

Proto-Freelance Paint Schemes

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Since returning to model railroading more seriously a few years ago, I've bucked the trend of pure prototype miniaturization and operational fidelity in favor of proto-freelancing. This gives me the freedom to explore the many facets of the hobby I'm unfamiliar with and do things in my own way as I learn. I can pick and choose the best parts of prototype railroading and combine them into something that reflects an individual perspective as part of who I am and what I love. But this doesn't mean I model on a lark. To that end, it took me a while to settle on a paint scheme for my freelanced Saint Canard Midland (STC).

Displayed here are the first (and thus far only) locomotives I've painted for the STC:

- 7638: Athearn GP40X low-nose
- 7655: Athearn GP40X high-nose

- 7672: Athearn GP38-2, ex-Rock Island "patchout"
- 7673: Athearn GP38-2, ex-Rock Island, repainted to STC "green image."

The Paint Scheme

The Saint Canard Midland is a Midwest "Regional Class I" (in the vein of what Wisconsin Central ultimately became), being modeled from the mid-1970s through the mid-1980s. In that time, many Class I (and fallen flag veteran) locomotives sported a variety of new, bold schemes, and I wanted a similar appearance for my fleet. The requirements for the design were:

Boldness: Present a proud, dynamic, attention-getting scheme.

Feasibility: Simplicity of design for ease of painting and minimal "prototype expense."

Inspiration: Tie subtle traits of certain Class I schemes into an original, yet classic, design.

Originality: Not like anything else... no "borrowed" schemes, no boring stripes or solid colors.

Visibility: Attention to safety and purpose using bold colors and contrasts, especially up front.

After several days of coloring in blank technical drawings I found online, I arrived at a scheme that combines two of my favorite paint scheme elements: the sharp contrast and unique shapes of Santa Fe's Warbonnets and Chessie System's vivid colors and bold stripes. These traits lie in the separation of the cab and intake portion of the long hood (Warbonnet) and the tri-color theme and banding (Chessie). In this way, the STC could be plausibly affiliated



with either one — which it is — yet stand on its own merits with a look all its own.

A Realistically Evolving Paint Scheme

While designing, I became torn between a Chessie-inspired blue-yellow-red scheme versus a unique use of green that honors the STC's legacy colors and turquoise print logotype. I even put it to an informal public vote to make sure I wasn't "missing something."

Then I remembered: Aren't all railroads prone to multiple schemes, commemorative and experimental designs, and accidental or temporary units? Of course! So the decision was easy: Do both! As my first gut preference leaned toward the Chessie tricolor, I batch-numbered and painted both GP40X units that way. The GP38 then became an "experimental testbed" for the purposes of this story. During the build, the yellow versions were the clear standouts. But as the finished locomotives took shape, the green one became more and more polished, especially once the yellow trim was applied. Both look equally dynamic and have re-



ceived their own accolades. So I'm afraid I still don't have a preference!

While a "point in time" is usually the defining mark when transitioning from one paint scheme to another, there are other considerations. New schemes are often introduced when new locomotives are purchased or when an in-house rebuild project is begun. Sometimes just a particular shop on a larger system is equipped to perform the updates, and some locomotives may never receive the new scheme for any number of reasons. Considering this, I may ultimately choose to split the schemes based on horsepower ratings (above or below 3,000 hp), or the home shops for servicing (Chicago versus Frankfort). Or just on an allowed dose of "whim!"

Second-hand Units Make a Freelance Real

The 7672 is the sister unit to the 7673; STC obtained both GP38-2s from the tragically defunct Rock Island. While both are slated to introduce STC's new "green image" paint, the railroad has such a need for the new power that only the 7673 re-

ceived the new paint initially, leaving the 7672 to soldier on with a quick patchout for a while. The paintshop still took time to clean the nose first.

(The above story along with the locomotives helps create a plausible existence and backstory for the road. The use of two paint schemes, the purchase of second-hand units, and the patching out of another unit are all examples of interesting dynamics seen on real railroads. The ex-Rock unit can also



instantly date a scene to anytime after March 1980.)

Colors used:

- Polly Scale CSX Yellow
- Polly Scale ATSF Blue
- Testors Fluorescent green
- Alps Cyan (numbers and logos on yellow units)
- Alps yellow (stripes on green unit)
- "Alps recipe red" (stripes, heralds)
- "Alps recipe royal" (heralds, logos)
- Various dirt, grime, and faded-color paint, powders, and chalks (ex-ROCK 7672)

About the Models

The 7638, 7655, and 7673 all began as undecorated Athearn models. The 7672 was factory painted as a Rock Island "bankruptcy blue" unit.

The new Athearn GP40X undecs are complex in certain areas of their assembly, requiring careful planning (and disassembly of the drive train to paint the bare-metal

frame). All three STC-scheme locomotives were done as a group, averaging out to about 10 hours per model — half of that in paint alone — but the time was worth it! The paint was two-color masked; stripes and lettering are custom decals that I designed myself and printed on an Alps MD-5000. The ex-Rock unit was detailed, then hand-patched, and finally weathered with chalks and washes. All four models are superdetailed with the usual host of add-on parts and enhancements with some still to come. As with all superdetailed models, 10 percent of the details take about 80 percent of the time.

There are some subtle and visible differences in the details. Numberboard colors, truck sideframe colors and styles, home shop sublettering, road number gaps, and locomotive styles all work toward the impression that STC is a large system that has far many more than just the four locomotives shown here!

Names to Remember and Inspire

STC celebrates the people and communities who inspire and sustain its spirit. Locomotives are subnamed for important individuals (units 7638, 7655, and 7673 are named for the CEO's grandfather, father, and wife, respectively), and cabooses may be decorated in commemorative schemes; currently caboose 1127 sports a scheme celebrating the birth of little railroader Bethany, while the 1203 is being shopped for new railroader Beverly.

THE EVERGREEN ROUTE: Not Just a Slogan - A Philosophy

Coined out of the coniferous regions of its northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin birthplace, the Saint Canard Midland maintained its celebrated "Evergreen Route" identity throughout its expansion southward to western Kentucky and eastward to Michigan. But over the decades it's become more than just a geographic nomer — It's a philosophy for our continued success and



strength, symbolizing all facets of the operation.

Indeed, remaining "evergreen" requires forward thinking, applied to the STC's values:

Environment — promoting the railroad as an environmentally friendly alternative to highway congestion; providing benefits to the community and nation; enacting operating practices that enhance and promote these benefits.

Commodities — Large portions of revenue traffic are still generated by and for agriculture, from harvest grains to wood products, and implements to packaged supplies.

People — In addition to taking care of our own employees, we take care of the community as well. From timely professional service to community improvement programs and sponsorships, we strive to help foster healthy, thriving communities, which support the railroad in turn.

Progressiveness — Green means go, and competition from common carriers of

road and rail requires us to embracing new ideas and concepts, from PR to technology, capital assets to cooperative strategies.

Assets — Adherence to the above principles has always enabled us to operate from a position of fiscal strength, which is the fundamental goal of any business enterprise.

While STC may no longer roam exclusively where conifers grow, our adherence toward our values and guiding principles allows us to proudly remain "The Evergreen Route" now more than ever.

The dynamics, evolution, and application of a well-thought paint scheme are exemplified in STC's locomotive roster, shown painted but not fully detailed yet. Variations in colors and details are things that real railroads either experiment with deliberately or adopt accidentally. Either case gives railfans and modelers something to discuss. In addition, a patched-out second-hand unit like the 7672 gives a freelance railroad a more plausible connection to the real world in a certain time. 🚂

