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**SKILLS BUILDER™**  
**Scratchbuilder's Jumpstart Kit**



## ***Why Our Squad kit is a great Value, and 3 other ways NOT to build a Squad.***

By Tim Bongard

I've said this before, but it bears repeating: Building a model of ***Emergency!***'s famous Squad 51 or any other Los Angeles County Fire Department Paramedic truck is probably one of the most complex "simple" projects you could ever rope yourself into. The reason for this is that the real trucks are just loaded with a ton of subtle yet significant details, and the kind of details that if you don't get them right, the model will look odd or flat-out wrong.

The temptation is to think that the LA County Squads are just pickups with a utility body on the back and a lightbar on the cab, but that is a huge oversimplification. For years, Squad 51 and her sisters had dual wheel rear ends and special utility boxes that were built by the LA County shops to a specific and precise formula that included "pillowed" doors, and in some cases, a unique railing with curved support legs. One of the reasons our Squad kit has over 140 pieces in it *and* an *extensive* Instruction Book is that there are *so many* details to add and get right, and we include them all.

Now, on occasion, we have heard from folks wondering why our kit costs what it does and the simple answer is because of what it contains, but it's also because we put everything you need from, a wide variety of suppliers and unique parts we have created for you, all in one box along with a detailed set of how-to focused instructions that can guide even

novice scratchbuilders through the building process. Our kit (and this goes for our entire kit line) is designed to give experienced modelers a jump-start in getting their projects off the ground and give novice modelers a huge, positive learning experience while completing the model. And in either case – and this is proven several times over – the results are often award winners. You end up with a top-class model you can be proud of.

Still, there are some guys out there that are convinced that our kit is pricey and they can do the project for a lot less money – and admittedly **there are three avenues you try** in order to save money – but they all will get you to subpar results or, worse yet you will end up paying out more money in the end than what you would with one of *our* kits. Here's a quick rundown of your options:

### ***Moebius Utility Truck Kit***

Let me start by saying these are *beautiful kits*. I have a couple and they are top notch, but when it comes to building a Squad body from one, it's the wrong starting point. It's like trying to build a C7R Corvette out of a Corvair – interesting, but it's a nearly impossible conversion. The utility body in the kit is apparently based on the venerable Knapheide service body, but the version in the kit is for the single-wheel, narrow depth cabinets, not the wider dual-wheel ones as on the Squad. The number of doors when compared to an LA County Squad is wrong as are the door types and door locks (square instead of round as on Squad 51). The Knapheide-style box is missing the center front cabinet that fits between the side cabinets on the cab end and it also doesn't have a cabinet under the rear deck like the Squads have. The LA County cabinets have rounder wheel well openings and have different positions for the taillights. So you have to fix all that stuff for starters and then find/buy a Twinsonic lightbar, decals, railings, Scott Bottles, a K-12 box, and the conversion parts to get you to the right year Dodge pick-up and, after all that, you will still have no guide on how to put it all together and get it right.

Like I said at the start, every one of the molded in features of the utility body model is spot on for a typical Knapheide which is what makes it a great model kit – just a rotten place to start in building an economical and accurate LA County Squad. If you don't believe me, **study** one of the kits and photos of Squad 51 and it should become readily apparent. My

recommendation: Buy several of these utility truck kits – they are beauties, but don't try to turn them into LA County Squads.

### ***Cast Resin Body***

This thing has been out there for years. I'm referring to the solid cast LA County Squad body that comes to you in a single block of resin that you can find on-line on several different outlets like e-Bay. Additional parts have been added over time, but there are several problems with it starting with the fact that it's a solid block of resin. Anyone I know who has one has complained that it is either warped, or bowed, or that the details are "soft" – not crisp like an injection molded model like the Moebius kit mentioned above or our plastic-based Squad Body. The problem is the same for several other offerings such as the Seagrave and Crown fire trucks from the same maker.

Their casting is *not* a great starting point for a great model, and that really is what I'm being critical about here: You shouldn't have to pay for something and then have to work like a fiend to get it to be an adequate model. Add to that *no* substantive instructions and *no* follow-up support to speak of, and you really have to wonder about the value of what you get.

What do I mean by "follow-up" support? Our kits come with follow-up support so that if we improve a kit with a better part, you can get that for free. If we add new, additional parts, we make them available to our kit customers. You fudge up a part while building, we'll support you. You need help, we're here for you. I wrote ***The Model Fire House*** in *Scale Auto Enthusiast* for several years and our how-to oriented instruction books are second to none. So with us, you get great value with what you pay for. With these other guys, you get a block of resin.

### ***Pro Built Plastic Utility Body***

The latest entry is a relatively inexpensive pre-built utility body that is a pretty good representation of the LA County Squad bodies, but again, there are a few problems, especially if you think you can buy this and the other parts needed for the project and come up with a cheaper but equal model to what we offer. You will need to correct the doors on this one for starters, but then you also have to get decals, railings, marker lights, Scott

Bottles, a California-spec Twinsonic Lightbar, radios, antenna, and a bunch of other detail parts that come to you in our kit – by the time you do all that *and* pay for shipping, you could have bought one of our kits and got our top-notch instructions to boot. And, as we mentioned before, our instructions and support are second to none. Take a good look at any of our built-up examples and you will see that there is a level of fidelity that comes to you in our kit – and you won't have to guess at it or how to do it.

So, if you think you can do it cheaper, good luck with that. If you think any of these three options mentioned here will get you to a championship model, maybe, but we can almost guarantee it will cost you more, take more effort, and you will have to figure the details out yourself. If you are new at this and have never done a conversion before, using any of these three options and not using one of our kits is, as we say in New Jersey, “Furgettaboutit”.

What we *can* guarantee is that our kit, with what we supply in parts, support, and instructions, is worth every penny and are quite a value for both novice and experienced modeler alike. If you get one of our kits and disagree, or think you are in over your head, return it and we'll give you a full refund.

The bottom line is that we take all the guesswork out of building a LA County-style Squad model. We give you what you need, and we show you how to build a beautiful show-stopper of a model. Everything else out there in the marketplace is just a doorstop, just ask our customers.

If you have questions, let us know. Visit our website and send us an email. You can reach me at [tim@tsbongard.com](mailto:tim@tsbongard.com) or call or text me at 480-310-8474.

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