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Autor: Freezer, C.J.
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Handrails

by C.J. Freezer

For far too long I had put off fitting handrails to my growing collection of Bemo coaches. I had plenty of good reasons, I still had to build the layout, there were other things to do, they might get damaged in the interim. Admittedly, every

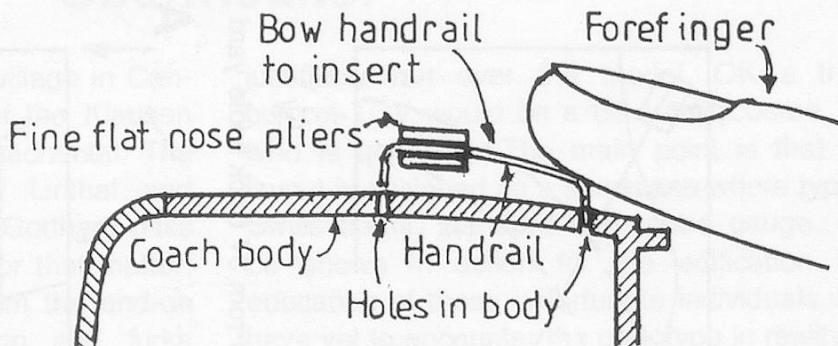
time I thought about it, the last excuse seemed feeble, but as Bemo left them for me to fit, I assumed they did so for a good reason, that they wouldn't stand up to the rough and tumble of storage.

A little while ago we decided to catalogue the collection, a fairly important point now that Nick is also collecting the range. While I had the coaches out, it seemed a good idea to look at detailing. Or, to be more exact, at putting the handrails onto the bodies. I soon realised why Bemo had left them off, they are extremely fiddly items to put in place and would add materially to the labour costs.

When you are only fitting them to one coach you go about what looks like a simple job in a fairly haphazard fashion but when you have a large stack on the desk you soon realise that you need a proper method and the right tools into the bargain. Tools consist of a scalpel to cut the tape or bag containing the handrails and a pair of fine flat nosed pliers. Nowadays I work on an A3 plastic cutting pad to protect the desktop and I have an Anglepoise clone light rigged so I can see what I am doing.

If you try to put the handrails directly into the two holes, you will have problems because the two legs are set just a shade wider apart than the holes. It's not a great deal, a matter of 0.01mm at the most, but it makes it difficult to get both legs in the holes. Once in, the handrails are very snugly sprung into place and unlikely to be dislodged. It's an old workshop principle, if it's hard to get in, it's usually hard to get out.

After the second coach I discovered the trick. You begin by putting the eight handrails in



a safe but readily accessible place on the bench. You then place the coach on the bench with one side uppermost, with one door dead in front of you, the coach lying parallel to the edge of your working area. Take the pliers and grip the first handrail at the extreme far end. Now put the other leg into the hole nearest yourself. Place your spare forefinger over the leg you have just inserted and gently bow the handrail so that the other leg goes in. Repeat for the second handrail.

If you began with the underframe facing you, turn the coach round so that the roof is now the nearest to the edge. You are now in a good position to put the other pair of handrails in. Don't try to insert handrails with the pliers over the coach body, it makes a tricky job much more difficult. This will have to be faced when the new centre door coaches come on stream, but for a normal coach, use the easy method. Then turn the coach over and repeat the process.

An important part of the process is the pliers. Mine have box joints and are only 3mm wide and taper down to about 0.2mm at the tips. I bought them over twenty years ago from a dealer who is no longer with us. Indeed, the firm who took over his premises have also gone. However a similar pair are obtainable from Shesto for just under £10 as well as a lap jointed set at just under £5.

There is a cheaper alternative, a pair of flat nosed tweezers which you can pick up in Boots for around a pound. The difference is in comfort, tweezers have to be closed with the fingers, whereas pliers are closed with the palm. Even a cheap pair fit nicely into the hand and form a natural extension of your body.

Oberriedhof Track Plan Not to scale

