AUTTORAMA

SCALE MODELS by Jorge Damico

QUICK GUIDE TO PHOTOGRAPHING SCALE MODELS

Introduction

Photographing scale models is a fun and rewarding way to share your hard work, track your progress, or even enter competitions. The good news? You don't need a professional studio or expensive gear to get great results. With a few simple tricks, the right setup, and a little practice, anyone can take crisp, eye-catching photos that do their models justice.

1/18 Scale Sauber Mercedes C9

In this guide, I'll walk you through everything you need to know, from choosing your camera to setting up the perfect background and lighting. I'll keep things simple, practical, and actionable, so you can start snapping great shots today, no jargon, just real advice that works. Let's get started!

1. Choosing the Right Camera

You don't need the fanciest camera. Modern digital cameras, even smartphones, can produce excellent results. If you want more control, look for a camera that lets you adjust shutter speed, aperture, and flash manually.

Types of cameras:

- Point-and-shoot: Easy to use, but limited manual controls. Great for quick snaps.
- All-in-one (bridge cameras): More features, built-in zoom, and some manual settings.
- DSLRs: Interchangeable lenses and full manual control. Best for those who want to experiment and grow.

Consult online reviews and compare models before you buy, features, convenience, and price all matter.

2. Image Formats and Resolution

- JPEG: Most common, but every time you re-save, you lose a bit of quality. Always use "high quality" settings if possible.
- TIFF: Larger files, but no loss of quality, great for archiving or editing.
- RAW: Like a digital negative. Maximum flexibility for editing, but you'll need to convert it for sharing or printing.
- How many megapixels do you need?
- 5–7 MP is plenty for most model photography and prints up to 8x10 inches. More megapixels don't always mean better photos; focus on lighting and technique.

3. Setting Up Your Scene: Backgrounds

- Infinite background: Use a sheet of poster board curved up behind your model for a clean, distraction-free look.
- Background color: Avoid bright reds, yellows, or greens; they steal attention. White is classic but can look gray in photos; sky blue is a safe bet for most models.
- Pro tip: Light your background separately if you can, to keep it crisp and clean.

4. Resolution and Printing

- For web: 72 DPI is fine.
- For printing, 300 DPI gives crisp results.
- Tip: Always shoot and save at the highest quality your camera allows. You can resize later, but you can't add detail that wasn't captured.

5. Lighting and Flash

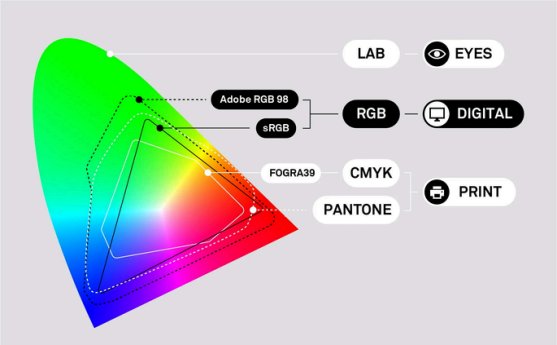
- Natural light is your friend. If possible, shoot near a window with soft daylight.
- If you use lamps, two desk lamps with daylight bulbs work well. Use one as your main light and the other to fill in shadows.
- Diffusers: Soften harsh light with a thin white cloth or even a shower cap.
- Reflectors: A piece of white foam board bounces light into shadows for a balanced look.
- Flash: Turn it off if you can—on-camera flash often creates harsh shadows and unnatural highlights.

6. Camera Settings for Sharp, Detailed Photos

- Aperture: Use a higher f-number (smaller aperture) for more depth of field; this keeps your whole model in focus.
- Shutter speed: Use a tripod for slower shutter speeds to avoid blur.
- ISO: Keep it low (100–200) for clean images; higher ISO adds noise.
- White balance: Use auto for most situations, but try presets (daylight, cloudy, etc.) for better color accuracy. If you shoot RAW, you can adjust later.

7. Color Modes

- sRGB: Best for web and most screens.
- Adobe RGB: Wider color range, good for editing and printing.
- CMYK: Only for professional printing.
- RAW: Lets you choose color mode later.



8. Actionable Steps for Great Model Photos

- Set up your infinite background with a clean, neutral color.
- Use two light sources (window + lamp, or two lamps) and a reflector to fill shadows.
- Mount your camera on a tripod for sharp images.
- Use a high f-number (like f/8 or above) for deep focus.
- Turn off the flash and use longer exposures if needed, just don't forget the tripod!
- Check your white balance for natural colors.
- Shoot in the highest quality format your camera allows.
- Experiment! Try different lighting, backgrounds, and angles. Review your results and adjust.

9. Real-Life Example

Imagine you've built a detailed model airplane.

- Set up a sky-blue poster board as your background, curving it up behind the plane.
- Place your model near a window, with a desk lamp on the other side and a piece of white foam board to bounce light onto the shadow side.
- Mount your camera on a tripod, set to f/11, ISO 100, and use a 2-second timer to avoid shake.
- Turn off the flash.
- Take a few test shots, adjusting the lamp and reflector until the shadows look soft and natural.
- Review your photos, tweak your setup, and shoot again.

Final Thoughts

You don’t need expensive gear or pro-level skills to take amazing photos of your scale models. Focus on lighting, background, and camera settings. Experiment, review, and have fun—your best shot is just a few tweaks away!

1/35 scale Tiger I Late version

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Appendix: Glossary of Key Photography Terms

Term	What It Means & Why It Matters
Boot Speed	How fast your camera is ready for the next shot—important for action
CCD	The sensor that captures your image.
DPI	Dots per inch; higher for printing, lower for web.
DSLR	Cameras with interchangeable lenses and full manual control.
Flash	Quick burst of light—use sparingly.
Gigabyte (GB)	A unit of digital storage. More GB means more photos can fit on your
JPEG/JPG	Compressed image format; easy to share.
Megapixel	More pixels = more detail, but 5–7 MP is enough for most.
Obturador (Shutter)	Controls how long light hits your camera sensor. Fast = freezes action, slow = more light but risk of blur.
Pixel	The smallest dot in a digital image. More pixels mean more detail.
RAW	Unprocessed file, best for editing.
Resolução (Resolution)	How much detail your image has, measured in DPI for print or pixels for digital.
Serrilhado (Pixelation)	When you see blocky “jaggies” in low-res images—avoid by shooting and saving in high quality.
TIFF	High-quality, uncompressed image format.
White Balance	Adjusts color to match the light source.
Optical Zoom	Uses the lens for close-ups—better than digital zoom.
Digital Zoom	Crops and enlarges the image, reducing quality. Optical zoom is always