

NER Photo/Art Contest Guidelines

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NER Photocontest reformatting of guidelines August 1, 2008.
NER Photocontest guidelines Amended August 29, 2010.
NER Photo/Art contest revised guidelines March 31, 2011.
NER Photocontest guidelines Amended September 29, 2012.
NER Photo/Art contest revised guidelines July 24, 2014

1. Categories

- A. Model-Black & White Print
- B. Model-Color Print
- C. Prototype-Black & White Print
- D. Prototype-Color Print
- E. Exhibition only – **Non-judged**
- IP. “Imagineered” Photography
- G. Graphic Art (oil/watercolor paintings, pen/ink/pencil/charcoal/pastel drawings, etc.)

2. Rules for Entry

- A. Entrant must be an NMRA member in good standing.
- B. Entries must be entered by the member or authorized proxy.
- C. The entrant must complete an entry form (Form #901). The form must be completed as accurately as possible including name, NMRA number, category, and description.
- D. Each member may submit up to twelve (12) entries with a maximum of two (2) entries in one judged category. Each member may submit up to an additional four (4) entries in the non-judged category.
- E. Photographic prints must be mounted on flat, rigid board or matted with similar material - no folders or glass frames are allowed. Photo and mount may not exceed 12" x 16" (30cm x 40cm) in size. Minimum mount size is 8" x 10" (20cm x 25cm) and minimum print size is 5" x 7" (13cm x 18cm).
- F. Graphic Art entries should be mounted and/or framed, but glass coverings are discouraged. The minimum entry size is 5" x 7" (13cm x 18cm). For entries over 12" x 16" (30cm x 40cm), please advise the Photo Contest Chairman by email several weeks in advance of the convention so that table/floor space can be provided. The entrant should also supply an easel for larger entries.
- G. All entries must have the entrant's name on the back, and may be titled on the front. However, entries with the entrant's name on the front will not be accepted for judged categories.
- H. All entries must be the work of the entrant. The entries in judged categories shall not have won a First Place Award in any previous NMRA National Convention Photo Contest.
- I. Any person who derives more than 50% of their income from photography or graphic arts is excluded from entering the contest.
- J. For photographic prints in judged categories, all adjustments made via darkroom or electronic methods, i.e. dodging, highlighting, cutting/pasting, etc. should be noted on the entry form.
- K. “Imagineered” Photography shall be photographs created by the use of darkroom or electronic methods that significantly alters the original photograph(s) to create an entirely new photograph. This can be done by alteration or combination of single or multiple images, or by significant adjustment of color, contrast, etc. Examples of the adjustments made via darkroom or electronic methods should be noted on the entry form to give attendees an idea of the work involved in creating the “Imagineered” photo.

3. Judging Procedures

The following judging system has been used in competitive camera club settings for many years. It is easiest to have an additional person, the Photo Contest Manager for example, handle the entries, freeing the judges from handling a stack of prints or graphic art.

- A. View all the entries in a category one at a time to get an overview of the field. There should be no commentary at this point.

The entries are viewed again, and each judge indicates whether the entry should stay or be eliminated. During this run-through, a positive vote from any one of the judges will keep the entry in the running. Any entry receiving no votes is set aside.

During the third run-through, it requires two positive responses to keep an entry; those failing are removed and set aside.

If the field is still large, perform another run-through. Three judges are now required to give assent, although by this time there are usually no more than a dozen entries left. The purpose of this process is to narrow the field rather than to pick winners, thus it is advisable that little or no commentary should be made until the next step.

With only ten or twelve entries left, the judges now have a reasonably small field to select from. At this point considerable discussion is needed and encouraged as the judges compare the entries. Entries may be arranged on the table in order of finish, and moved about as the judges seek a consensus.

Entries removed earlier may always be brought back for further consideration, but it should be noted that this method will generally produce the same final ten entries or so from more than a hundred choices, no matter which team of judges is used. Different teams of judges may likely produce different winners from these finalists, however. This is not surprising, as we are dealing with a subjective medium.

- B. After all the categories have been judged, the judges must select a **Best of Show** from among the First Place winners. The Best of Show will be removed from that category for consideration of first, second and third.

4. Awards

Plaques shall be given for First, Second and Third Place in each category, together with as many Honorable Mention Certificates as are deemed necessary by the judges. The decision may be influenced by the size and quality of the field. The Best overall entry will receive BEST IN SHOW.

5. Photo Contest Judging Factors

The Photo contest is much more subjective than the model contest. A prize-winning photograph is often more a matter of art and luck than execution of technique. Certainly, the photographer is faced with more things that are beyond his control than the model builder, at least where the prototype categories are concerned. Notwithstanding this subjectivity, there are some judging factors that are brought to bear by the experienced judge. These will be given appropriate, albeit intuitive, weighting as the judges come to their consensus.

- A. **IMPACT**: This is best explained by the "I wish I'd taken that picture" reaction. Given a choice, action is preferable to static scene; rare or unusual equipment is more interesting than the ordinary. In model photography, the choice of the model will contribute to the impact of the picture. Other questions arise in model photography: Does the photograph reveal obvious, distracting modeling flaws, or has the photographer apparently taken pains to be sure that all of the elements shown work together to produce a pleasing result? When the environment is exceptional, or the viewpoint makes the ordinary extraordinary, full credit should be given for the contribution the photographer's sensitivity brought to the subject.
- B. **COMPOSITION**: The arrangement of the forms within the photo should be pleasing to the eye. How well did the photographer use the available space within his format? Did he or she follow the guidelines taught in art and photography classes? If the rules are broken, did the result justify that decision?

5. Photo Contest Judging Factors (continued)

- C. **ARTISTIC APPROACH:** This subjective area is where a strongly graphic or symbolic composition may move one judge and a "typical calendar shot" may be more moving than another. One tends to evaluate artistic and aesthetic qualities on the basis of one's own experience. What moves us and the degree we are impressed will change as we are exposed to more and better images. A judge should not start out looking for a special kind of artistry - to do so would be imposing personal values, sensibilities, or preconceptions without giving the entries a chance to speak for themselves.
- D. **LIGHTING:** In photography, "Light is law." It is the only thing that makes it possible to create an image. Skillfully handled, the result can be a work of art; badly handled, the result is a total failure or a snapshot at best. A picture made with on-camera flash and no other light would be a snapshot. The photographer should be given full credit for use of multiple flash, supplemental reflectors, or a well-developed room lighting system, depending on the quality of the execution. Natural sunlight is superior to flash systems, but even it can be badly handled. The best execution of any limiting system in model photography is one that produces a realistic, natural appearance, without multiple shadows (there can be only one sun!), with accurate color, and without excessively harsh contrast and black holes devoid of details.
- E. **EXPOSURE:** If a print appears washed out, or shadow details are obliterated, it is obviously an improper exposure. However, the judges may decide that an unusual exposure was skillfully handled to achieve a desired mood or dramatic effect.
- F. **FOCUS:** Model photographers should strive to maximize the appearance of sharpness throughout the photo to achieve realistic results. Generally, "selective focus" is not desirable in model or prototype photos, since it produces fuzzy areas that are distracting; but there are always exceptions, and the judges must determine whether the photographer achieved his or her goal or not.
- G. **DIFFICULTY:** In prototype shots, this relates to motion, lighting conditions (including weather), selection of an appropriate viewpoint, inherent danger and the knowledge of special techniques and equipment. Night photography, for instance, is considerably more difficult than shooting an idle locomotive with the sun over your left shoulder. Model photography involves a different set of technical skills for close-up work while maintaining adequate depth-of-field. Lighting models adequately can be difficult and complex as well. Since a model may be photographed many times with different settings, there is little reason to see poorly lit photos of model scenes. A prototype may be available only once.
- H. **TECHNIQUE:** Is the color pleasing, correct, or believable? Color saturation should also be evaluated. To some extent this is influenced by the quality of processing; however, whether the result is acceptable or not is a judgment for which the photographer is responsible. An unsatisfactory processing job may be redone. Black and white is more often controlled by the photographer, because more of them process their own black and white than do their own color. Good blacks and mid-tones, clean whites, and careful contrast control are essential to all contest-quality black and white prints.
- I. **FINISH:** Consider the impact of the presentation of the entry. Prints should not be streaked or blemished and should be bonded correctly to the mount, with carefully measured borders. Mounts and mats should be clean and neatly cut, lie flat, and not show excess mounting tissue or adhesive around the edges. If a print is not suitable for publication reproduction, it should not be considered for an award.
- J. **SPECIAL EFFECTS:** This would apply to deliberate blurring or panning to accentuate motion, long exposures at night to create light streaks, multiple exposures, shooting through smoke or fog, using filters, print toning, or any other special effects limited only by the photographer's imagination. In model photos, special effects include smoke and steam simulation, fog, panning and wheel spinning, harsh weather conditions, and more. The final evaluation should be, as always, a response to how well the effect achieved the desired result: did it work, and is the result pleasing or evocative enough to have made the effort worthwhile?