

Improving the Faller N Scale Car System Bus

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A few easily executed improvements to the Faller N scale Car System will result in a better looking vehicle without any compromise in running characteristics¹. Here are the basic problems with the vehicle as assembled at the factory:

1. The battery and wires are easily seen through the bus windows.
2. The bus sits too high on the chassis.



Figure 1, Contents of the N Scale Start Set (photo Faller)

Also, like most N scale vehicles, the bus can benefit from some additional paint and details.

DISASSEMBLY

¹ Note that the later version of this particular start set includes a few changes. The most obvious is that Faller replaced the clear glazing with a frosted window casting complete with somewhat 'cheesy,' silhouetted passenger heads painted on the plastic. The reviewer has not had the opportunity to examine this 'improved' model to know if Faller addressed the height problem at the same time by producing its own casting or if it is simply a redo of the Wiking window casting designed to hide the battery and wires.

Step one is to disassemble the bus. In my case this was not too difficult; I inserted a hobby knife blade between the chassis and the rocker panels and carefully slid it along the joint, separating the glued areas as I went. One spot was particularly difficult and despite my attempts I did damage the bus body shell slightly. A spot of paint will hide the defect from all but the closest examination.

In order to remove the clear plastic window casting, you will have to temporarily detach one of the glued on bumpers; I suggest the front one for reasons that will become apparent later. Popping the window casting loose was not too difficult; Fallar used a spot of glue to hold it in place but careful prying, pushing, and twisting will overcome.

MODIFICATION

The window casting must be modified to allow additional clearance for the battery so that the body assembly can sit down on the chassis at the right height. The area that must be removed is the 'ceiling' of the clear casting from just behind the windshield to just ahead of the second skylight. There is no foolproof way of doing this as the casting is fairly easy to crack and becomes even more fragile as work progresses. I went at it full-tilt, grinding the area away with a rotary file attachment in a Dremel tool.



Figure 2, Modification to the Window Casting

I saved the little square of plastic that fits in the first skylight with the intent of thinning it a bit and gluing it back in place. As you might imagine, a mere two seconds after I picked it up with my tweezers, it managed a desperate escape and is now presumably safely ensconced in the Electrolux. I later filled the opening with a dollop of Microscale's Micro Krystal Kleer.

HIDING THE MECHANICALS

Use a #1 or larger paint brush to give the battery and visible wires a coat of flat black or dark grey acrylic paint. While doing this, push the wires down as close to the chassis as possible, especially the one that connects to the front of the battery.

To further camouflage the non-scale contents of the bus, give the window casting a coat of Tamiya X-19 Smoke Tint paint; this is best done with an airbrush. Do this on the inside of the casting to avoid scratches upon reassembly. For added realism, avoid tinting the windshield.

ENSURING GOOD OPERATION

Set the window casting aside to dry and turn your attention to the body. Test fit the shell to the mechanism and note that the chassis can be installed so that its underside is flush with the lower edge of the rocker panels (and our modification of the window casting will now make this possible).

Note too, that the tires rub against the inside surfaces of the fenders. Remove the mechanism and set it aside.

Additional clearance for the wheels and tires must be provided by removing some material from the inside of the wheel wells. This can be done with the Dremel and rotary file attachment or more painstakingly with a hobby knife and a half round jeweler's file. The idea is to trim the inside edge of the fender area back at an approximate 45-60 degree angle thereby thinning the fender lip to allow additional space between the back side of the fender and the tire. Test fit the mechanism, checking your progress as you go. Pay particular attention to the alignment and clearance of the front wheels; they need to be able to steer through their entire range without the tires rubbing.



Figure 3, Modifications to the inside of the Wheel Wells

FINISHING AND DETAILS

At this point, you are done with the mechanical modifications and internal esthetics, but you may want to spruce up the exterior of your bus. I painted mine Conrail Blue to represent an 'Autocorriere' rural bus, a common sight in Italy during the 1970s.

Alpine modelers might want to try their hand at the flashy Swiss version of the Post Bus scheme. This typically consists of a white roof that continues down around the windows to a red 'belt line' encircling the bus. The rest of the body remains yellow except for the black rubber fender flares and bump strip that wraps around to the front and rear bumpers. Add the letters 'PTT' just ahead of the traditional postal horn logo using decals or dry transfers.

Modelers of the German scene may want to repaint the entire shell maroon to match the ubiquitous DB Bus. There are doubtless dozens of prototype schemes you can copy, some of them quite ornate; or you may devise your own private line. On the Internet, a few well-crafted Google image searches will reveal dozens of photos to stoke the fires of your imagination.

You might want to carry the body color over to the wheels, optionally leaving the center of each wheel silver to represent a chromed hub. While you have the body color on your brush, paint the panel beneath each bumper to match the body.

Paint the grille opening flat black then go back and color the headlights white and the grille 'britework' silver (the silver is optional as some versions had minimal chrome). Paint the rib that divides the windshield silver as well. A small drop of Micro Krystal Kleer over the painted headlight makes for a fairly convincing lens (I considered adding working lights, but battery life between recharging is already quite short). Paint the tail lights silver, and when dry, paint the inner two-thirds of each lens with Testor's #2724 Stop Light Red and the outer one-third with their #2723 Turn Signal Amber. Add a couple of tiny license plates to complete the effect.

Those wishing to take it to the next level (Bam!), can add wipers and rear-view mirrors using parts found in Gold Medal Models' #160-7 Diesel Details set. Looking at the photos I found, I noticed that the mirrors are usually top suspended types; using one mirror from the GMM etching and cutting it in half gives just the right appearance to the model.

There's just enough room in front of the battery to mount a Preiser figure to drive your bus along the Faller Highway. Starting with a standing figure, trim the legs at mid-calf and glue the driver to the inside ledge of the front bumper casting.

REASSEMBLY

Reinstall the now-smoked window casting into the shell and affix it with a couple of dabs of Micro Krystal Kleer or white glue. You can now reattach the bumper you removed – touch up any disturbed areas with the appropriate paint.

Since it takes quite a bit of pressure to insert the charging plug, I added a couple of strips of 0.10" plastic strip to make an internal ledge along the rear sides against which the chassis can rest. These are glued flush against the lower edge of the window casting and the chassis is then installed flush against the lower edge of the strips. This effectively prevents the glue joint from being broken when the plug is inserted (you still have to hold your thumb against the bottom when you remove the plug or the entire chassis is likely to come out with it).



Figure 4, Reassembled and Repainted Bus

Test fitting the mechanism, the body will now snuggle down onto the chassis like it should. Double check that nothing rubs and make any needed adjustments. I recommend final assembly of the mechanism and body using a light coating of clear silicone on the mating surfaces. This keeps the body firmly in place while assuring that you can easily disassemble the bus in the future should the need arise.