# PLAY-DOH SCENERY

By Mike Rickett

OF the many compounds and materials that are in common use in the construction of scenery for model railways, model racing car circuits and landscapes, the recently introduced Play-Doh modelling compound is perhaps one of the most useful. One of its many advantages over similar materials is its ability to harden naturally and also the ease with which it can be painted—a very valuable asset when building scenery for a model railway layout.

Play-Doh is particularly useful when granite or sandstone rock faces are being modelled. The cracks, crevices and fissures of real rock are easily reproduced in model form with the simplest of tools, and more important, Play-Doh is not quick drying and it is not therefore necessary to hurry.

Play-Doh is available in four colours: white, blue, red and yellow, any one of which is suitable for this sort of modelling. A 3 lb. tin of Play-Doh, costing 12s. 6d., is ample for a two or three foot long cutting.

If the cutting or hillside is built up in the manner described in the February, March, April, May, June, July, and August 1964 issues of the 'Meccano Magazine', $\frac{1}{2}$ in. to 1 in. wire mesh will be used to form the base for the scenery and this can also be bent to form the base for the rock face. This should then be nailed into position ready to receive the modelled Play-Doh. The remaining scenery at the top of the cutting or hillside not requiring a rock face, can be treated in the normal manner, i.e. papier mâché and plaster.

The Play-Doh can then be removed from its container and kneaded until it is soft and workable. A quantity is then rolled out flat until a thickness of approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ in. remains and the entire piece is trimmed to the correct size for the area to be covered by the rock face.

## Wire mesh

It is wise to allow for a little contraction when the Play-Doh has set hard and I would recommend that the piece be made about $\frac{1}{4}$ in. longer and wider for every foot length. You can if you wish, buy a small sheet of extra fine wire mesh—$\frac{1}{8}$ or $\frac{1}{4}$ in., which can be embedded in the Play-Doh to give it extra strength. This is not absolutely necessary however, especially if wire mesh is used as a backing to both the rock face and the normal scenery.

The Play-Doh is laid out flat and a penknife or modelling knife used to carve out layers of Play-Doh to form ledges, cracks and other strata. This is where Play-Doh wins, for the only other alternative method of making a rock face is by using plaster applied on to a papier mâché and wire mesh base actually in position. With Play-Doh it is much easier to carve the rock face flat on a work bench and then to place it in position, rather than to carve the rock face when in position.

## Realistic surfaces

The actual carving is a relatively simple operation and is done by scraping one area of Play-Doh and then adding the remaining scraps underneath the area to form a ledge, which is then smoothed off. Cracks are formed by drawing a penknife at an angle across the piece of Play-Doh and then smoothing off each side of the crack with a penknife and scraping a little off one side to give an uneven appearance to the opposite side.

The rock face can be placed in position and plastered at the upper and lower edges. It is advisable to wait for approximately 24 hours to let the Play-Doh set before painting. The painting itself should be done with oil colours, for although water colours are quite suitable for Play-Doh, they tend to be less vivid when dry.

For a wall of granite, a medium grey paint should be used and for sandstone, a reddy brown mixed with orange. However, it is best to experiment and to vary the shade as you go along. It is rare to find a rock face exactly the same colour throughout its length and to enhance the effect, patches of green can be added on ledges and cracks and flock or dyed sawdust sprinkled on to represent grass at the bottom of the rock face.

*Left. The Play-Doh is kneaded to soften it before it is rolled out flat. Centre: Cracks and fissures are formed with a modelling knife or blunt instrument. Right: When the Play-Doh has hardened, it is then painted to give a faithful reproduction of a rock or soil surface*