

Tail Lamps and Side Lamps

All trains ought to have tail lights, but often models do not – a pity as it is not difficult to add them. The basic rules were agreed through the Railway Clearing House in 1867 and (with modifications) are still used today; many companies had similar rules before this. Before 1951 each company had its own rule book based on the standard RCH rules but with slight variations. The following contains what I have been able to determine about the grouping companies rules, but is not complete. I have not covered special cases such as lamps on slip coaches or the Isle of Wight.

The lamps had to be fitted at all times when running (and removed promptly when not required) but only needed to be lit at night, poor visibility, or other special circumstances. As late as the early 60s a separate lamp had to be used on even DMUs and EMUs fitted with built in lights, and some carried lamps even in the late 70s. The Blue Pullman had lamp brackets but the rules were changed shortly after it came into use in 1960. Flashing electric lamps replaced oil lamps in the late 70s.

There are several styles of lamp. Handles were mounted side to side, and could be curved, V haped at the top, or narrowed (like a road narrows sign) towards the top.

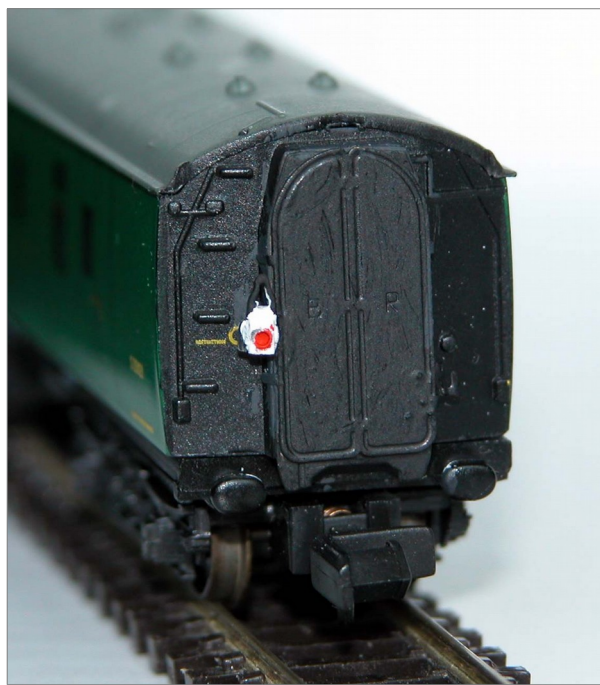
The cases of BR tail lamps were white; some grouping companies used different colours: LMS black or aluminium; LNER red for passenger trains and white for goods; GWR and SR red until 1936 then white.

Side lamps were usually black except on SR where they were white. They had rectangular handles mounted front to back, except most LNER side lamps seem not to have had handles and to have been kept permanently on the good van.

Springside make lamps for N, OO, and O, in many different styles and colours (Gaugemaster among others stock them). The carrying handles need painting black, or replacing with blackened wire as even in O they are over-scale, in fact in N they arguably look better cut off (as in the photo above). A block of white plastic strip with a red dot painted on looks almost as good in N.

In BR days passenger trains and fully fitted freight trains only required one red tail light, usually central or offset towards the left side (the SR required it to be on the left). The exact position depends on where the lamp bracket was.

The photo on the right is a Farish MK1 coach fitted with an etched rubbing plate from TPM (which includes a lamp bracket each side), and a cover over the corridor connector that passenger trains often had over the front and rear corridor connectors to help keep the weather and sparks out (the TPM etch includes one of these), and a Springside tail lamp (supplied unpainted with no jewel) with the handle painted black.



While the last vehicle in the train was usually a brake, it did not have to be for a fully fitted train. However the tail lamp still had to be on the end of the train so some fitted vans had lamp brackets for this reason, and I think all passenger rated stock did. From September 1969 brake vans were no longer required on fitted freight trains unless they were carrying dangerous loads, though the tail lamp was still needed.

Pre-grouping all trains required side lamps as well, companies dropped this requirement at different times. On passenger trains they were not required after about 1924 except the GWR required them until 1934. The LNER dropped the need for side lights on fully fitted freights in 1934 and BR adopted this rule, but they were always needed on unfitted or partially fitted trains. The rules about side lamps were complex. Two lamps high up shone a white light forwards as well as showing a light to the rear, so the loco crew could check the brake van was still attached to the train! Thus these lights have to be mounted so they are sticking out a little beyond the van side. The position of the brackets varies on different designs of brake van; on the LNER they were on the cab sides. It is best to check a photograph if you can. These lamps had 2 lenses and the body was usually painted black in BR days, though some seem to have been white.

The SR was an exception as they considered the two side lamps sufficient on their own and did not require a tail lamp on a freight train, though SR brake vans would show one when running on other companies' lines.

The colours to be shown to the rear depended on the track the train was on (quite a challenge to change these when your train crosses between tracks!). Usually both would show red to the rear. However, if running on the slow line (of a 4 track line) or on a relief line or goods loop next to the mainline, the light on the side nearest the main line had to be white (if the colour shown could not be changed, the lamp had to be removed). A train on a relief line next to a slow line (i.e. the third parallel line running in the same direction) would show two red lights.

The photo on the left shows a BR period unfitted brake with lights appropriate for running on the slow line next to the fast line. One light has been changed from white to red by painting it with Artists vermilion oil paint: this is translucent so looks better than ordinary enamel as the jewel still reflects light.



The above were the rules applied in BR days. However, most group companies had slightly different rules about side lights. The LMS omitted the side lamps if on the third parallel line. The GWR rather than having a light showing white backwards omitted it, and on the third parallel line had no side lights. The SR rule book says "special regulations will be issued" but I don't know what they were.

Finally, in OO or N if you never intend to couple anything to the rear of the brake van, why not remove the ugly automatic coupling? If you want, add a dummy 3-link coupling such as the ones produced by Scalelink as shown.

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