

NEED A BREAK FROM MINERALS? 'AVE A BANANA!

Now then; when one is thinking of something to include in the Newsletter and decide to ask Dave Sutton to help, it should be quickly realised it could lead to trouble! Here's Dave's lead-in for our collaboration...

It started with a simple message from the Editor: "I've been investigating Bananas, what can you give me" unfortunately the first thought that came to mind was a scene from a religious drama I'd seen where the character Dougal says to Father Ted Crilly "what about when St Tibulus grabbed that lad's banana""no Dougal...that wasn't a banana!" replied Ted...seems I'd got it wrong that time, so all I could give Alan was some info on the fruit (which Americans consider a Herb), with a leaning towards the Great Northern Railway.

Thanks Dave! Actually, the plant itself is a perennial herb which produces fruits.



First known to be displayed in London in 1633, the now humble banana started to become more commonly seen here in the 18th and 19th centuries, originally as deck cargo from the Canary Islands. Sir Alfred Jones (1845 - 1909) is given the credit for introducing the banana, using refrigerated ships of the Elder Dempster shipping company. Edward Fyffe commenced imports in 1888, possibly through Liverpool, and then in some quantity from 1901 via the Manchester Ship Canal to Salford, but they still only became very widely available and popular after WW2. Originally they were the Gros Michel variety, which was wiped out by a fungus, and thus the bananas we have eaten since the 50s are mainly the fungus-resistant Cavendish variety. The developments are noted here broadly chronologically.

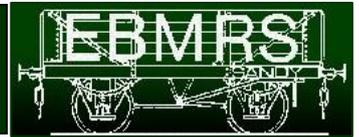
Whilst Elders & Fyffes operated out of Salford docks, ships arrived weekly from Costa Rica. Dock 6 had a dedicated banana room opened in 1902.

Below is a fantastic picture of bananas being loaded into containers on flat wagons at Salford dockside. Containerised transport is not a new concept!



The shipping lines used to transport Bananas to the UK about 1900 were

The Royal Mail Steam Packet Co
Elder Dempster Shipping Ltd
Lamport & Holt
Elder Dempster & Co
British & African Steam Navigation Co
Imperial Direct West Indian Mail Service.



It seems the fruit trade developed rapidly. On 16 February 1901 a crowd of more than 8,000 watched the departure of brand-`new ship *Port Morant* from Avonmouth, returning 4 weeks later with 20,000 bunches of bananas and 14,000 cartons of pineapples and oranges. This was all packed into trains for country-wide distribution, though I don't know if this was via the GWR and/or the MR. I do know generally for the MR there was traffic between Avonmouth Docks and St Pancras, via the Stratford-upon-Avon and Midland Junction Railway, and that the GWR worked (at least) between Avonmouth and Moor Street in Birmingham.

The Fyffes traffic seems to have relocated to Garston (Liverpool) around 1905

Picture: unloading bananas into waiting wagons at Garston. They seem, at least at first inspection, to be commandeered livestock wagons!

Fyffes and Elders both had depots at Stratford Market (East London) in 1907 before their merger.



At least until WW1 imports arrived at Avonmouth and Garston docks, which could handle 72 ship loads of bananas a year, so one about every 5 days. Southampton was used additionally to Garston from round 1913 when Fyffes was taken over.

Some of the LNWRs discussions I've seen centre on the fact that whole trains of bananas were not listed in normal working timetables. Instead they were allocated a Q Path - "Runs as required" - Garston had something like 20+ Q paths for fruit and other special traffics, and the trains made no intermediate stops for detaching wagons en-route to their various destinations, being afforded express freight priorities. It's also noted some LNWR Super D 0-8-0s were especially fitted with steam pipes for the Garston traffic.

Packing of the bananas on the vans seemed to have been laying the 'hands' on a bed of straw, and a crude calculation in the LNWRs discussion suggested that between 6 and 7 tons of bananas per van seems a reasonable guess, and that therefore a boat-load of bananas - say 12 million - may require upwards of 500 vans. The LNWR was operating a fleet of 650 vans, so I suspect they were kept well used, though it's also suggested that smaller consignments may have been transported in ordinary fruit vans for shorter journeys.

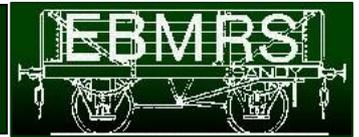
Specialised vans for the transport of bananas were operated by all the main Grouping companies, as the fruit required special handling, heating and ventilating conditions during its transport and so the wagons were insulated, fitted with steam heating pipes and, in some cases, equipped with adjustable ventilation to allow the ripening process to continue en-route.

The LNWR were quick to realise the traffic potential and instigated a build of steam heated and vacuum braked vans with 9' wheelbase but they were found not suitable for express work. The GN had suitable vehicles with 16 feet and 18 feet 8ton vans with steam heating and vacuum brake, so handled the majority of the traffic from Liverpool/Manchester via the Cheshire Lines Committee to destinations in the West Riding, Eastern Counties and London.

In 1905 the volume of traffic was

London	2255 tons in 781 wagons
West Riding	194 tons in 1336 wagons
Eastern Counties	954 tons in 440 wagons

Receipts for the London traffic alone were £2700 which made the flow very profitable for the GN. Elders & Fyffes were looking to increase this flow by restricting the traffic through Bristol and increasing the Manchester traffic, this would have required storage at Kings Cross goods yard. The traffic manager's office decided that space could be created in the coal bays adjacent to the basement of the 'goods outwards' building. Elder & Fyffes were allocated 9 bays which were bricked up and doors fitted, E&F then fitted them out themselves to their own requirements, the cost to the GN of these works was £913.



Subject to the agreement of the GN directors the rent was agreed on the following terms.

Traffic receipts less than £4000 per annum - rent £150 per annum

From £4001 to £5000 per annum - rent £125 per annum

Over £5000 per annum - rent £100 per annum

Elder and Fyffes were confident that traffic would immediately be above the higher rate doubling their business. By 1912 E&F were looking at re-establishing at Garston docks (Liverpool) as well as Manchester. In 1912, during the first nine months of the year, some 6,833,625 stems of bananas were imported into the UK. By 1930 the figure, for the year, totalled some 15,301,238 stems, obviously providing regular income for the railway companies.

Around 1900 the tonnage of the boats used would be about 4,000 tons and steam powered using triple-expansion engines. By 1929 the boats had reached 5,500 tons, still steam powered and this time had started to carry passengers, usually about 50 each of first and second class. It was not until 1938 that diesel powered boats were used, with tonnages then approaching 8,000 per vessel.

With the grouping and the formation of the LNER the Distribution Depots were:

Liverpool, Garston Docks, Leeds, Sheffield, St Helens, Glasgow, Manchester, Halifax, Wigan, Hull, Newcastle, Leicester.

Considering Liverpool (Garston) first, these docks were adjacent to the CLC routes from Liverpool Central to Southport, Warrington and Manchester, so traffic could be routed via Throstle Nest Jct. and Fallowfield to Dewsnap near Guide Bridge for onward services via the GC main line. Hull had its own routes both to York for onward transit north, across to Leeds and the Manchester area and of course to Doncaster for southbound traffic via the GN or GC routes.

In June 1929 LNER Magazine H E Millward (Goods Managers office, Hull) reveals that when a banana boat was expected trains would be lined up for a variety of destinations, for example:-

Train 1 - Nottingham (GN), Burton (GN), Sleaford, Spalding, Lincoln, etc.

Train 2 - Newcastle via Bishop Auckland.

Train 3 - Link traffic to Normanton, Doncaster and Darlington.

Train 4 - Middlesbrough, Sunderland, etc.

These trains were seemingly run on an ad-hoc basis and do not appear in the Freight Section Working Time Tables (WTT), instead they were run as 'Q path' as noted for the LNWR earlier.

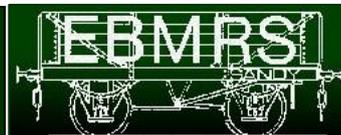
In what seems a strange move (due to the additional shipping distances involved), the port of Hull was used from the early Twenties. It was then the 3rd largest port in the UK, with a dock area extending 7 miles along the Humber. At some time between 1930-1933 Elders & Fyffes relocated this traffic to Southampton.

In a 21 hour period in 1934 Southampton Docks loaded 681 banana vans, which must have pushed availability of dedicated stock to beyond normal availability.

The LNER had used a lot of ordinary vans converted for banana transport, but with the relocation to Southampton the Southern had to hire 325 various LNER vans and then build some of their own. The arrangements weren't helped when the Southampton depot was destroyed by fire on 5th June 1936, destroying some 60 or so vans, mainly the on-loan LNER vans. In partial consequence the following year many boats were rerouted to the Royal Albert Dock and West India docks in London, so the LNER cancelled its lease arrangement to use its own vans once more.

Picture: loading bananas into LNER vans at West India Dock in 1935.





And also, unloading bananas at Southampton Docks

The beginning of WW2 put paid to banana imports (officially from November 1940), the government concentrating fruit imports on oranges. After the war the Fyffes ship, SS Tilapa (seen right) brought in the first shipment of 10 million bananas on 30th December 1945, with the government aiming to ensure all the bananas were provided to children. Banana wagons were (unsurprisingly) reportedly generally repurposed during the war.

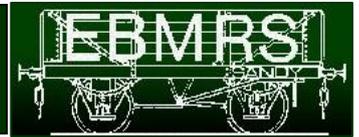


Aerial view of Stratford Market goods depot. The banana sheds were located in the upper-left area of this image.

With the bananas arriving in an unripe state, they were distributed to various ripening depots before onwards transshipment. It seems there were quite a number, and included locations such as Stratford Market, Curzon Street in Birmingham, East Croydon, Lingfield, Exeter Central (up to 3 full trains in one day in the 50s and 60s), Newton Abbot, Warminster and Barnstaple. The last 2 named could only take 3 vans. Fyffes also used part of the old LMS goods depot at Cambridge, and to illustrate shorter workings, a depot at Taplow on the Western would have half a dozen banana vans tripped from Slough as required. The arches under the Windsor lines at Clapham Junction were used by Fyffes and are known as the Banana Arches. Much more locally, there was a Fyffes depot in Hitchin town centre at one point and it was known for the bananas to be offloaded in the old MR engine shed.

When the vans were emptied at the ripening shed, railway staff had to sweep them out and burn any loose straw left inside, always keeping a watchful eye out for any tropical spiders or snakes that may have accompanied the bananas!

In 1957 Garston could still be required to arrange up to 7 banana trains in a day.



Geest became heavily involved from 1952, gaining about half the market by the mid-sixties, and as one example in 1962 they had a depot at Easton Lodge near Braintree which handled 300 tons each week. Pratt's bananas was established in 1960, operating from Kings Langley and Hemel Hempstead.

Around 1960 there were investigations in association with Fyffes into developing a hovercraft - but named Cushioncraft - to bring the bananas to the UK, being potentially an easier ride for the fragile fruit.

In 1962, a London Midland Region docket noted ports being used as follows -

- Avonmouth, Elders, Ships as required (the largest tonnages, but banana traffic ceased here in 1976)
- Garston, Elders, Ships as required
- Greenock, Elders, Ships as required
- Southampton, Elders, Ships as required
- Preston Dock, Geest, Ships fortnightly
- Barry, Geest, Ships weekly
- Port of London Authority, various small traders, As required (not operated as trainloads)
- Liverpool, Various small traders, As required (not operated as trainloads)

With changing patterns of banana-growing regions we started to receive bananas from areas much closer to the UK. Furthermore, some varieties were smaller and more delicate and were packed in crates for shipment. This changed the requirements for refrigeration and heating of the fruits. The Southern vans had no ventilators whereas other regions' vans did so, and by the mid-1950s those were being sealed or removed. Vans also started to have steam heat removed but with extra insulation added - though steam pipes were retained at this time. Yellow circles were added to the vans with increased insulation from 1961, and remaining steam pipes were removed by the end of 1963. Despite adaptations the distribution was changing, less by rail and consequently many wagons being taken out of traffic by 1968.

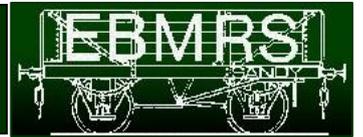
Geest ceased using Preston in 1971 when it sold 2 of its ships, being no longer economically viable after only 11 years. Instead, the increasingly larger vessels they hired couldn't negotiate the River Ribble and the operation was moved to Barry in South Wales.

Tilbury, and Newhaven are also known to have been used in the 70s. After Preston and Barry, Portsmouth has been the main port, but the last loads were run in 1979 and the last 17 railway vans then withdrawn.

Many remaining vans found their way into the departmental traffic, particularly in South Wales following their original allocation to Barry Docks traffic. The last ex-Southern van was withdrawn circa 1978.

Unloading bananas by conveyor belt into railway wagons on the south side of Preston dock circa 1960





The Banana Vans

GWR vans

The Diagram Y4 was created around 1921; A shortage of meat vans had meant some 300 meat vans (MICA A or X6) had been temporarily created by converting V16 vans. Whilst converting them back to V16, the banana trade was increasing and so 258 were fitted with steam heating and a new end ventilator. The door locks and handles were relocated to be within easy reach of dock workers, as the wagons were loaded whilst 'on the move' through the warehouses at Avonmouth.

Build summary

- Dia. Y5 180 built 1907, lasting to late 50s. ABS produced a kit
- Dia. Y12 47 built 1925, lasting to the 1960s. ABS kit
- Dia. Y7 Details unknown at time of writing, other than built around 1929. ABS kit. One preserved at Didcot, pictured right
- Dia. Y4 As noted above. Kits and RTR from K's, Ratio, Parkside and Rapido



Van 82554 at the SVR. Built as a Mink A in 1908 (Dia. V12) but converted to Dia. Y5 in 1925, surviving in departmental use into the mid-1960s.

SR Vans

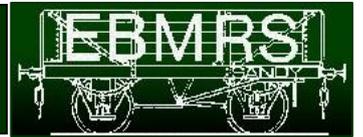
The LSWR built vans in 1913-15 for traffic from Southampton. It's not known how far they worked across the UK in normal traffic, but half this order was diverted for WW1 needs almost immediately and some were also used for meat traffic. The LBSCR adapted existing vans for their share of traffic, with the Southern adding more vans in 1931.



SR vans, clockwise from the left:

- D.1479 S50819
- D.1478 S50774
- D.1478 S50610
- D.1479 S50886





As referred to earlier, with Fyffes operations moved to Southampton, within 2 years the Southern built a fleet of 200 vans to Diagram 1478 on the new Clearing House 10' wheelbase underframe. These worked alongside the hired LNER wagons until the 1936 fire, and when the operation moved to London the LNER recalled its remaining wagons. Nonetheless the Southern built a further 125 vans, amending an order of D.1458 vans to become Banana Vans as D.1479.

Both types entered traffic in the SR's Stone livery with Venetian Red lettering, albeit with a slight difference in that the D.1478 vehicles carried large SR lettering until 1936, before the SR switched to small lettered branding, which is how the D1479 vehicles entered traffic. With the suspension of banana trade in the war, many of the SR's Banana Vans were re-purposed for the transportation of meat and were branded accordingly.

It is suggested there must have been some supply of bananas during the war, as in March 1941 an amendment of the painting diagram showed a wartime livery of Red Oxide, with Lemon lettering and a 1' 6" green band added to each corner, specifically to indicate use for banana traffic.

Build Summary

LSWR (SR Dia.1463) 100 vans built by 1915, 29 left in traffic at September 1946.

Dia.1478 200 vans built 1935. Steam piped with no ventilation.

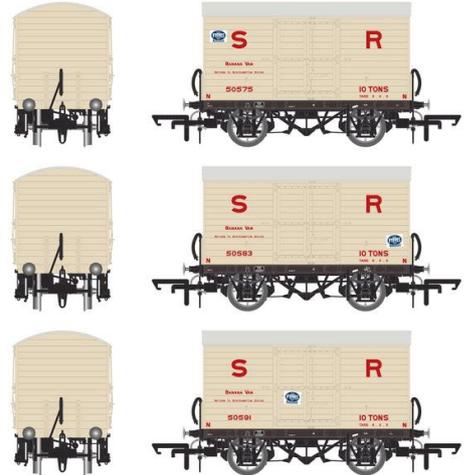
RTR models by Accurascale, pictured, kit by ABS

Dia.1479 125 vans built 1938. Steam piped with no ventilation.

RTR models by Accurascale, kit by ABS

LBSCR no details available. Kit produced by ABS

None appear to have been preserved, but examples of the SR types survived into the 1970s.



LMS vans

The LNWR and MR both built vans for banana traffic, though I've not traced any banana vans from other LMS-constituent companies. The LMS itself built a number of banana vans, the last batch of which was built after the war and, oddly to my thinking, not to express train specifications.

Build summary

LNWR

Dia. 86 12 built 1904, 7T

Dia. 89 1 built 1904, 16' long with sliding doors. Superseded by Dia.92

Dia. 92 25 built 1906, 10T, 18' long,

MR

Dia. 365 vans 1905 200 built, 1906 100 built

Dia. 387 vans 1906 200 built, 5 more in 1909

All these believed extinct by 1939

LMS

Dia.1660 (a) 400 built 1925/26

Dia.1660 (b) 600 built 1926-30 slightly different body style

Dia.2111 100 built 1946. 10T, 9' wheelbase

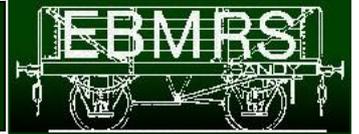
All LMS types could be seen into the 1960s.

These two pictured are both preserved examples of the Dia.2111. The one below is at the Bluebell Railway.



LSWR Vans

Great Eastern-designed vans were produced in 1923 under the LNER banner, featuring vacuum brakes, steam heating, and thick insulation to keep the fruit at a stable 57°F from dockside to distribution centres like Stratford Market in East London. It was from these that some were loaned to the Southern (as noted earlier), some of which has Southern branding. It's stated in one source that 85 of them survived to 1958, whilst the Dia.52 versions could still be seen in the 1960s.



Build summary

Dia. 42 (GER Dia.72) 100 vans converted from ex-GE general vans in 1923, numbered 632822-632921. Oxford Rail produce a RTR van of this type, pictured right.

Dia. 52 at least 120 built 1929 with a 9'wb, 74 later versions had a 10' wb.

D&S produced a kit for a GNR banana van

None preserved.



BR vans.

Notwithstanding the LMS vans somewhat restricted speeds, BR built 1,550 vans to this (and similar) design between 1951 and 1958, the last batch being supplied without steam heat.

There was then a new 12T van designed without steam heat but heavy insulation; this was led by the changing industry - new varieties were smaller and more delicate, now being packed in boxes rather than the large hands. The vans were fitted with through steam pipes in order to work with older vans.

After the war the vans were painted in BR bauxite, with paper labels for the banana brands being stuck to the van sides.

Dia.1/240 280 built 1949 LMS design 9' 10T

Dia.1/241 150 built 1951 9' 8T

Dia.1/242 700 built 1952-56 8T 10' Ratio & Parkside kits

Dia.1/243 230 built 1957 diagonal bracing

Dia.1/244 250 built 1958 same but 24.5" buffers

Dia.1/246 1028 built 1959-60 plus 1 conversion from a 1955 D.1/213

I find 11 preserved examples, all of which are numbered for the Dia.1/246 design.

B881724 Foxfield

B881741 Scottish Vintage Bus Museum

B881839 Keighly & Worth Valley Rly

B881879 East Kent Rly

B881987 Nene Valley Rly

B882126 Rother Valley Rly

B882288 Lavender Line

B882517 Bo'ness (pictured, below right)

B882523 Rother Valley Rly

B882536 Rother Valley Rly

B882583 NRM (pictured, below left)

The 3 at Rother Valley are pictured, right, cosmetically restored.

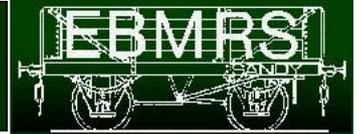


Of other models, Dapol have produced over 100 livery variants, for GWR, LNER, BR and private owner - but they're all the same model. Hornby produced R213 but this is based on a VanWide VEA van. In the Model Railway Journal issue 313 (July/August) there's an article on building banana vans in which the author has noted the possibilities of using Ratio D.1/242 kits as a basis for D.1/240, 241 and 244 variants. He has also taken a Dapol banana van to produce a more accurate version of its D.1/245 heritage. The original mouldings are apparently 1962 Hornby Dublo!



Alan Cooper





As can be seen from all this, there was a considerable traffic of bananas throughout the UK and it was common for such trains to be seen on the North London line, both east and west dependant on where the ships docked. I have a record of one such train from Southampton to Temple Mills with Battle-of-Britain 34008 in charge, another with U-boat 2-6-0 31892, whilst heading westwards a Black 5 worked such a train from Victoria Dock to Acton.

In terms of wagons likely to be seen in 1959 through Finchley, the summary of types would be as follows

- GWR D.Y5 and Y12 - possible
- LNER D.42 and D.52 - occasional
- SR D.1478 and D.1479 - definitely some
- LMSR D.1660 and D.2111 - a good number
- BR diagrams, all types

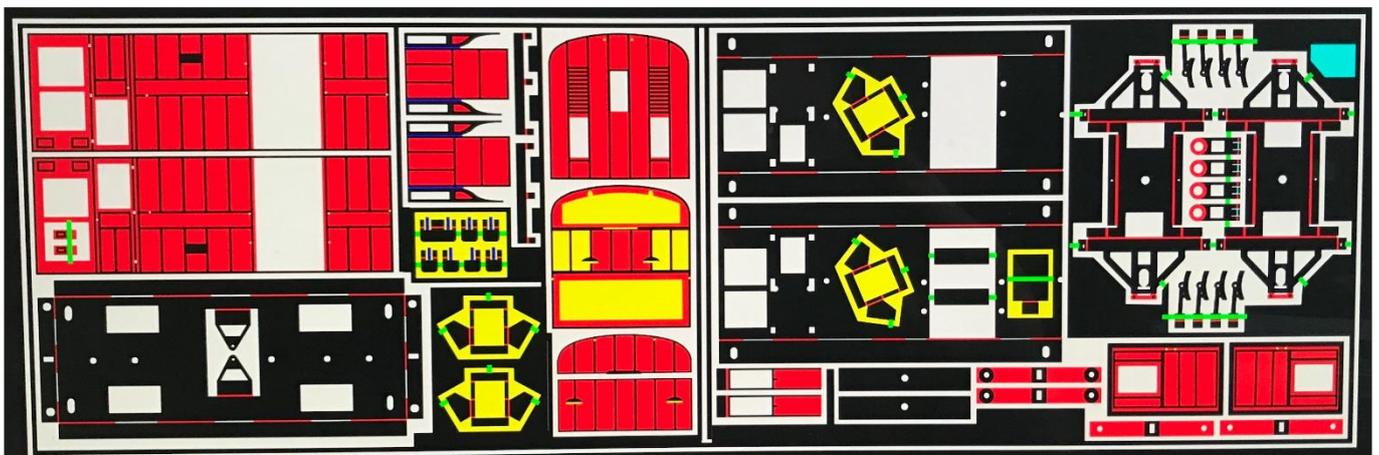
Very crudely, a train of 20 wagons could be in the ratio of 1:2:2:4:11, in order as above, but give or take a couple as takes your fancy. The choice of models for any such train is restricted, or course, to what's available or your efforts to adapt or scratch build.

Over to Dave now, for his model of a GNR banana vehicle.

Whilst writing some notes for the Editor on Banana vans of the GN, I mentioned to him that I'd modelled one of the more unusual vans. It all started quite a few years ago whilst browsing John Crawley's book 'Great Northern in Focus'. Within was a photograph of 1057, an 8 ton Brake & Banana van. This was the most unusual of vehicles and had a certain appeal to it so I searched for more photographs. After some considerable time it was obvious that this was, unfortunately, the only known photograph with none showing the van in service over what was a considerable time frame.

So with just one photograph and a diagram for dimensions I set about creating some etches. I use a simple free/open-source program called Inkscape to create the drawings, but this isn't really suitable as it does not save the drawing to the correct file type. However, if saved to PDF this can be sent to the etching company and they will convert the PDF into a file suitable for them to etch from. I send the drawings as a Front of etch and a Back of etch which helps cut the cost of the artwork.

BV_Etch - This is the final drawing before it is converted to front and back drawings, the colour coding identifies (to me) areas which are half etched, fully etched and tags.



BV1/2 & 3 - These show stages of the soldered construction, although a bit mucky I now do all cleaning at the end of construction and clean the body with an ultrasonic cleaner which has improved the finish as it gets into places that small brushes can't.



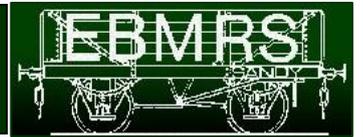
BV 4 & 5 - Teak graining is carried out with oil paints using a technique by Mike Trice. I prime and then undercoat the body with a rattle can, the undercoat for this is Volkswagon Orange. I buff the paint slightly to take any sheen off then apply the artists oil paint (Winsor & Newton Burnt Umber) thinned with a small amount of liquin. Lining is yet to be applied.



I have now built several of these as one was just not enough. It has also been described as 'possibly the cutest van ever built' and has now appeared on several layouts on the exhibition circuit.

Grantham_streamliner_years - The cutest van is sitting in the bay on 'Grantham the Streamliner years' when exhibited at Newcastle in 2024.





This article is to be continued as unfortunately I have been unable to locate photographs of the finished models and they have been packed away for 4 years while we renovate our new home...
DS

Sources of information include the following:

Midland Record 12, various wagon books for the Southern, LNER, LMS and BR, and MRJ 313
The Clearing House facebook group (a wagon page), link: [The Clearing House | Facebook](#)
LNWRS forum, link: [Routeing of Banana Trains from Garston - LNWR Society Forum.](#)
RMWeb (search for banana !)
Rapido, Accurascale, Oxford Rail websites
Bluebell Railway website stock page