

Ultrascale Review

Review: 001-081220

A Western for the Broader Gauge.

by John Sherratt

Really, I don't remember very well the 'Westerns' in service; they were almost before my time. I think I only ever saw three members of the class in action on BR, when I stayed a weekend in Bath, just before their withdrawal. However, I have always had a soft spot for their distinctive styling, and so my interest was caught when I read about the forthcoming model from Heljan after the generally good reviews given to their Class 47.

Although I did not manage to get to the Warley show in December 2004, I was able to nip out for a quick visit to a swap meet at the Stafford County Showground that was on the same weekend, just down the road from where I live. There I was pleasantly surprised to see a pile of boxes containing the new Western, on several stands. The piles seemed to be going down steadily, so after thinking carefully about this for around 40 seconds out came the wallet, and I went home with a model of D1015 in Golden Ochre, courtesy of Trainlines of Derby.

Now, I don't claim to be an expert on the Westerns, or any of the other diesel hydraulics for that matter, and I haven't held the model up against a drawing or a big collection of photographs. So, I stand to be corrected by any real experts, but to me, this is a very nice model that really captures the feel of the real thing and is, certainly to my way of looking at it, a big improvement on the models that have gone before. Anybody wanting to know more about this class, would most likely find a useful starting point in the article by Allan Sibley in MRJ on improving the old Lima model.



Conversion Pack.

The following day I contacted Ultrascale to ask about a wheel conversion kit for the Western, and I was lucky enough to get an early set of wheels from them to test. What you get in the bag from Ultrascale, is a complete set of six axles, with a pack of spacing washers to move out the bogie side frame to accommodate the wider gauge. The Heljan model is powered on four axles, this being the outer axle on each bogie; the middle axle just goes along for the ride.

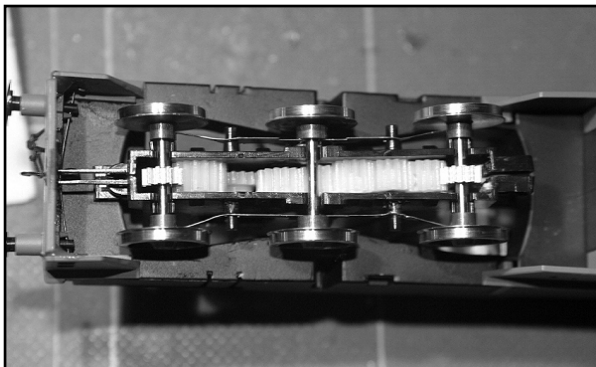
The Ultrascale wheels come with a gear wheel already fitted to each of the four driven axles, so you do not have to worry about dismantling the 00-gauge axles and fitting the gear off them on to the 18.83 mm axle. I always check the back-to-back of any wheels before using them – here I found that one axle was just a little “wide” on gauge, though that was easy enough to put right with a twist and tweak.

For me, the longest part of the conversion was working out how to remove the keeper plate from the bogie to get out the OO wheels and axles, but this is probably down to me being a bit dim! I found out you do not have to remove the bogie from the underframe, though it does help if you take the body off the underframe. Aside from anything else, it would probably be a good idea to do this in order to avoid damaging the paintwork. You will need to pull off the bogie sideframes: these are just a push fit on to two spigots on the side of the bogie, so can be pulled off quite easily.

I found that if you slip a narrow screwdriver down from above, through the gap in the underframe casting that takes the bogie, it is quite easy to prise open and undo the clips on the keeper plate that hold it in place, on the bogie moulding. You can then lightly pull the keeper plate up, by putting your thumbnail under it at the end of the bogie. This is probably easier to do than describe, and once I had worked out how to do it, the second bogie only took me about 10 minutes to convert.



Before conversion.



Conversion fitted.

Once you have taken the OO wheels out, you will need to bend the pick-up strips out a little, so they bear on the back of the new Ultrascaple 18.83 mm wheels. This is a matter of trial and error and probably best done with a fine pair of tweezers. The backs of the Ultrascaple wheels are all-metal, so you do not have to be too exact with your “aim” in adjusting the pick-ups; anywhere on the back of the wheels should be fine.

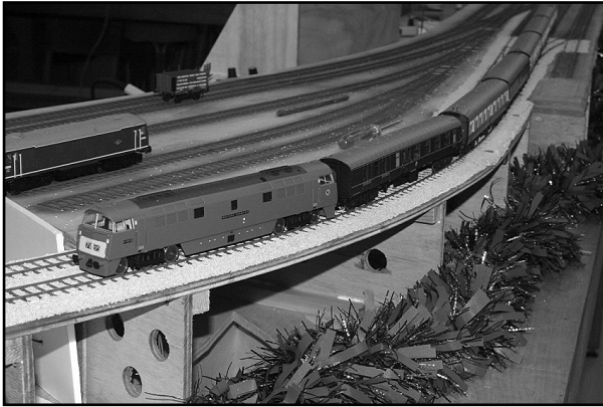
Once you have done this, all you need to do is to clip the keeper plate back on the bogie to hold the new wheels in. I did not actually use the spacing washers to pack out the bogie side detail, as I found this moved the brake shoes further out from the wheels – though it is an easy enough job to add them later, if this turns out to be necessary.

One minor note of caution – I have not yet had time to try adding the extra brake detail that comes in the box with the model from Heljan. I suspect that if you try to fit this unmodified to the model, it may score a direct hit on the valance on the body when the loco is on anything other than very easy curves. I plan on checking this out as soon as I have a little more time.

In summary, a very quick and easy conversion to P4.

I have done a few conversions to P4 of ready-to-run, including the Hornby Black 5, and the Bachmann Pannier, Class 08 Shunter, Class 24, and even, going back quite a while, the Lima Class 40 and Dapol Pug.

Of these, I would say the Heljan Western with the wheels from Ultrascale is probably the quickest and easiest to do. It might not be ready-to-run P4, but it's not far off.



The test run.

It looked very fine, I thought, as it lapped Slattocks with a rake of Bachmann Mk1 coaches, courtesy of fellow member Andy, and powered past the seasonal scenery.

Full price details for the conversion packs can be found in the 'Conversion packs' section of the Ultrascale products web site.

A few days later, I went to the clubrooms of the Manchester Model Railway Society for their pre-Christmas social afternoon and was able to give D1015 a good test run on Slattocks, the P4 layout that is under construction there.

I had not given D1015 a run at all in its OO form, but I need not have worried, as it turns out to be a very smooth and steady runner with a steady range of speed from a slow crawl to a quite respectable top speed.