So, I hear you thinking, what is a dyed in the wool Great Western man doing building a Somerset and Dorset Joint Railway full brake for himself? Well, in the early 1900s one could find all sorts of vehicles from many different railways traversing the metals of other, potentially rival, railways. Through carriage working was common but even more common was varieties of vans making up multi liveried trains all over the systems of the pre grouping railways. This gives one the opportunity to run all sorts of interesting and attractive vehicles as through carriage and van workings. I have always liked the livery of the S&D, as indeed I like those of the LNWR and LSWR among others, so some of my trains will feature 'foreign' coaches and vans in their makeup. Similar arguments can be made for running a vast range of goods vehicle too, so, within reason; anything goes provided the vehicles and their workings are credible.

I know next to nothing about the S&D other than it was crucial to our transport system during the first and second world wars and was a joint venture between the LSWR and the Midland but fortunately, there are aficionados on the 7mm E-group who do and they have provided me with invaluable help in the form of information, pictures and drawings of these vehicles. Hopefully, I shall get it mostly right.

Big Jim's kit comes as a flat pack containing some exquisite etches, the usual bags of whitemetal bits and pieces, a generous supply of wire and 16 bound pages of well thought out and well written instructions, pictures of the build and scale drawings plus a printed card kit for the brake van interior and a pre formed roof that is the right size and fits properly. Well up to his usual high standard and, just as importantly, well suited to alteration and the addition of more detail because the basics are accurate and well thought out; one could build the kit as
presented and finish up with a perfectly acceptable model. The only extras one needs to do this are wheels, paint and transfers. However, I will be changing a few things better to suit the way I like to build stock for my railway. At £60 for the basic kit I think it is good value as a starting point for super detailing and alteration.

I read through the clear and well written instructions to satisfy myself that there was nothing out of the ordinary and then got to work assembling as much as possible 'in the flat', which is what the instructions also suggest doing.

Here are the major parts largely ready for assembly. The buffer beam folds up to represent the wooden beam fitted originally. The instructions suggest filling
the gap with solder but the scrap box yielded some 2mm thick brass stock that fitted well so I used that instead. Once the turnunder is made in the sides, the guard's bucket can be fitted. A neat piece of design in three pieces that makes up into a neat unit with sharp corners. The sides need fitting with hinges, droplights and ventilators before bending the top and bottom runners to shape. The solebars still require riveted overlays for the step board supports fitting and there a number of handrails to be made. The droplights fitted to the double doors need to be filed down slightly in their inner edges so that they sit square in the window openings and a couple of holes for the double doors will need drilling through where the droplights obscure the etched hole; not onerous. The lower steps were made up at the same time. All the folds were simple and all this was done in an afternoon. Before assembling the body I also fitted all the major handrails and lamp brackets to the body since they would be very difficult to fit securely once the body was painted. However, it does make it more difficult for the painter.

The parts fit extremely well so assembling the body simply required some care to ensure that the parts were held square during the tack soldering process to make the initial assembly. Once the body was put together in this way and then proved to be square, it is a simple matter to run fillets into the joints to make sure they are strong. Later I fitted the solebars and steps too. This is the result of a second, fairly long, afternoon's work. The coupling hook is from the CPL set I am using, yes I know it is not exactly right but I have standardized on these couplings for all Screw coupled carriages and good stock and the hook is always soldered in solid too.
Here are a couple of shots of the largely completed body. Now all that is required is to complete the roof details and modify the buffers before fitting them. The handrails on the roof and non-step end are from CPL.

Next day I began with the buffers; the bodies provided are excellent castings that no-one else, so far as I am aware, make. Jim in his instructions refers to his casting method as 'not sophisticated'; I would that some other manufacturers were as none sophisticated. However, they are provided with whitemetal heads. The spares box provided a set of steel heads of the right size and I sprung them by soldering 10BA nuts to some 0.5mm nickel silver wire and soldering a central holder on the floor, which I had added earlier so that the underframe can
be added later. There is not enough meat in the castings to allow for integral springing.

The vacuum pipes are also whitemetal, nicely cast but not what I wanted. Again, so far as I know, no one makes vacuum pipes to this pattern as a lost wax casting so I fabricated some from a length of annealed 1.6mm nickel silver rod, spare springs and bits of tube and scrap etch. Then I added some lost wax Westinghouse pipes to the other side of the buffer beam. Most, if not all, these vehicles were dual fitted because they travelled widely off the S&D system. Whether they were steam heated is open to conjecture.

The kit is designed so that the outer wheel sets are made up as a rigid 4 wheeler with the centre wheels having some play. I prefer compensated chassis and so sent off for a Slater's Midland 6 wheel underframe unit to modify to fit the floor.

The W irons with integral supports in the Slater's kit were left off as the kit comes with very well cast axle guard & spring units and anyway, they would not have fitted without modifying the solebars. These supporting W irons however need wire soldered flat in specific places to support the wheels sets and provide rocking motion for two sets and lateral or radial slide for all of them. I measured up and fitted the wires to the floor and rigged up some keepers for the centre set to slide laterally in thus:
The set that goes to the right does not rock but can slide in an arc; the set on the left rocks on a central pivot and can slide in an arc while the centre set rocks and slides from side to side. The axle boxes were thinned and the wheel axles ground down to give enough clearance for the chassis to operate. The Slater's unit goes together well and I have described this previously on the GWR T38. I used the vacuum cylinder provided in the kit and not that provided with the 6 wheel chassis.

The roof finally finished with springs to hold it in place. The oil lamps are interesting, each one comes as four pieces, one for the lamp, one for the holder, one for the bung and one for the bung holder. It would be possible to alter the formation for day or night running as required. However, I think that it would be far too easy to lose pieces so the whole lot were glued in place for daytime running with the lamp pots in the bung holders and the bungs in the lamp holders.
So there it is complete; it took five afternoons, two of them longish ones. An excellent kit, it goes together well and all the parts fit. Anyone with a little experience of etched kit construction could build it. It is off to Warren's paint shop now and, when it returns I shall fit the etched grab handles, which have a very distinctive shape, the door handles and the pre-printed card interior that comes with the kit.

Back from Warren's paint shop, I think he has done a great job and with just enough weathering to
make it look as though it has been in revenue earning service for a while.

I discovered that if one fits the glazing first and then the door grab handles, they could be fitted into holes drilled in the glazing, which holds them securely so that there is no danger of fogging the glazing with cyano.

Not a difficult kit, anyone with a little experience of etched kits could build it.

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