

The *Mayflower*, Goodyear style

Bringing Revell's blimp down to earth

BY GIFFORD HAMILTON

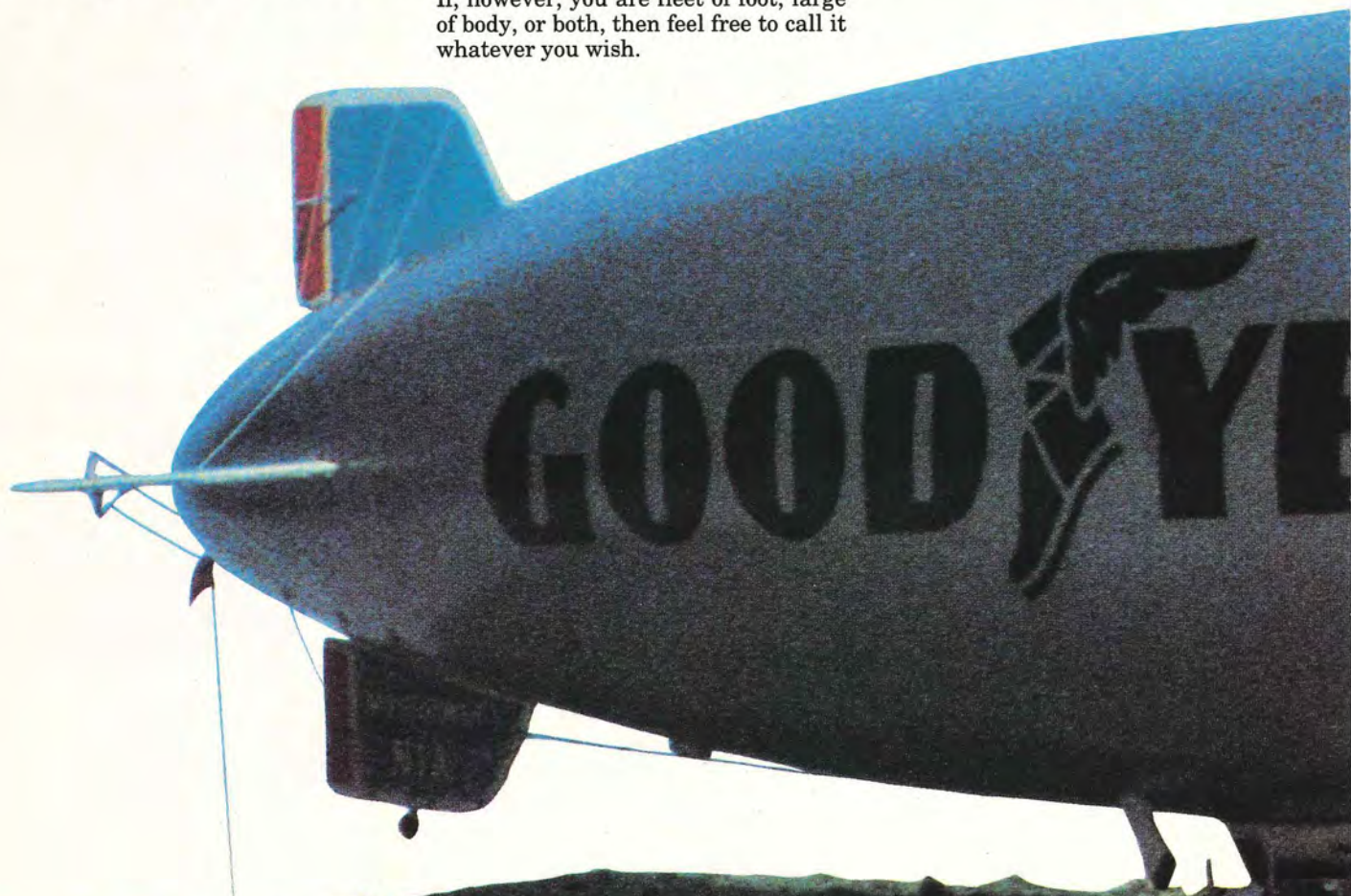
THIS PROJECT is in keeping with my philosophy of modeling the obscure and difficult to verify. Those of you selective enough to have read this far are obviously aware that the *Mayflower* I've modeled is the airborne variety and not that of 1620 Pilgrim fame. I hope to convince modelers that

the somewhat toylike Revell Goodyear blimp (kit No. 4750) can be turned into a unique display item that will certainly get some comments from your friends. Let's face it, how many blimp models have you seen lately, anywhere?

I should make it clear that the correct name for this vessel is "airship," and those who fly them often take strenuous exception to the term blimp. If, however, you are fleet of foot, large of body, or both, then feel free to call it whatever you wish.

It's evident that Revell made this kit as a promotional item for Goodyear since it obviously wasn't designed for the scale enthusiast. For those of you who care, the scale is 1/167.56363, approximately. The only useful purpose served by this knowledge is that it is close to model railroad N scale, and a few N scale figures add a great deal of appeal to the model. Since the Revell kit is the only one available you won't have to make any difficult decisions if your hobby shop has it in stock.

The real claim to fame of the kit is



that it has a motorized, light-up, operating sign gimmick that not only advertises Goodyear but includes blank sign material so the modeler can create his own messages. All this may be great fun for the youngsters, but it doesn't make a good scale representation.

However, all this paraphernalia results in one advantage: There is so little detail that almost nothing has to be changed, only added. The scale is so small that leaving out lots of little details won't hurt the end result one bit.

What to keep. About 90 percent of the parts in the kit are for the motorized sign, so these can be placed aside; we're only interested in the envelope (that's the fuselage in blimp talk), nose cone, tail cone, fins, two parts 31, and the gondola parts.

To fill the rectangular sign hole in the envelope, I formed a piece of sheet

styrene to the inner curvature of the aperture and glued it in place. After it had set up, I leveled the opening with pieces of plastic closely cut to the size of the hole and preformed to the correct curvature, Fig. 1. I don't recommend using small scraps since this will create an excessive amount of filling and sanding as well as a lot of excess weight on one side of the model that will have to be compensated for.

Details. Before adding putty, I carefully cut off the gondola from each envelope half and then assembled the envelope. The removal of the gondola made it easier to fill and sand the envelope and to make the modifications to the gondola that followed.

My detailing was based on photos and general in nature; I didn't try to duplicate every little thing. In fact, those of you with above average powers of observation will note that I've completely ignored all those thousands of

lights that flash messages of questionable interest to millions of crook-necked groundlings. Well, I really did want to put in the lights but I just haven't come up with an easy and logical way. If any of you have suggestions I'd sure be willing to listen. I just don't have the patience or desire to do them one at a time with a pen.

I don't know what the thin spine on the top of the envelope is supposed to be, but I saw it in a magazine photo so I made it from stretched sprue, Fig. 2. I removed the battens on the nose since they were ill-defined and replaced them with stretched sprue; there are 16 equally spaced battens around the nose. The other details on the bottom of the envelope were made from sections of sprue and sheet styrene, Fig. 1.

The kit gondola is solid with the windows represented by decals. I decided that clear windows would improve the kit, so I made a vacuum-formed copy of the gondola. I suggest making several copies since the kit gondola will have to be cut and modified later, rendering it useless for further copying.

The next step is to cut out the window area of the kit gondola, Fig. 3.

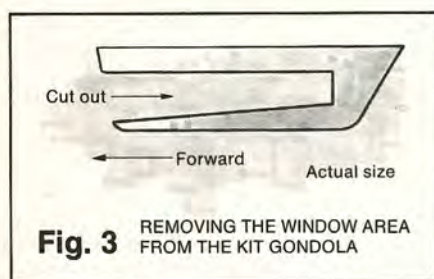
Revell's Goodyear blimp kit can be made into a convincing scale replica. The simple diorama base features N scale figures and a coat hanger mooring mast.





Fig. 1. The rectangular hole for the illuminated sign has been backed with sheet styrene, filled, and smoothed with sandpaper.

Fig. 2. The kit battens on the nose were poorly defined, so Gifford sanded them off and replaced them with stretched sprue. Note the stretched sprue spine on the top of the model.



After the model is painted, the remainder of the kit gondola is reattached to the envelope, and the clear vacuum-formed copy slips over it. I did it this way because the gondola is one of only two points that will support the model in the diorama and the extra strength of the original gondola was needed.

I didn't add any interior to the gondola for the simple reason that it isn't going to be visible, so why bother? Exterior details visible in the photos were added with stretched sprue and wire, Fig. 4.

Masking and painting the gondola was a little tricky. First, I cut out the window area of the decal with a sharp knife, then I cut around the outside edge of the decal so I could hold it against the clear gondola. The shape of the remaining decal represented the area to be painted gloss white while the missing window area was the area to be masked. After the paint was dry, I applied the decal, being careful to avoid messing up the window frames.

I used stretched sprue for the exhaust pipes on the bottom of the engine nacelles. I fashioned the two-bladed propellers from sheet styrene rather than use the kit's plastic circles that represent spinning props. I used three thin strips of sheet styrene to represent the baffles in the opening on the top forward section of the prototype nacelles, Fig. 5.

Final finish. After adding the fins, I completed the envelope by spraying on a gray primer coat, followed by a coat of Testor silver, allowing 12 hours between coats. There was no need for any further finishing of the envelope since the silver looked just right after decaling and spraying with Testor Glosscote (from a spray can). It's a good idea to wait at least 24 hours after painting before epoxying the gondola in place. After painting, I used white cotton gloves when handling the envelope.

I cut the decals as close as possible to the color line and used a lot of setting solution. The Microscale system worked fine; much better than I'd hoped considering the shape of the model and the quality of the decals.

After the decals were in place and dry, I added the wire braces on the fins from thin stretched sprue glued on with white glue, Fig. 6. I used silver-colored sprue so I didn't have to paint the braces afterward. Again using thin, stretched silver sprue, I made control horns and rigged four control cables from the upper rear of the gondola to the leading edge of the lower fin. Two small valves made from sprue were added on the sides of the envelope and painted black. I painted parts No. 31 gloss white, used flat black to represent the openings, and glued them to the model.

Diorama base. Fortunately this model doesn't require a lot of diorama work to end up with a nice looking base. It's an easy base to make and it nicely shows off the model. The base is made from a piece of $\frac{3}{4}$ " pine board $15\frac{3}{8}$ " long and $7\frac{3}{16}$ " wide. I added $\frac{1}{4}$ " x $\frac{3}{4}$ " wood trim around the base to act as the shelf for the display case. The mooring mast is a section of coat hanger bent so that the nose of the envelope may be epoxied onto it to provide sufficient support, Fig. 7. After adding the red nose tip de-

cal, I drilled a hole in the nose that was just the right size to fit a coat hanger. The guy wires were made from thin piano wire epoxied to the mast.

After the mast and wires had set up, I painted the base with a splotchy pattern of dark green and tan to represent dirt and grass. I also painted the edges of the base since they would be visible through the case.

I used model railroad grass, green and tan turf, and ballast for the texture. The groundwork was attached with a bonding agent made from a 1:1 mixture of white glue and water with a few drops of detergent acting as a wetting agent. This mixture was placed in a plastic spray bottle from a garden store. I mixed a little ballast with the turf and grass and sprinkled it all over the base, creating a mottled appearance. At this point the texture can be removed and reapplied until a satisfactory appearance is achieved. Any turf that fell onto the outer edge of the base was brushed off before applying the white glue mixture.

When I was satisfied with the groundwork, I flooded it with the glue mixture. It's white when it's wet but becomes invisible when dry. The flood may cause some of the grass and turf to float; lightly sprinkling more material onto the glue settles it down. The key to success here is to get everything really wet. The grass and turf soak up the glue, providing a perfect bond to the wood.

While this was drying, I determined where the gondola wheel touched the ground and sprinkled some ballast in an arc across the base. Generally airships are allowed to swing with the wind and therefore will wear away the grass in a circular path around the mooring mast. Adding this little path also breaks up the coloring a bit.

After the glue had dried I went back



Fig. 4. Close-up of *Columbia's* gondola. Note the footrails, pylon support struts, and exhaust pipes projecting through the cowlings.



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Goodyear's *Columbia*, sister ship of the *Mayflower*. Unlike the Revell model, the real airships had the sign feature on both port and starboard sides. Note the valves and electrical conduit on her underside, and long-range fuel tanks underneath the engine pylons. Small valves on the side of the envelope can be seen on the leading edge of the letter D on her port side.

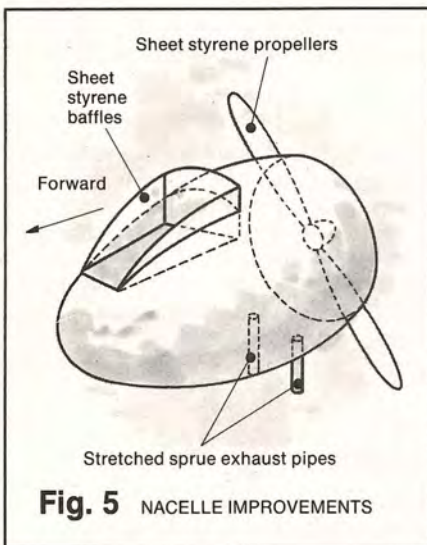
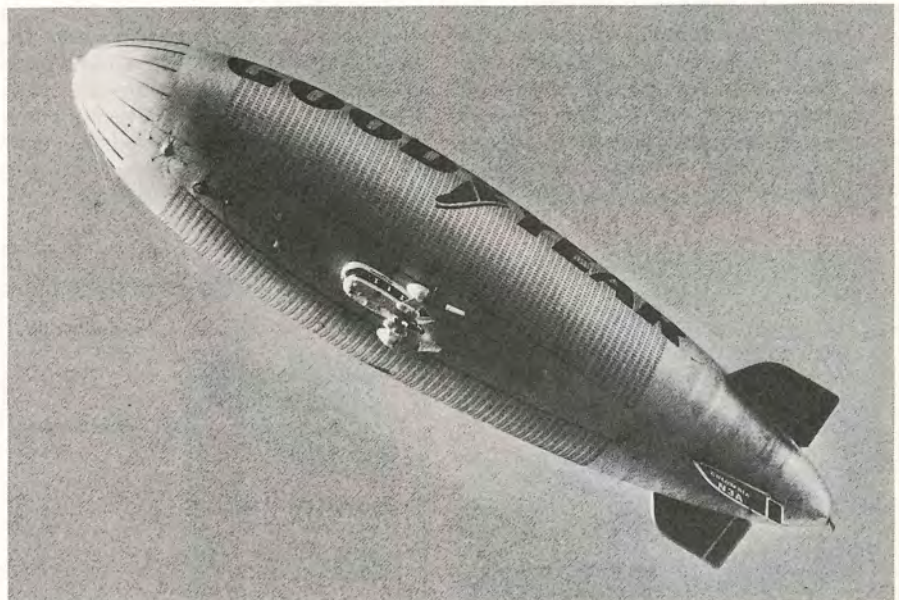


Fig. 5 NACELLE IMPROVEMENTS



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and added more grass to avoid a flat, pool table look. I added some coarser turf to represent small bushes, but I didn't want to overdo it because of the small scale. The success of the ground-work depends on avoiding uniformity. Adding a few N scale figures provides a good size comparison for the airship.

Display case. I made the display case from .10" acrylic which costs about \$16.00 for a 30" x 36" sheet. I cut the pieces with a special cutter available from acrylic supply stores. After scoring with the tool, I snapped off each piece over the edge of my workbench. This method leaves a slight bevel on the edge which serves to guide the liquid cement when building the case. I built the case right on the base, using it as a jig. I let each joint sit for about 30 minutes before going to the next one. The top of the case was cut last and bonded in place upside down so the sides of the case exerted weight onto the top. After the assembly had set up, I could handle the case and applied



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View from above shows the author's realistic groundwork. Note the path worn out of the grass by the wheel when the airship swings with the wind.

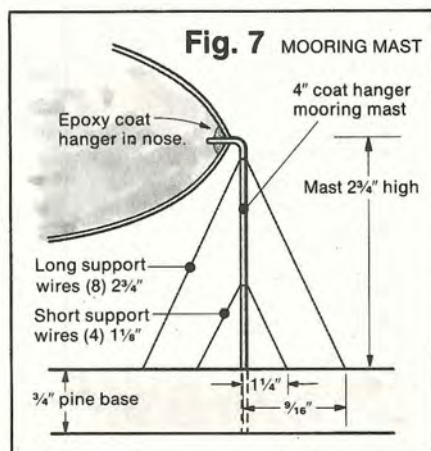
more liquid cement in all the joints.

Mooring the model. After the base was completely dry, I painted the mooring mast with alternating stripes of red-orange and white. The support wires were painted silver. Next, I filled the hole in the envelope with epoxy, and spread more epoxy onto the hori-

zontal section of the mast. Then I slipped the airship into place onto the mast, moving the model around a bit to get the right balance before the epoxy dried. I put a small dab of epoxy under the gondola wheel and rested the model on the groundwork. After the epoxy dried, I added two stretched sprue



Fig. 6. Stretched sprue was used for the support wires on the fins, control cables, control horns, and the flag line.



Meet Gifford Hamilton

Gifford Hamilton became a modeler in 1955 while going through Navy flight training at Pensacola. Since then he's logged 10,000 hours of flying time in more than 100 types of aircraft and has built hundreds of models of airplanes, rockets, and ships, with a few armored vehicles thrown in.

Now engaged in aircraft marketing, Giff lives in Aurora, Colorado. In addition to plastic models, his hobbies include flying models, painting, and working on a 5 1/2' x 8' HO scale model railroad, which he operates with his 12-year-old daughter Vicki.

mooring lines from the nose to the gondola, a flag line on the stern, and a flag from the scrap box.

For those of you with a reasonable knowledge of aviation I might point out that airships are versatile vehicles. They can even do aerobatics—sometimes called bagobatics. Yep, that's right, they can do bag-overs, bagelmans, hiss-outs, split bags, and even bleeps!

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REFERENCES

Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co.
Public Relations Department
Akron, OH 44316

Revell, Inc.
Blimp Requests
P. O. Box 66366
Los Angeles, CA 90066



Gifford made a display case from clear acrylic. Note how the case fits over the diorama base and rests on the bottom trim strip.