slope, removing the window completely, as can be seen here.

N-Circle_21-10-29_Restrooms

I then replaced the roof with the steel roof panels and painted them silver with a dark grey wash to bring out the steel ridges. I added a roof vent from the detail parts box.

N-Circle_21-11-08_Restrooms

With the shallow slope steel roof, the building looks a lot more “American” now, and not so out of proportion, though the first-floor level is still high relative to the ticket shack. I then added a man by the entrance … and began to get the funny feeling it may be TT scale - 1:120, halfway between N and HO scale…! Oh, well… Probably why it’s the only time I have ever seen this kit, it was listed incorrectly on eBay. Looks like the latrine for the eventual park scene will need to be placed away from other structures…!

So, we have a quick demonstration of “rehabbing” a simple structure with some good characteristics to better fit into an intended scene. And a lesson in making sure that built structures of unknown origin purchased on eBay really are in your modelling scale…!

The next N-Circle update will describe building two gas station kits from different manufacturers but very similar in form. One will be detailed for a 1950s Shell station and the other for a 1980s Shell station. These two projects were actually started before the fuel depot, but involve a very high level of detail work, so they still require many more hours to complete, so stay tuned!