Fall 2006 Baldwin Trophy Winner
Rich Walz's Coal Dock

Back at the dawn of the new paradisiacal era of model trains—back when George Sellios had barely outgrown short pants—he released his Fine Scale Miniatures kit #100, Jacob's Fuel Company. The year was 1972. About thirty years later, as I rummaged through an obscure hobby shop, I found and bought one of those kits… at seven times George's original price.

In FSM's early days, its kits were much less lavishly detailed than they are now, and structural elements were sometimes more hinted at than actually realized. And yet I felt then, as I do now, that Jacob's Fuel was a terrific kit. I decided to try to build it to the finished level of FSM's more recent offerings.

I completely rebuilt the coal dock's loft, adding new clapboard, shakes, subroofs, rafters, board-by-board roof walks and supports, a door, a boarded-over window, signs, and lightning rods.

FSM included only the two outer support beams (the most noticeable ones) beneath the dock's three elevated bins; I added the fifteen beams that had only been implied. FSM intended reinforcing plates only for the two most visible side of each bin; I added them to all sides. I increased FSM's nut-bolt-washer castings from 104 to 882.

The building's loading platform was divided into two sections. Though this division looked good, it didn't make practical sense. I redesigned the platform, including a truck bay to justify the platform's division, building everything board-by-board. (I stuck a bird's nest in the platform's rafters—a detail which, as far as I know, no one has yet spotted, despite my hinting at its existence ever more blatantly.)

Although the dock's inclined plane seemed okay at first glance, under closer scrutiny it became clear that the plane was supporting its support beams, and not the other way around. I corrected that, while rebuilding the plane, its catwalks, and the coal bin below it, board-by-board.

The pit where hoppers would empty their loads was originally implied by a grate, but below the grate—no pit. So I added one.

When everything was finally tweaked, I had added 1,627 parts to the kit. Still, my super-detailed version of the coal dock follows FSM's footprint closely. Those familiar with the kit will instantly recognize my dock's origin. I ended up with a coal dock that might be 25% better than FSM's version—at about 400% of the construction time.

But what the hey. I'd probably have wasted that time watching TV, anyway.