

Garden Trains

From A to Z

L is for Lettering



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Garden Trains - A to Z

What you will find in this document.

Discussion groups are a great way to share information. One thing that is unique to LSOL.com is our Tuesday Topic. Each week, for almost six years, we have discussed a specific group topic. It could be about bridges, or maybe you like steam vs. diesel engines. Many times it is about how people solved a problem, or what they think about a current issue or product. My favorite was several years ago. "If your railroad was a candy bar, what would it be." (Good and Plenty, Milk Dud, etc.) We have fun at LSOL.com as well as help each other with serious issues on our railroads.

Now with almost 300 different weekly discussions online we wanted to make it easier for you to use this vast knowledge base of topics. We are taking the time to edit the best answers on a specific Tuesday topic into PDF documents. We have also added photos as available so you can see just what was being talked about from each of the users.

This paper is different than one written by just one author on a topic. You are getting dozens and dozens of years of combined experience from some of the smartest people running Large Scale Trains today. Save this document and start building your own personal reference library on your computer today.

What is LSOL.com? (Large Scale Online)

Large Scale Online has been providing information for Large Scale Garden Train enthusiasts for almost 15 years. We are the oldest, largest, and most professional web site on the Internet that is exclusive to Large Scale Garden Trains.

LSOL.com provides information in many different ways. We have online articles, videos for you to watch and photos for you to see how it is done. We also have organized and secure online discussion groups. We are the only site that requires people to use their real name. No hiding behind your keyboard making anonymous posts. Join Us.

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Lettering

Lettering: Decals, vinyl, rub on, hand painted, laser printed? Which do you prefer?

Some of us like to get undecorated engines and rolling stock and add our own lettering to them. If you are running your own railroad line, like some of those guys whose color wheel only has shades of blue, it is the only way you are going to get custom equipment.

Some of us are looking for standard road names, and just need to get some traditional letters on a piece of rolling stock because the manufacturer did not see fit to make it in the road name that we wanted.

So, have you ever re-lettered a piece of equipment? What did you use and how did you put it on? Did you print the decals yourself, or have someone else do it for you? Have you ever used good old rub on letters, or used label paper that goes in your printer? Hey, just how do you get the old lettering off if you cannot find undecorated equipment?

Rick Henderson - I am not a great painter

I am not a great painter, so when I must change a road number, I prefer Dry Transfers, aka rub on. I try to buy only unlettered locomotives and add the numbers myself. On cars, if I need to change the number, I scrape it off as best as I can, spray over that area with a very close matching paint, add the numbers and then weather it enough to hide any obvious work.

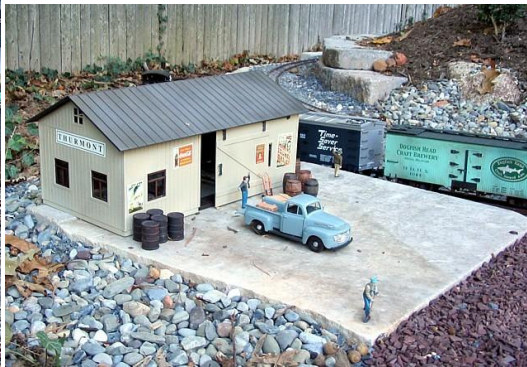
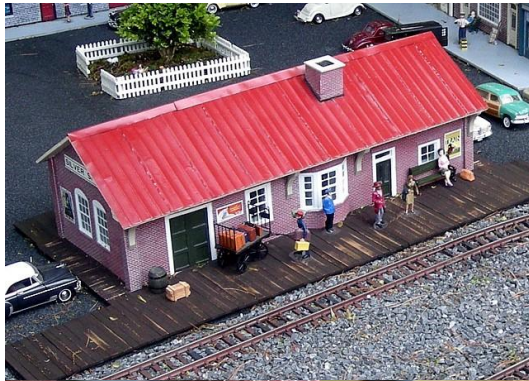
Mike Evans - seal the decal with dull cote

Our club has been using an Alps 1300 to print white lettering on microscale decal paper. This lets us all re-letter our rolling stock and locos for a favorite or made up RR name. Just be sure to seal the decal with dull cote after applying. It seems to hold up really well. Use MS Word to create the lettering in black and white using the available fonts (poster is a good one) and size it appropriately then print out on decal paper. Unfortunately the Alps printers are no longer made and supplies for the white ink are getting scarce.

Brian Donovan - I use decal setting solutions

I roll my own as they say. I make my own decals and vinyl stick on signs with an inkjet printer. The Epson Durabrite inks are waterproof and supposedly UV resistant for 30 years. The biggest problem I had initially was occasional lift off of the lettering from the decal paper. Directions say to give them a few coats of spray on clear coat (like Krylon Crystal Clear). I found that to be insufficient and followed up the initial spray coat with a couple of painted on coats ModelMaster acrylic clear coat (flat or gloss works fine). That fixed the problem.

Using white decal paper for white lettering is a bit tricky. You have to try to match the model color with the printer color. I get it close and then blend in the color with the paint I used to paint the model. I use decal setting solutions - Microscale MicroSet for setting and with MicroSol for irregular surfaces like rivets. After the decals have thoroughly dried they get a couple of coats of matte acrylic clear coat to blend them in. I have been pretty happy with the results even with close up inspection.



Stephen Auslender - I print on white decal paper because

Back in the old days it was considered normal to buy decals and repaint and re-letter the rolling stock and locomotives. For HO and even O gauge there were hundreds of different decal sets available. Today, with G gauge, there is practically nothing available. So I have to print my decals myself. I print on white decal paper because when one prints on the transparent paper the colors come out translucent, not opaque. There was one really good office or home printer that worked very well with decals that was the Alps. Unfortunately the Alps is not longer made. A small number of modelers have these still and they make the best decals.

There isn't much of a market for pre-printed decals for several very good reasons. 1) too many different scales run on G track (1/32, 1/29, 1/24, 1/22.5, 1/20.3) which would mean producing and stocking a line of larger scale decals would drive a manufacturer nuts. 2) there are not that many model railroaders in G to make it profitable to produce a line of decals. and 3) there are not many modelers in G who want to or have the time to build models from kits and from scratch. It is far easier and more convenient to simply buy an interesting pre-painted freight car and just change the couplers and/or add steel wheels. Most of the craftsmanship seems to go into the laying of the track and making the buildings and scenery. It appears that it takes a lot more time and work to build a large outdoor model railroad than it did to make a HO gauge layout. Or maybe it just seems that way as we get older.

Paul Roberts - I sure miss my dry transfers!

I used CDS dry transfers exclusively but my stock pile is dwindling (no longer being made) so I've printed a lot on my computer of water soluble decals. To remove I use the brake fluid method if they are real stubborn but have been lucky with a pen white eraser on a few projects (much less toxic and less messy). Fortunately manufacturers have been making a lot of road names available but I sure miss my dry transfers!

KC Marshall - To remove decals I use alcohol

I have used both purchased wet decals and made my own from inkjet. I would like to use vinyl but they usually only come in one color which is fine for data but not roadname. The KC&D RW uses a 3 color icon and it just doesn't look good in single color, but that is what comes with independence. Most my stock stays out all season long and needs to be UV resistant.

To remove decals I use alcohol and a little elbow grease with Q-tip and toothbrush, seems to have worked pretty well up to this point. I also purchase road name rolling stock because of the great colors but change icons and numbers to fit my road, but I also leave them as is to create a mixed freight with different road names from the 30's – 50's.

David Clapper - I think our cat is more artistic than I am!

I have been running a mix of cars marked with all sorts of road names. I have thought about re-lettering at least the Sierra passenger cars to my own road name, but I think our cat is more artistic than I am! I would really like to see an in-depth article (or series of articles) on re-lettering cars and engines.

James Scofield - I treat the decals with Solvaset

I have printed my own decals on Micro-Mark decal paper and printed them with an Epson Stylus Photo printer. After printing I spray them with Testors Dullcoat. I have not had any problems with them. I treat the decals with Solvaset to settle them between boards or over details such as rivets, etc. and then dullcoat them after they have dried for 24 hours. For dry transfer users, Woodland Scenics has a vast variety of sizes, colors and type styles of dry transfers in letters, numbers, and straight lines.

John Damkier - Staples

I like the vinyl letters you get from Staples. They hold up outside very well and look good as long as there is no close inspection.

David Maynard - I have resorted to hand painting

Since I model a Railroad that is so obscure that no one would make commercial decals for it I am left with but a few choices; 1)order custom decals, but I am too cheap 2)Buy premade lettering in rub on or decal, but I haven't seen any in the font I want 3)paint my own. I did an article here on LSOL a while back about how I paint my own lettering, I print out what I want on my printer then use carbon paper or transfer paper to trace out the lettering and then just paint between the lines.

http://www.largescaleonline.com/members/emag/article_695.html

I used to use rub on numbers for numbering my equipment, but even they are getting difficult to find around here so I have resorted to hand painting my numbers too. I even put a thread in the workshops about how I changed the number on a hopper car because I had 2 with the same road number

http://www.largescaleonline.com/members/ubb/ultimatebb.php?ubb=get_topic;f=6;t=000258#000000

I have tried different ways of removing lettering and I end up using a strong solvent, either brake cleaner or lacquer thinner. I lightly dampen a rag and carefully rub off the lettering I don't want, but you have to go slow and careful when using a strong solvent so you don't remove the base coat of paint or damage the plastic.



Richard Friedman - had a rubber stamp made

I've used rub-ons, decals and decals I've made, and I even had a rubber stamp made for my narrow gauge California and Southern. I've not been too happy with vinyl letters as they seem too thick. I'm probably too shaky to paint them on.

I just built three Bachmann freight car kits (two boxcars and a reefer) and used rub-ons to letter the box cars DPF 1944 and 1945. The Reefer got some HO decals for end numbers, and I made a logo and matching numbers. I printed them onto paper and taped them onto the car for sizing and spacing. Now I'll make decals for them.

I've done decals before and generally have been dissatisfied with the results, but it may be lack of practice. The ink runs unless well coated with clear spray. At least three light coats, don't ask how I know this. Maybe my other decals were too large to apply easily. Will probably try again. Had no luck matching car paint to get white lettering, but may try a bright yellow lettering instead. I was surprised at how little a rubber stamp cost, and by using paint instead of ink, the lettering looked pretty good on a real wood car.

I have used just about all the different lettering/numbering techs available. Like decals the best, but they are getting hard to get and expensive. Have used Dustin Decals for years, but he is now out of the decal business. Tried printing my own decals and that was a total failure. You have to have a steady hand and a lot of nerve to set large decals. Have done some hand painting of numbers (changing numbers from 23 into 28 for example, that worked well on an LGB C&S Forney.) May have to start using custom vinyl's on the next project. The following pictures represent decal work.



Gordon Havens - Weathering can cover a multitude of sins

I have used decals and rub on letters on at least a dozen cars and prefer decals. The rub-ons are fine on smooth surfaces, but they are not as good when you let them sit around a year or two before you use them. I know from experience. Decals work great and use a lot of wetting solution to fill in around rivets and crevices. I personally never liked the thickness of the stick-on or vinyl letters, but I have seen some beautiful work done by some modelers.

The best thing about doing your own lettering is having cars on your railroad that don't look like every other railroad that you visit. If you do make a small mistake, no problem, just weather the car. Weathering can cover a multitude of sins. The main thing is to have fun with your RR.

Elaine Haggbottom - Hand painting is right up my alley

My printer was never good enough (high tech enough really) to do any of this, and I remember a club member trying to do it years ago without much success, so I shied away from it. But, I was always lucky enough to "find" the road names I wanted and so didn't have a need. The only time I DID change an engine was when I discovered the LGB Steam (Mogul or Mikado, never can remember which?) Engine and it was lettered for the "C&S" which I never could have used on my layout. Only PRR or Reading or something from PA when available. At the time I also discovered the LGB stick-on names, numbers, etc. They may have offered them with the sale of the engines? At any rate I changed the name lickety split! I also used many of the vinyl stick-ons for any other printing jobs when needed. I tried the rub-ons, but they always wanted to fall apart just as I would get them where I wanted them... Hand painting is right up my alley, so I probably would have done that on cars IF I had needed to, certainly did plenty on buildings and signs.

Joe Fotschky

I only have a few items that have been lettered or decaled by me. Of course I farm the decal making job out to Jeff Damerst at Shawmut Car Shops in St. Marys Pa. I have been happy with the product I get from Jeff.

Here is my Central of Georgia caboose I lettered using water slide decals made by Shawmut.



I also decaled about 15 of these to give out as gifts at the SELSTS. I was having a problem with the silver paint and decal and Jeff help me straighten out the problem.



Mike O'Malley

I'm a real novice at this stuff and I've been trying all sorts of things. Here's an example, and you can see for yourselves what works and what doesn't. I got an unpainted USA Trains 44 tonner, and painted it to look like this:



I used Krylon spray cans for the gray and the black, white Polyscale acrylic, brushed on, for the chevrons, and Pactra pinstripe tape for the pinstripes. The lettering/numbers are inkjet vinyl that I did myself. I'm grading it a "B." The white Chevrons were really tough to do. I used masking tape and a brush, and there was a lot of bleed through the tape and the paint is very uneven. Next time, I'll do a white undercoat and mask it to spray the dark topcoat.

The vinyl lettering is ok, but the problem is always matching two different blacks. You can see the color difference pretty clearly, especially around the number. Because inkjets can't print white, you have to leave the number and the border "empty" and try to match the background color to your model. It would have looked better if I had gone with some laser cut vinyl graphics. Some "weathering" will help

I've also used the rub-ons; this engine and tender borrowed their color scheme from Brian Donovan. I used inkjet dry transfer rub-ons. They're a little more complicated to use--you have to print reverse--and they don't stick to detail that well. But they're pretty good on a flat surface. The paint I used (Rustoleum hi heat almond--thanks again Brian) is very textured and I probably would have gotten better results on a paint with a smoother finish.



Dave Marecek

The Lone Firr RR runs equipment for 2 Railroads that no longer exist and 1 that does, but isn't well known, so commercial products are not viable.

The era is circa 1910, so lettering was simple on the Logging railway and Coal railway. For both of these I use Vinyl lettering and letter for the VL&Mco or WCCo. The vinyl is outdoor resistant. The only thing I do is after applying, I use dry brush techniques to blend the letters into the car. I usually use Dust to soften the white. For the E&N RR, all rolling stock is done with vinyl, however Engines and Passenger cars are Gold Lettering and were started with CDS Decals (no longer available), so I have matched with Printed Paper decals and then merged into the car with same paint as the car, and then finished with several coats of Dullcote.

