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Run 259

October/November 2012

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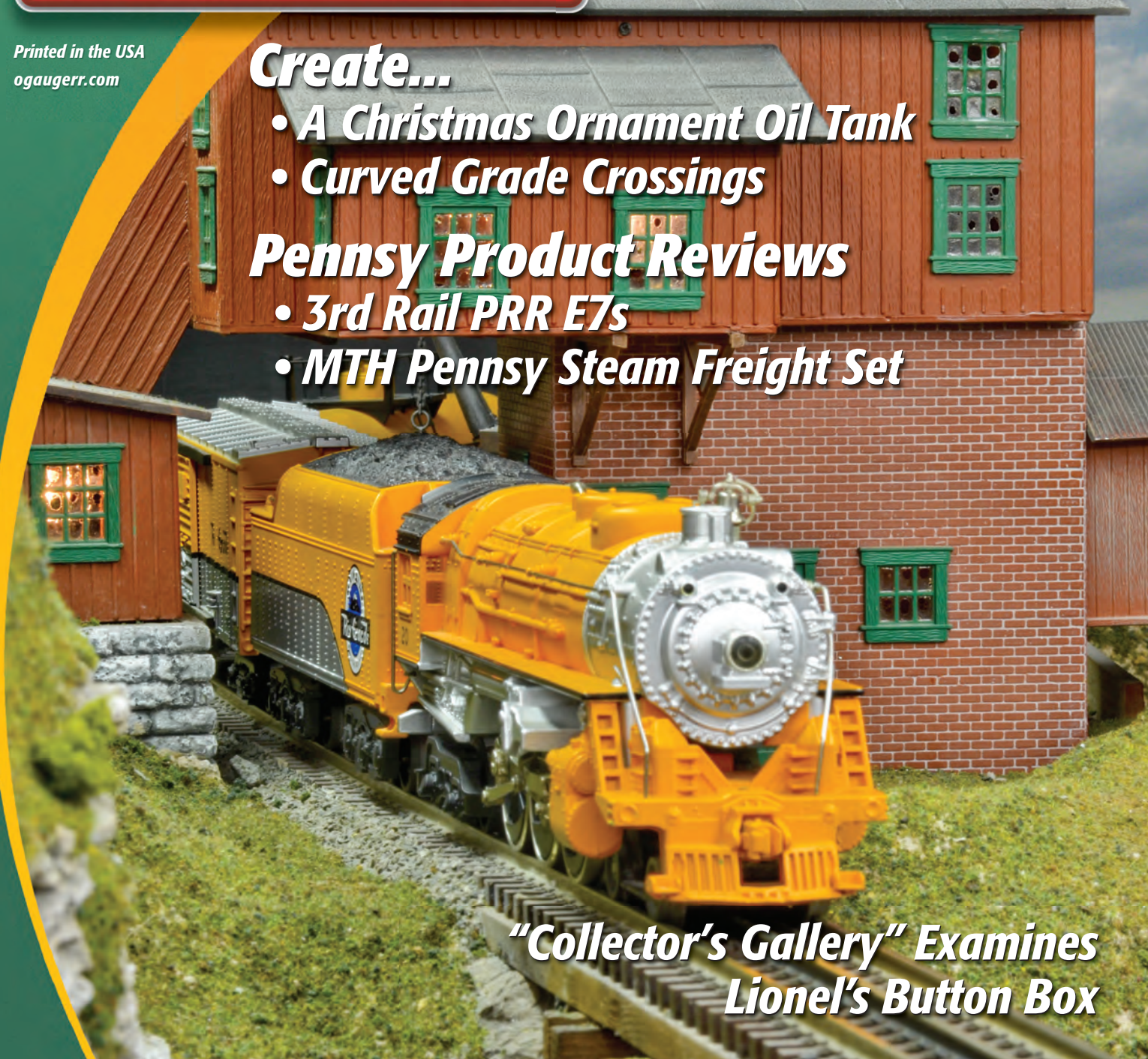
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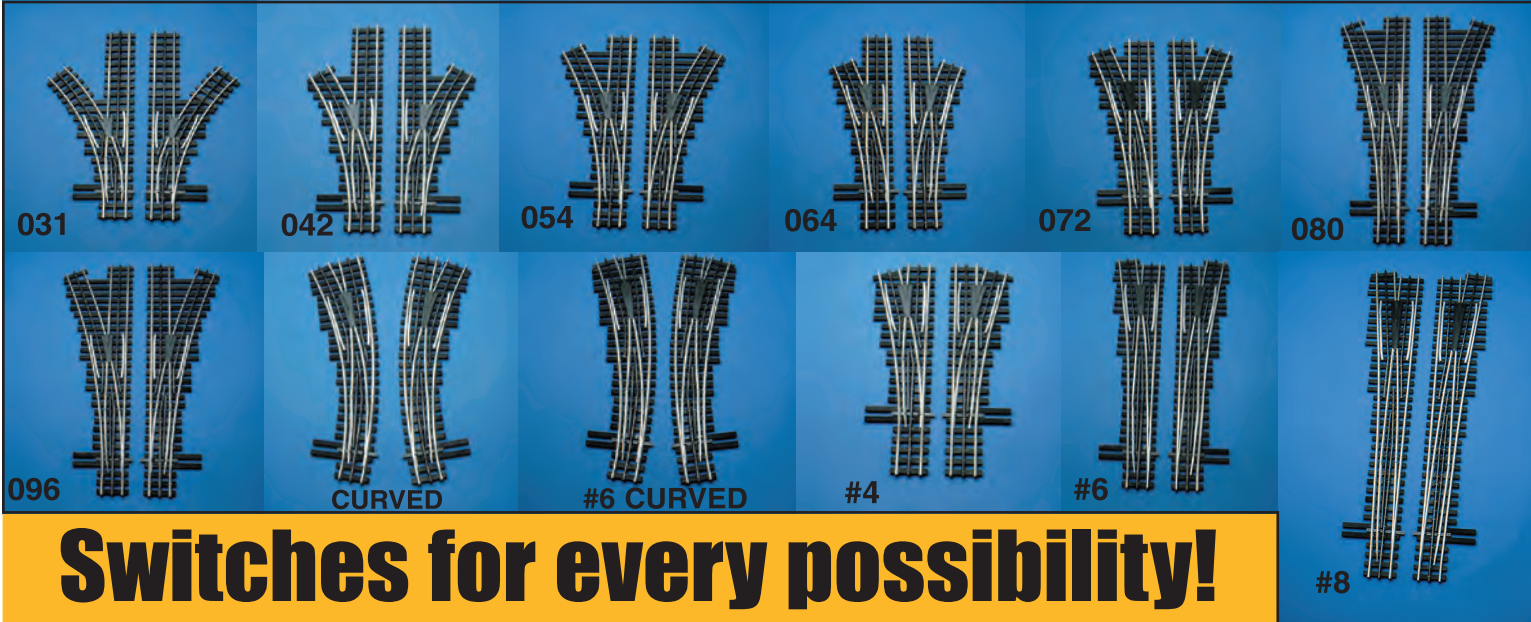
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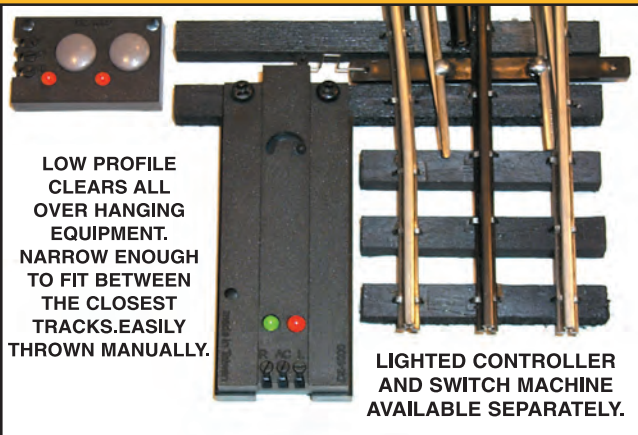


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ON THE COVER

Since this is the October/November issue, and since those months herald the start of fall, Halloween, and Thanksgiving, it seemed appropriate to include some seasonal color on the cover. This Rio Grande steamer fits the bill nicely. The locomotive is an MTH RailKing model that operates on Jim Teeple's layout. You'll see much more of Jim's layout inside this issue.

Photo by Jim Teeple



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Show Me a Story



What's going on here? Steve Phetterplace shares the account of a seasonal incident inside this issue.

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There's a story behind virtually every model train layout. For example, what was the motivation for building the layout in the first place, and why was O gauge selected? What was planned in terms of scenery and operations? How did a particular theme, brand of trains, or type of control system come to be chosen? And the list goes on. This is the type of information included in nearly all of our major layout features, and it gives the reader the background needed to understand why and how the layout was constructed.

What about stories that exist, or potentially exist, right there *on* the layout? When we create individual scenes for our miniature rail empires, I tend to think of them as vignettes incorporated in a broader overall setting. We often have the makings of a story when we determine just where to position the various structures, figures, and other scenic features. A fictional tale based on what we are creating may not be the first thing to come to mind, but it's probably safe to say that just about every object or figure placed on the layout has some purpose for being where it is. And if that is indeed the case, it follows that some potential exists for elaborating on things a bit and spinning a bit of a yarn.

I really enjoy seeing my fellow hobbyists engage in some creative storytelling with select action and scenes on their layouts to the extent where they may even reposition trains and other objects on the layout as the story line develops. I think it's great when someone takes the time and effort to conjure up a make-believe scenario and follows


through with a sequence of photos that guide the viewer through the timeline of the event. In some respects, it's very much like a photo essay that might have appeared in *LIFE* or one of the many other newspapers and magazines we enjoyed in the past.

A fine example of the potential for storytelling and the type of story I'm referring to appears in this issue in a new section called "Rail Tales." Our premier "Rail Tales" features the creative work of Steve Phetterplace, an *OGR* contributor and forum participant. Steve has been published in *OGR* before ("Let it Snow!" in Run 232), but this time around, he had originally submitted a few photos that he felt might be appropriate for "Readers' Rails." Upon seeing what Steve had come up with, I decided that this interesting little story deserved a bit more exclusive treatment. A story line was developed that turned Steve's photos, complete with a fictitious newspaper article, into a fun and fanciful feature that I believe our readers will thoroughly enjoy. Perhaps best of all, the incident he describes and portrays is entirely appropriate to this particular time of the year.

Regular readers of *OGR* will recall how other contributors have also developed and shared fictional stories about certain aspects of their layouts. Often these accounts are displayed as sidebars to the main article, or they may even constitute a theme for the entire article. Jim Policastro, to cite just one example of the former treatment, has taken us on tours with his little people as they explore new sections of his layout. Don McCuaig took a different approach and

provided a detailed layout feature that was, at its core, an imaginary journey through a section of the northwestern U.S. Bill Bramlage went even further than that where he showed us how to create an entire picture book for his grandson based on an adventure Thomas the Tank Engine experienced on Bill's extensive layout.

We hope to include more standalone illustrated short stories in future issues. All that is required is a bit of imagination, about 500 words more or less of descriptive text, and a digital camera capable of producing high-resolution images. Most current cameras will do fine in that regard if set to record the fewest number of images. The idea would be to depict an imaginary event that unfolds somewhere along the tracks, which ideally includes the trains in some way. It could be a story developed around a roundhouse scene or perhaps something related to a particular event or incident somewhere along the line. For that matter, it might even be a recounting of the adventures of one or more of the 1:48 scale "inhabitants" of the pike, human or otherwise. The only limits are what the imagination can dream up and the ability to develop the action visually and logically in a series of around five to seven photos.

It would be great if this inaugural version of "Rail Tales" inspires more readers to take a close look at select scenes on their layouts and consider the possibility of spinning a yarn that can be shared with our readers. It could be a whole lot of fun. So show me a story! 



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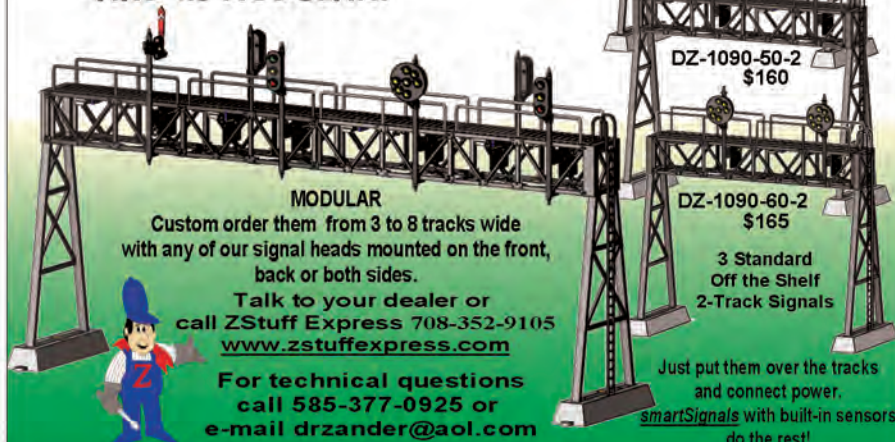
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Product Announcements



The Greyhounds Are Running

Williams by Bachmann has released a new Union

Pacific “Greyhound” ready-to-run O gauge starter set in a distinctive two-tone gray livery once used by the prototype to match its locomotives to new Pullman cars and emphasize the road’s streamlined passenger service. The complete and ready-to-run set includes a Baldwin 4-6-0 steam locomotive with operating headlight and tender, smoke, flywheel-equipped motor, and digital True Blast II whistle and bell sounds; 60’ heavyweight combine car with lighted interior and passenger silhouettes; 60’ heavyweight observation car with lighted interior and passenger silhouettes; 60”x 40” oval of snap-fit track with roadbed; 80-watt AC transformer with horn, bell, and direction buttons; and an illustrated instruction manual. The Greyhound #00325 is \$429.95 at Williams by Bachmann dealers.



Lionel Catalogs for Your Tablet

Two new products are available from HSL for Lionel consumer catalog fans who are tablet users: *Lionel Catalog Archive 1925-1942 Tablet Version* and *Lionel Catalog Archive 1945-1969 Tablet Version*. The catalogs install directly on tablet devices such as iPad, NOOK Color, and others. Users can flip through pages, enlarge and shrink pages with two finger pinching, and jump to a particular page using the device’s viewing software. Delivered on a DVD and installed through a computer via iTunes (iPad) or similar software. The tablet versions contain high-quality scans of every page of included catalogs. Available directly from HSL for \$40.00 plus \$5.00 shipping or \$30.00 and shipping for those who have already purchased the PC/Mac compatible versions. HSL, 200 University Park Dr., Suite 240, Edwardsville, IL 62025-3636, www.hsllinc.com, 800-779-2802.

Scenes Galore

Woodland Scenics has released 12 new Scene-A-Rama scenery items, marking the largest expansion of that product line since Scene-A-Rama was introduced in 2006. The individually packaged scenery items are sized right for small projects, crafts, and dioramas, and make it easy for hobbyists to try different products when exploring landscape options and planning their projects. Products include SP4180-Grass, SP4181-Earth, SP4182-Soil, SP4183-Low Growth, SP4184-Bushes, SP4185-Plants, SP4186-Wild Grass, SP4187-Snow, SP4188-Flowers, SP4189-Sand, SP4190-Gravel, and SP4191-Rock. Visit www.scenearama.com for full details. \$2.29 each at your local Woodland Scenics dealer.



A Nasty Spill

The Lionel Hooker Tank Car Accident Accessory, 6-37977, is now available at authorized Lionel dealers. This operating accessory features a plastic 1:48 scale 8,000-gallon Hooker Chemicals tank car that has come to grief on the side of the rails. Flickering LEDs simulate welder torches in the hands of workmen fixing the mess. The tank car has sprung metal trucks, but the car is permanently attached to the accessory’s base. \$129.99 at your Lionel dealer.





Tower Power

New from Ready Made Trains by AristO are three new tower accessories including a water tower, rotating beacon, and railyard light tower. Each tower sits on a square 4-1/4" metal base; stands approximately 13" high; and features metal ladders, detailed graphics, and operating lights—a blinking red light atop the water tower, red and green lenses in the rotating beacon housing, and two movable floodlights on the railyard light tower. The towers are currently available in three families with one of each type of tower bearing the same road name and available separately (U.S. Navy versions of the towers shown). Also available are NY Subway and Long Island RR versions. More road names to be released in 2012 include PP&L/Penn Power, U.S. Army, Bethlehem Steel, and Atomic Energy Commission (AEC). Towers are intended to be powered by 12–14 volts. Visit www.readymadetoys.com for prices and complete information.



Atlas 8,000-Gallon Tank Car

Atlas O is manufacturing a prototypical single-dome 8,000-gallon tank car in British American Oil Company colors for Canadian Car. This limited-production O gauge tank car is scheduled for early 2013 and will be produced in four different road numbers in both 2-rail and 3-rail. Cost is \$75.00 plus \$12.00 shipping or \$20.00 shipping charge for purchasers of three or four cars. For more information or to order, e-mail mlhorne@shaw.ca or call 604-560-4028.



New Hobby Lube

Model train enthusiasts now have a new lube option. DuPont Teflon Non-Stick Dry-Film Lubricant is available in 4-ounce squeeze bottles that store easily. Teflon fluoropolymer creates a dirt-resistant, micro-thin dry film that reduces friction and improves mobility but won't cause build-up even after multiple applications. A precision tip enables users to get the lubricant into tight spaces and apply an exact amount. There's no overspray or waste making it ideal for model trains, toys, and other collectibles with small moving parts. Because Teflon fluoropolymer is an inert substance, it won't damage delicate plastic, rubber, or metal components. DuPont Teflon Non-Stick Dry-Film Lubricant is available nationwide at hardware, home improvement, or auto supply stores for \$3.99.



Darstaed U.S. Debut

Trains Hoover has introduced the Darstaed Line of O gauge trains to North American hobbyists. Among the newest products in the line is a model of British Railways LMS standard class 3F tank locomotive, which saw service in Great Britain through the end of the steam era in 1968. Until now, this iconic locomotive has never been mass produced as a ready-to-run O gauge model. The locomotive is available in 25 different liveries. Black unlined versions are \$375.00, lined black versions are \$400.00, and colored locomotives are \$425.00. All operate on O48 and larger curves and feature a satin finish, a powerful new all-gear mechanism with all three axles driven, Mubachi motors, working headlamps, and sprung buffers. The models will be AC/DC switchable for the U.S. operators. Also available are the Darstaed Pre-Grouping Advans in 10 different liveries. These colorful lithographed cars feature all-metal construction and sprung buffers and sell for \$49.00 each. To order in the U.S., and for more information, contact Trains Hoover at trainshoover@gmail.com.



Maintain That Turf

Since 2004, Menards home improvement stores have sold a variety of authentic O gauge collectibles during the holiday season. The 2012 line features an animated and lighted Menards store and coordinating garden center (shown), seven limited-edition flatcars, three decorated and assembled buildings, several Lionel train sets (including an exclusive Chicago and North Western set), and a number of accessories including trees and a water tower. This year's line of collectibles will be available in Menards stores the first week of November, or they can be ordered from www.menards.com beginning September 1, 2012.



Slider Transport

The Railroad Museum of Long Island is offering a White Castle refrigerated TOFC with matching truck tractor as its spring 2013 Lionel commemorative car—the 13th in a series. This Lionel Traditional O car with die-cast metal trucks



and couplers will feature the nationally recognized White Castle livery and will be limited to advance purchase sales. Funds raised will go toward the operation of the museum including education and restoration programs, exhibits, collections, and the historic Lionel layout. The flatcar with trailer and tractor sells for \$77.00, with shipping and restricted membership in the museum included. Foreign orders, add \$10.00 per car, and New York State residents add \$6.64 sales tax. Payment by credit card, check, or money order should be made in U.S. funds to the Railroad Museum of Long Island. Visit www.rml.org to download the order form. Orders must be received by Friday, November 2, 2012, with delivery expected in April or May 2013.

SMR 4-4-0 locomotives

Schneider Model Railroading, Inc. (SMR Trains) has received prototype models for its next limited edition locomotive



releases: the Western & Atlantic *Yonah* and the New York & Harlem's *Amenia*. The *Yonah* is the third engine of SMR's "Great Locomotive Chase" series which included the previously released *General* and *Texas*. The *Amenia* (3-rail version pictured) is one of the earliest NY&H engines (that line later became part of the New York Central System). These individually serial-numbered models are being hand-produced from brass, are fully decorated, and include electronics designed for conventional transformer control. A \$100.00 deposit reserves a model and entitles the buyer to a \$150.00 discount from the final retail price. Preorders are currently being accepted at www.smrtrains.com or by mail at SMR Trains, P.O. Box 753, Mount Laurel, NJ 08054.



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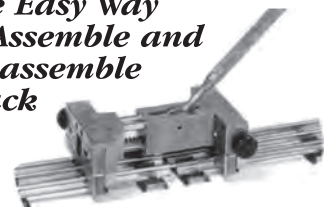
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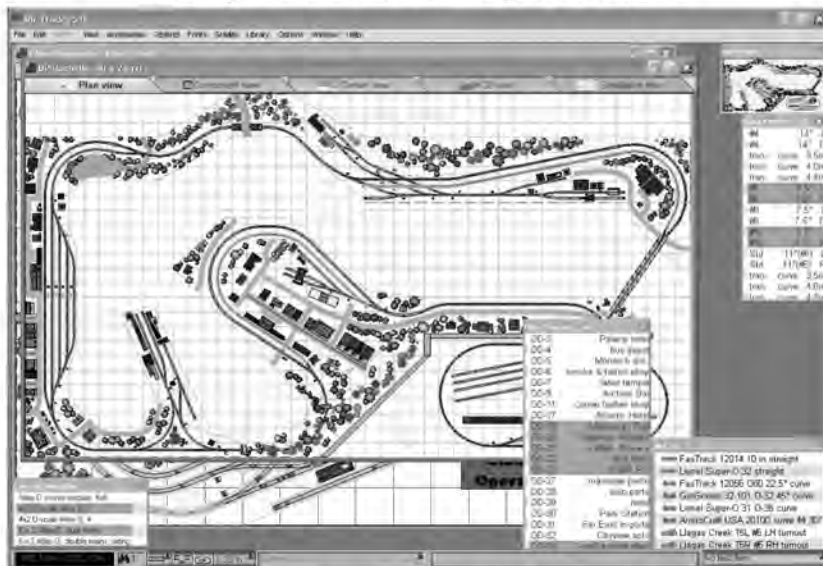


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How would you like to show your trains and layout to your fellow O gauge railroaders?

You can take your photos using a digital camera capable of at least 3.3 megapixels set to the best JPEG image. Please send only original, unedited JPEG files. Color prints of 4"x 6" or larger are also fine. Be sure to include brief notes about the trains in the photos and any other information you'd like to share, such as the size of your layout, unique scenery, make of track, power supply or control system, and so forth.

We are looking for quality photography with good lighting and clear images; however, on-camera flash photos are generally not acceptable. Send your photo, CD, or prints to Readers' Rails, 33 Sheridan Road, Poland, Ohio 44514-1680. Or you can e-mail your image and text files to editor@ogaugerr.com.



Tranquil Harbor

This harbor scene on Bob Terpak's O gauge layout may be compact in overall size, but it is packed with a level of detail that is sure to attract and hold a viewer's attention and interest for a long time. Bob's special interests in model railroading include realistic operations, the creation of convincing scenic vignettes, and modifying various Lionel operating accessories to give them a more prototypical appearance while still retaining their operational capabilities.

Allhallows Eve

It appears that Halloween has definitely taken hold at Rest Haven cemetery, and the groundskeepers are going to face quite a cleanup in November after the ghouls and ghosts have settled into their unearthly domain for another year. This graveyard scene is part of a Halloween-theme corner module created by Christopher Finch and features moving figures and headstones along with an abandoned cathedral complete with eerie lighting. It leads one to wonder how the residents of that nearby house contend with the Halloween season each year.



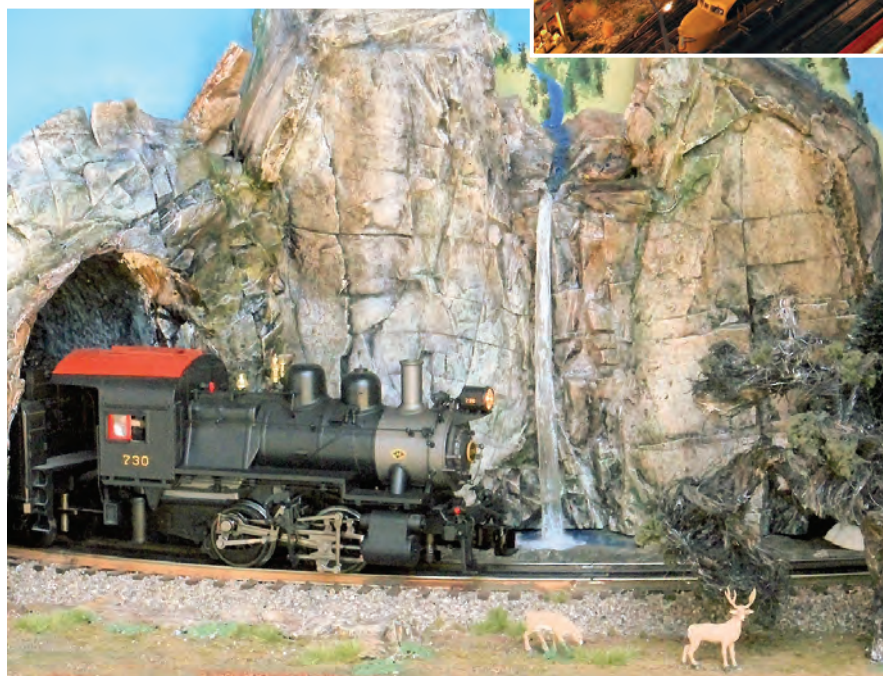


Waiting for a Train

Two waiting passengers watch the tail end of a local freight train rumble through the town of Lewiston on Jerry Zaret's 2-rail O scale Stillson River Railroad. The layout is a combination of standard and narrow gauge trains and features coaling and logging operations. The buildings in the front are made from kits, while the background structures are scratch built. Scenery on Jerry's layout is only partially complete, and the layout is currently in temporary storage. It will be reassembled when renovations on Jerry's new residence are completed. The photo was taken by his friend Eric Garen.

Passenger Station Deluxe

When Bill Bramlage creates a passenger station scene, he does it in grand style. In this high-angle night shot, a total of seven tracks are occupied by consists destined for a variety of destinations on Bill's large and finely detailed layout.



Where Deer and Antelope Play

An O-4-0 switcher, running light en route to the yard, exits a tunnel and glides past some impressive and sheer cliffs on Jim Shaw's 3-rail O gauge layout. Jim used a Bragdon Enterprises mold to create these towering cliffs. The locomotive is an MTH Premier line model, and the grazing deer in the foreground, apparently totally unfazed by the approaching iron horse, are from Arttista.

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Product Reviews



3rd Rail Pennsylvania EMD E7

Review and Photos by George Brown

Passenger diesels from EMD have been favorites of mine since I first saw them on the New York Central Water Level Route in the late 1940s. I know, even the mention of the NYC in a review of a model decorated in Pennsylvania colors could be considered as heresy. But as a simple matter of locale, I got to watch EMD E-series diesels painted in gray lightning stripes pass by me long before seeing those long, handsome growlers finished in Pennsy Tuscan red or Brunswick green.

Regardless of the road, the twin engine 2000-hp passenger pullers from La Grange were something to see.

With their origin in the mid-1930s, the real EMD E-series locomotives were initially equipped with two 12-cylinder Winton 901A diesels rated at 900 hp each, thus the model designation of E, which stood for eighteen-hundred horsepower. Beginning with the E3 and carrying through to the E7, the big Es had twin 12-cylinder EMD 567 diesels of 1000 hp

each. Each diesel drove its own generator, which provided the electrical power to the traction motors. As a side note, the successor E8 was rated at 2250 hp, and the final locomotive in the E series, the E9, was 2400 hp.

The E7 debuted in 1945 with a more vertical nose than on its predecessor E3 through E6 models. As the best-selling passenger engine ever, the E7 ended production in 1949 with over 425 A units delivered to 30 railroads along with over 80 B units going to 10 roads. A distinctive external telltale for the E7 A units over the later E8s and E9s was the panel of vertical louvers located immediately behind the doors to the cab. One E7 survives today at the Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania in Strasburg.

Our evaluation units of the 3rd Rail E7s were decorated as Pennsylvania Railroad EP20s. In Pennsy parlance, EP20 stood for EMD, passenger, and 2000 hp. The PRR owned 46 of the EP20 A units and 14 B units. Our models were from the first release of the 3rd Rail E7, which I understand is now sold out. By the time you read this, 3rd Rail's encore release of the engines will likely be available in B&M, B&O, CB&Q, C&O, GM&O, NYC, Penn Central, PRR Tuscan single stripe, Seaboard, and Southern.





Construction and Features

For the 3-rail operator, Sunset/3rd Rail offers its E7s in powered A units with TMCC and RailSounds 4.0 under license from Lionel, Cruise Commander speed control from the Electric RR Co., fan-driven Turbo Smoke, and command-operated coil couplers. A separate nonpowered B unit with thumbtack couplers is also available in road names that ran the cabless booster units.

In the 2-rail version, both A and B units are powered and are also offered separately. According to the ad on the 3rd Rail website, the 2-rail A unit has 64-channel sound and QSI Titan DCC with a tether cable carrying drive power from the A unit to the B unit. After a few minutes with a ruler and calipers, I confirmed that the 1:48 scale dimensions of the A and B units compared favorably with those on engineering drawings of the real E7s.

Each unit has a molded plastic body mounted on a stamped sheet-metal frame. As shown in the photos, the body is realistic with a number of separately applied plastic, brass, and cast details. I particularly liked the A unit's signature antennas of the PRR, which proved amazingly robust when I worked on the engine. I simply slipped the protective strip of shipping foam between the antennas and set the engine upside down in my padded servicing cradle. See-through screens cover most of the vents on the carbody, with windows and portholes also glazed appropriately. However, these windows and portholes are machined from clear polycarbonate rather than the usual molded clear plastic. In fact,

the polycarbonate used in the 3rd Rail E7s is the same material used for cell phone screens and is impervious to damage from paint or solvents.

In the first production run of his E7s, Scott Mann of Sunset/3rd Rail had the inside surface of the portholes painted, but for the second run, they will be clear. If you have a first-run E7 and want to remove the paint from its portholes, Scott told me that acetone will take the paint off and not harm the polycarbonate. Personally, I'd remove the portholes from the carbody before applying any solvent such as acetone.

Realistic diaphragms are on the ends of the units along with train lines that proved

to be remarkably malleable, which is fortunate. On O72 curves, the couplers swing into these lines and bend them out of the way, which is where they stay. To photograph the engines, I was able to bend each of the lines back into its normal position of hanging straight down, and none of them broke off. The next time I ran the E7s, the coupler bent the lines out of the way again. I'm sure running the engines on O54 curves would do some major adjustments to these lines.

Unlike other modern 3-rail O gauge diesels, the 3rd Rail E7 powered units use a single large Cannon motor. This motor drives all six axles via a toothed belt and drive shafts under the frame and in the trucks. Universal joints connect these shafts together and allow the trucks to turn. Journals for each axle are sprung, and all twelve wheels are flanged. On the outside wheelset of each truck is a pair of traction tires.

LEDs provide all the lighting on the A unit, which includes the headlight, red classification lights, number board lights, cab interior light, and backup light. Inside the industrial green cab are figures representing the crew in addition to the control stands and other apparatus. The B unit has an interior light also. Because the B unit has pickup rollers, a Mini Commander EX board and coil couplers from the Electric RR Co. could easily be installed in it for command-operated couplers.

The satin finish Tuscan red paint on





driver electronics, the E7 ran nearly silently with the sound shut down, regardless of the load on its coupler. Of course, the electronics worked predictably well using either the original TMCC hardware with a CAB-1 for command control or the Legacy system with the CAB-2 set to CAB-1 emulation mode. With the Cruise Commander electronics running in command mode, acceleration and deceleration can be set to 32 steps or 100 steps with speed control on or off. I preferred 100-step operation for its smoother changes in speed and, in fact, I don't recommend 32 speed steps.

Transformer-controlled conventional operation was also smooth and predictable. As with all 3rd Rail locomotives, a 9-volt alkaline battery for RailSounds backup power is installed at the factory in China.

For operators who like smoke, the white vapor streamed with reasonable density from all eight of the small exhaust stacks on the A unit. A small funnel comes with each A unit for filling the smoke unit, which has to be done rather slowly and carefully through one of the forward exhaust stacks. The reason is that the smoke unit is located under the front end of a small plastic exhaust manifold for all eight stacks. With the smoke unit in operation, this manifold disperses the smoke to all the stacks. A slide switch under the frame sets the smoke unit for command or conventional operation or off. My default setting is off. By the way, no smoke unit is installed in the B unit.

Considering the unusually large speaker inside the A unit, I was somewhat underwhelmed by the quality of the sound from it. As an experiment, I sealed all the see-through vents from the inside body with small layered strips of clear shipping tape and also applied thin strips of duct

our evaluation sample A and B units was flawless as were the stripes, lettering, graphics, and other individually painted small details. I did find the lettering of Southern Pacific Company on the owner's plates rather curious since the evaluation Es were decorated as PRR units.

On the A unit, the pilot is mounted to the frame instead of the front truck as is common on most 3-rail O gauge diesel locomotives. With the factory-installed front coupler in place, O72 is the E7's minimum curve. However, removing the front coupler and then installing the solid pilot included with each A unit enables operation on O54 curves. As part of this review, I initially planned to install the solid pilot for one of the photos. The coupler is easy to remove from the front truck, and the pilot is even easier to swap once the coupler is gone. However, I discovered that

removing the front coupler meant also temporarily dismantling the motor and battery bracket from the frame. You see, the wires to this coupler route under these components and connect to the electronics located on the back of the frame. Because the engine was not mine, I chose not to tear it down that far.

At Trackside

On the editorial Carpet Central Railroad, the 3rd Rail E7s smoothly started and accelerated whatever weight of train I coupled to them. My favorite was a nine-car mail train with head-end express reefers, baggage, RPO cars, and a P60 coach, which were all finished in PRR Tuscan red.

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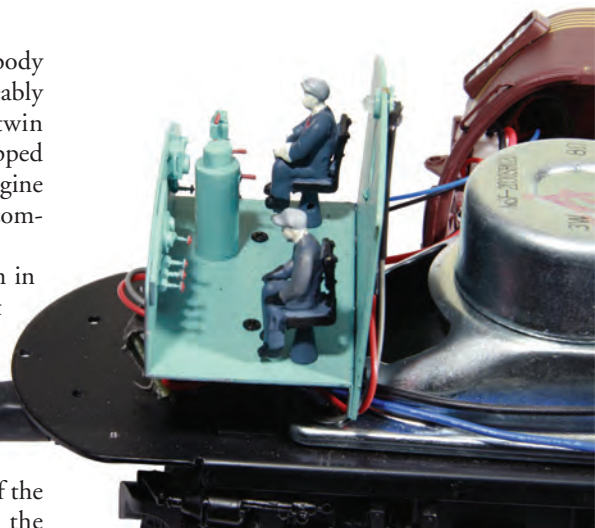
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tape as a soft gasket between the body and frame. My reward was a noticeably improved reproduction of the twin EMD 567 sounds. Naturally, I stripped all of my "sound mods" off the engine before returning it to Scott at the completion of this review.

Out of the box, the engine ran in conventional mode but would not detect the TMCC signal or run under TMCC. Scott immediately sent a new R4LC receiver board that cured the problem. As shown in the photo of the engine with the shell removed, the R4LC board plugged on top of the Cruise Commander motor driver assembly and was a snap to replace. To freely paraphrase the Schick razor blade ads of years ago, pull-push, click-click, change boards that quick!

Overall, the E7s tracked my Atlas O72 mainline and O72 crossover switches smoothly and gracefully without a derail occurring over the several cumulative hours I ran them.



At the End of the Run

I enjoyed my visit of several weeks with the two 3rd Rail E7s or, in the case of the Pennsy decoration on our evaluation units, the EP20s. They were without a doubt a handsome pair on display or on the road. 

Pennsylvania EMD E7 A and B units

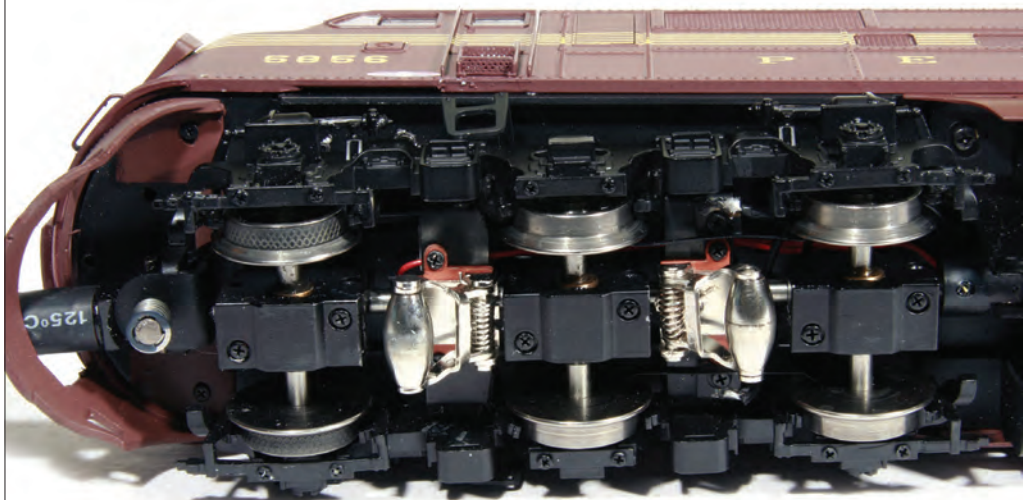
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3rd Rail EMD E7 TMCC Performance

(smoke unit: off; sound: on; speed control: on)

Length, A Unit:

18-3/4" over couplers; 17-1/2" between pilot and diaphragm

Length, B Unit:

18-1/4" over couplers; 17-1/4" between diaphragms

Distance Between Locomotive Pickup Rollers:

1st and 2nd: 2-1/4"; 1st and 3rd: 10-1/2"; 1st and 4th: 12-3/4"

Weight on Driving Wheels: 5 lbs, 12 oz

B Unit Weight: 2 lbs, 8 oz

Tractive Effort @ 18 VAC:

2 lbs, 6 oz @ 3.1 A, 56 W

Minimum Sustained Speed @ 18 VAC:

2 scale mph @ 1.1 A, 20 W

Maximum Tested Speed @ 18 VAC:

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20-20160-1	NP FT ABA w/2.0	\$679.95
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20-20182-3	Reading & Northern SD50 w/Lights	\$175.00
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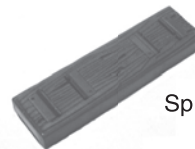
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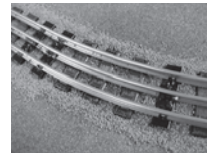
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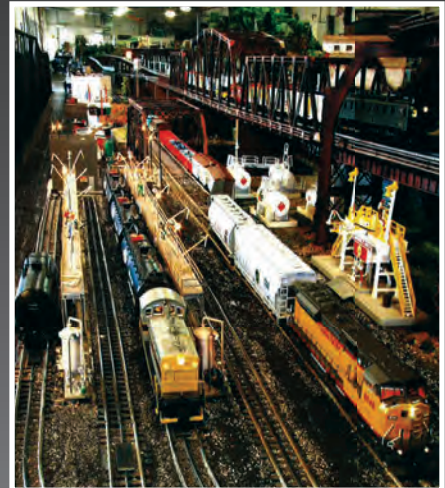
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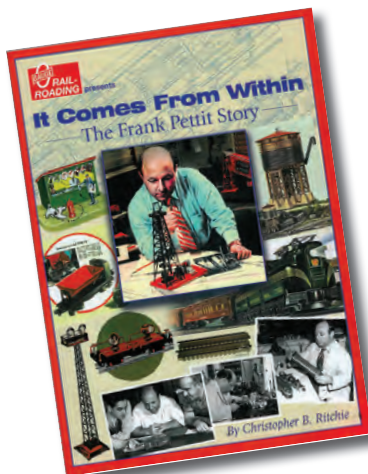
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MTH Ready-to-Run PRR 4-6-0 Steam Freight Set

Review and Photos by George Brown

As the FedEx driver handed me a monstrous box from MTH, my first thought was anything this big has got to be exciting. After all, I'm from the era of when bigger was synonymous with better. If that paradigm held true for the MTH steam starter set that I lugged to the OGR testing lab, which also serves as my train room, this was going to be a fun review. Oh, the package was 20"x 7"x 30" and weighed 23 pounds. One thing for sure—under a Christmas tree, the box and its contents would definitely have lots of hope as a show starter. And Dad would know for sure that he was not destined to get yet another bizarre holiday necktie.

Available in either Pennsylvania or Union Pacific markings, this RailKing Rugged Rails set includes everything needed to run the train. In the way of tools, only a pair of pliers and a small flat-blade screwdriver might be necessary. Our Pennsy set included the equipment listed below and shown in the photos:

- 4-6-0 steam locomotive
- Freight cars:
 - Chromed Gulf tank car
 - PRR gondola with crate load
 - PRR N5c illuminated caboose
- 31"x 51" 12-piece RealTrax oval
- 54-watt Z-500 transformer with connecting wires and illuminated track lock-on
- DCS Remote Commander single-train control system
- RailWare interactive DVD and operator's manual

Before I get into how the set runs, let's take a brief look at its various pieces of equipment.

Locomotive

Both the die-cast engine and its plastic tender have no particular prototype that I can determine. Its decoration is reminis-

cent of the Pennsylvania Railroad in the glory years of the early 20th century with the overall Brunswick green and colorful trim. As to the paint and decoration, it's first rate as I always expect from MTH.

The ten wheeler's primary technical attributes include the Proto-Sound 3.0 digital control and sound system plus the tetherless drawbar. This drawbar is a thin and narrow composite board with printed circuits that carry power and control signals between the engine and tender. If an event such as a derailment and rollover should happen, the drawbar can withstand a 90-degree twist without damage. As with all MTH steamers, the Proto-Sound 3.0 electronics ride inside the tender. By the way, this same set was sold in the 2010 season, but with Proto-Sounds 2.0 and a tether cable between the engine and tender.

Additional operating features include a headlight with automatic two levels of brightness, fan-driven smoke unit, can motor with flywheel, and metal gears on



the engine. A remotely operated Proto-Coupler is on the back of the tender, which rides on metal trucks with die-cast side frames. By the way, these side frames are definitely PRR style.

The smoke unit puffs in time with the sounds of the steam exhaust chuffs, which occur twice for each revolution of the drivers. I found this surprising because I'm used to four chuffs and puffs per driver turn from MTH steam locomotives. Additionally, the only control for the smoke volume control is a potentiometer accessible from underneath the tender. To set the smoke density, ranging from maximum down to off, a small flat-blade screwdriver is needed. Remote control of the smoke is not available with the Remote Commander.

Freight Cars

All three of the freight cars have plastic bodies with most details such as ladders and grab irons molded in, sprung metal trucks, and operating thumbtack-style couplers. As their name of Rugged Rails implies, these cars can withstand considerable stress from derailments, heavy handling, or even careless storage.

On the tank car, the chrome finish is dazzling with crisp and colorful lettering and graphics. Although the ladders, platform, and handrails appear to be delicate, they are actually quite durable.

The gondola provides the extra play value for the set with its removable load of two simulated wooden crates. Three foam blocks, which are also removable, hold these crates in position in the car. With its crates and foam blocks out, the gondola could then carry just about any load that a new train enthusiast, regardless of age, can fit in it. An example could be the new cell phones for junior and sis. They can make videos with their phones riding around in the gondola and then share these action clips with all their Facebook friends.





At the end of the train, the caboose has a figure representing a crewman riding in the cupola. For rolling stock with few frills, the wire handrails are unexpected as are the two electrical pickup rollers, one on each truck.

Transformer

Basic is the best description for the Z-500 transformer, colloquially called a brick within the hobby. All it does is transform its rated input of 120 VAC to an 18 VAC output. The power plug is the on/off control—plug it into the AC outlet for power up and unplug it for power down. A 4-amp circuit breaker is manually resettable.

DCS Remote Commander

My usual reference to the DCS Remote Commander is DCS lite, and as such, this train control system is a feature-reduced subset of DCS that controls only one engine; that is, the one included in the set. Rudimentary operations are possible with this system, which includes Proto-Sound startup or shutdown, throttle up or down, reverse, horn or whistle, bell, sound volume, and coupler opening. Initiating random special sounds and triggering passenger or freight yard announcements can also be done. However, no emergency stop or power-off function is provided other than unplugging the power cord.

The hardware consists of the handheld remote and the interface box that connects

between the Z-500 and the track. Buttons for each of the eight functions plus the throttle control are on the handheld, and the interface box has a green indicator that lights momentarily upon receiving a command from the handheld. Two owner-supplied AA batteries power the handheld, but the interface box gets its power from the Z-500.

Unpacking and Assembly

Setup of the set took less than 30 minutes, and that included taking the items that make up the set out of their individual boxes, which were packed inside the colorful set box. The sensations I experienced while unpacking each of the boxes and then looking at its content for a few minutes was not unlike the excitement of a Christmas morning.

Assembling the loop of RealTrax was a little bothersome depending on the fit of the plastic tabs under the rails. I had trouble aligning and snapping together a couple of the joints on the straight sections and connecting them to the curved section. Putting the curved sections together went without a hitch.

Electrical connections could not get any simpler for the neophyte or experienced hobbyist. At the track end of the hookup is the illuminated lock-on that plugs into any of the sections. Power feed wires with factory-installed, color-coded plugs connect the electronic interface box for the Remote Commander to the lock-

on. And a single coaxial plug on the end of the cord from the transformer plugs into the interface box. In my opinion, the entire electrical system was well thought out and implemented. In a word...nice.




Remote Commander and DCS

Unlike DCS, which uses wireless radio frequency signals for two-way communication between the DCS remote and the TIU, the Remote Commander sends line-of-sight infrared codes to its interface box in one-way communication. Essentially, the operator points the handheld remote at the interface box and presses the desired button. The interface box receives the infrared code, translates it, and sends the required digital command to the engine for execution. If the handheld remote is not pointed more or less directly at the interface box, or if an object is in the path of the infrared beam, the intended operation such as direction change won't happen. Additionally, the Remote Commander is meant to work only with the set's engine, so the ID number sent by this system to the engine is fixed and cannot be changed.

However, the set's engine can be run on any layout using DCS or conventional transformer-controlled power, as I proved on the Editorial Carpet Central Railroad. Even though the Remote Commander is a feature-reduced control system, the engine has the fully featured Proto-Sound 3.0 electronics, including supercapacitors for backup power to support an orderly

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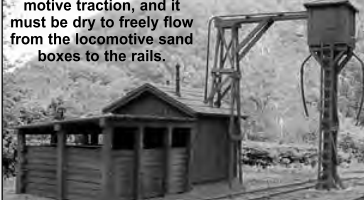
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shutdown. But there is a caveat for taking the set's ten wheeler from a DCS layout back to the track run with the Remote Commander. When the MTH Ready-To-Run set's engine powers up on a DCS layout, it is assigned a new ID number and runs as any other DCS steam locomotive. But with this new ID number, the engine will no longer work with the Remote Commander until it is reset back to its factory default ID. As a further condition, resetting the engine back to its factory default can only be done within the advanced menu available only on a DCS remote controller. But once reset, the engine will run again under control of the Remote Commander.


At Trackside

Not that the train ran great on the O31 loop of RealTrax supplied with the set, but my wife was so impressed with it she asked if I would like to buy it for my collection. My response was that it's a neat toy, but I'd rather have the one that got away—see my "Helper Engine" column in the previous issue, Run 258.

Initially, the Remote Commander behaved unpredictably and randomly failed to execute commands, even with my being careful to point the handheld remote at the infrared receiver on top

of the interface box. I didn't see any particular pattern indicating an operator error, so I gave up in frustration and decided to come back to the problem later. But after spending a couple of hours of typing on this review, I went back to the set, and it worked without a glitch from that point on. Even after running the engine on the CCRR and then resetting it back to its factory default, the Remote Commander worked every time, all the way to packing the set for return to MTH.

The engine and lights in the caboose never used more than 20 watts, even with the train running fast enough to get visually unstable in the O31 curves. As to the inevitable question of did the engine leave the rails—no! But on a couple of the curves, it appeared to be just shy of launch speed, so I immediately slowed it down.

While I'm on the topic of speed control, I quickly developed a preference for the rocker switch throttle on the Remote Commander's handheld over the thumb wheel of the DCS remote. Overall, I rather liked the petite handheld, even if I did have to point it in the general direction of the interface box every time I wanted the engine to do something. But mainly, the train set was fun to run! 

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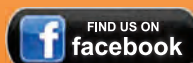
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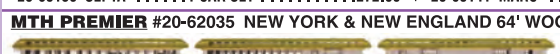
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Born to Have Fun

Article and Photos by Jim Teeple

I suppose it was only natural that I would become interested in trains. My father was an engineer for the B&O during the steam era and through the 1970s, and my uncle was track maintenance supervisor for the B&O Akron Division. During World War II, he was recruited by the government and was responsible for establishing the track network at the Ravenna Arsenal in Ohio. For that reason, two engines on my 3-rail O gauge layout have special meaning to me: the B&O Royal Blue 4-6-4 Hudson and the E3 diesel A-B-A units that ran a daily schedule between Washington, DC, and New York City.

In the 1950s, a group of railroad history fans would charter the Royal Blue, ride the steam-powered version from Washington to Chicago, and then return

to DC with diesels heading the consist. It was past the steam-to-diesel transition period, and not many had my father's certification to engineer both steam and diesel. As a result, he was selected to make both runs each year. He would take the steamer west, attired in his bib overalls complete with red neckerchief, and return on the diesel in a suit and tie. I also was fortunate to have ridden the Royal Blue from Washington to New York in 1957.

Like other boys my age back when trains were the toy of choice for most lads, I would sneak the Lionel catalog to school in my lunch pail and argue the merits of the Lionel 3-rail Magne-Traction with the 2-rail American Flyer guys during recess.

It was two weeks before Christmas in 1951 that Dad told me about an ad placed

in the local paper by a man who had a used Lionel train setup for sale. If I was willing to settle for second hand, we could go look at it, or we could wait and see if Santa might bring something new. Of course I would

A Norfolk and Western J passenger engine approaches the station.



happily settle for second hand. I was, after all, used to having some second-generation items in my life and not ashamed of it at all. My mom made me the nicest shirts out of flowered feedbags she bought for 50 cents from the turkey farm adjacent to our own farm and much nicer in my view than what the other kids had. So, Dad and I looked at and bought the used set, which turned out to be a prewar Lionel with lots of O27 track and many cars, switches, and cardboard buildings. We got it all for \$50.00—a lot of money in those days—but it amounted to much more train than Santa ever could have mustered up new. Many hours were spent lying on the floor in the parlor watching, at eye level of course, the engine's headlight reflect off the rails as it rounded the bend. This was in a time before we had TV and were pretty much required to use our imagination while listening to the radio. My grandson once asked me if I was born before fun was



That's the B&O Railroad Royal Blue in the foreground, and it provides first-class daily passenger service along the line. The railroad's steam power includes a B&O Hudson, Union Pacific Challenger, and Pennsylvania Camelback.





The maintenance-of-way crew doesn't stop work for even a short break as this Norfolk and Western J exits the twin tunnels.

invented, but I think it's safe to say that some of the most fun you can have is fun you invent for yourself.

That first train was later set up in the basement of our farmhouse on two sheets of plywood. I continued to add to it every time a birthday or Christmas came along and could pretty much count on there being

a new present of some Lionel or Plasticville stuff. The failed strings of Christmas lights even were recycled as interior lights for my buildings.

That layout remained in place for many years until I sold it to get money to buy photo darkroom equipment and a 4x5 press camera. I remember my mom asking

many times if I was sure I wanted to sell my trains. They had been my prized possession, and trading trains for photo equipment turned out to be a difficult but wise choice as it led to a career that lasted a lifetime: first as a portrait photographer for a local studio, then as photographer with an engineering company, and finally into the law enforcement field where I retired twice. Still I never lost interest in trains. I was always looking at train magazines and public layout displays, but raising a family on a cop's wages left no time or money for trains.

In 1990 after my first retirement, I started once again looking into the hobby. At first I planned to model in N scale or HO but soon found that my ability to work with something that small at my age was a stress on my agility and eyesight. So I came back to O gauge and am definitely glad I did.

My initial plan was to construct an island in the middle of the basement with one side devoted to postwar Lionel and the other side to contemporary MTH hi-rail. With that plan in mind, I started acquiring most all of the operating accessories made by Lionel between 1945 and 1969 and restoring them both operationally and cosmetically. After several years passed and with another retirement fast approaching (including more time to work on a layout), I determined I needed to make the best use

The smoke shop gets a new roof, and the hardware company warehouse dock workers on the next block are being kept busy. The warehouse was made from two Downtown Deco buildings that were modified and combined.





A Rio Grande Hudson passes my latest addition to the layout, which is the interlocking tower with a detailed interior.

Here's a view down Railroad Avenue as a Denver Rio Grande Hudson crosses the trestle at the west end of town.



of the space available. After long and careful thought, I decided to settle for MTH trains with a focus on realism and detail. Finally, a plan was coming together in my head, and I would start on the actual construction. I would model small town America, and the era would be late 1940s to early 1950s during the transition from steam to diesel

A new furnace and hot water tank installed against one basement wall increased the space available for trains. The layout now measures 8' x 21' with triple-level plywood benchwork that is fitted with Atlas track laid on cork roadbed. Motive power is MTH Proto-Sound 2 engines and rolling stock. The buildings are a mixture of Ameri-Towne, Downtown Deco, Lionel, craftsman kits, and others. I operate the layout with DCS powered by a single Z-4000 transformer. A separate 28-amp, 12 VDC power supply is used for lighting and some accessories.

Every section of track has wires soldered to the bottom of each of the three rails that run down through the cork and



This scene looks east along Railroad Avenue. That Blue Comet is westbound on the edge of town.

plywood to 14-gauge bus wires that run along the perimeter of the layout from the Track Interface Unit. In hindsight, this turned out to be overkill, but I decided to do it this way because, if it turned out later to be needed, it was not going to be possible to do easily or neatly after the fact. The only exception is when an insulated section of outside rail was needed for activating accessories such as crossing signals. Plus I reasoned that even if all that additional wiring wasn't necessary, it sure wouldn't hurt anything to have it already in place. The result is that getting a strong and consistent DCS signal throughout the layout has never been a problem.

Not being particularly interested in replicating prototype operating procedures, I laid track in five separate loops for continuous running of the trains, with two reversing loops on the second level. The layout includes more than 250' of track, and I am able to have at least five trains running in various directions on a continuous basis.

All of the tunnel portals and rocks were cast with Hydrocal in handmade rubber molds, and the terrain was formed using plaster cloth over woven and glued inch-

thick cardboard strips followed by applications of latex paint and landscaping materials.

Among my favorite buildings is a

structure I made with a Lionel grain elevator, a Lionel coaling station, and a few spare parts added to create a mine that covers two levels. This structure could use some

The mine at West Hill consists of several additions to modified Lionel structures, and the number of additions just keeps growing. It's obviously a profitable mining operation.





Commuters begin to gather on the platform as a Pennsy Camelback chuffs slowly into the station.

additional detail, but I am still debating what to add and where to add it.

The feed mill on my layout is modeled after a classic Farm Bureau feed mill like

the one in Phalanx Station, Ohio. When I got my first drivers license years ago, my Saturday job was to take our 1947 Dodge 3/4-ton stake-body farm truck and trans-

port feed to the mill about a half mile from the farm where it was ground by water power. Even before I was old enough to have a license, I made the trip with our Ford 9n tractor and hay wagon. I have a lot of memories of that time and place and like to keep those memories alive on my layout when possible.

A B&O Hudson passes the upper-level town, which is made up primarily of Ameri-Towne and Downtown Deco structures.



Another favorite is the Downtown Deco beverage dock. It was initially supposed to be an eight-bay flat placed against a wall, but I cut it and wrapped it around the City View apartment building and added a roof to make it into a unique warehouse (it's the building with the auction sign).

The market storefront was cut out and replaced with two wooden doors to become a single-engine firehouse, just right for small town America.

A Downtown Deco union hall on the city level was modified to have a full-windowed store front.

Ameri-Towne rooftop water towers have been added to many of the tall buildings in the city. Roofs are a very visible part of the layout, and I am in the process of working on making stacks, vents, and details to help improve their appearance. I

also plan to learn the art of silicone mold making so I can cast in resin some small details like skylights and stairways that are otherwise unavailable. The city structures are mostly made from various combinations of fronts and sides from the Ameri-Towne 820 series of kits.

The gas station is a converted Lionel small loading dock. I plan to replace it and several of the other plastic buildings with some wooden structures of similar design. This will give me something to do in summer evenings when we are out touring the country in our travel trailer. Sure beats watching TV.

I like MTH and Woodland Scenic figures and also buy unpainted Artista pewter and Preiser resin figures because I enjoy painting them and giving a distinctive look to my miniature population.

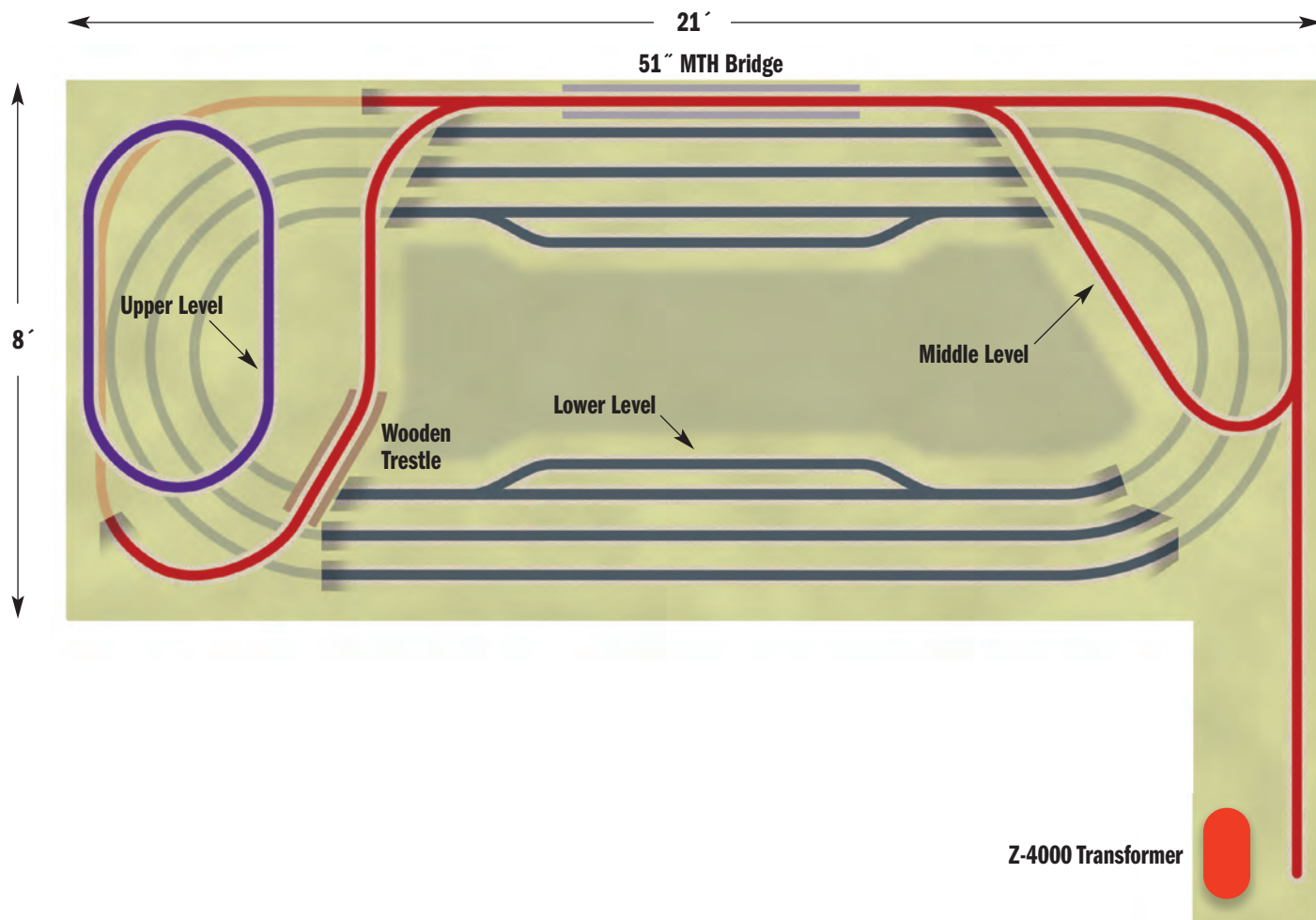
I started out lighting interiors of the buildings with LEDs thinking that they would create virtually no heat, would not use much current, and would rarely burn out. But I discovered that LEDs emit a beam



The early morning stillness around the hobo camp is temporarily disturbed as the Blue Comet rumbles by.

rather than an even 360-degree illumination. So I went back to using incandescent grain-of-wheat bulbs. The LEDs work great

for things like the blinking lights on the barriers at the construction site and the flashing dome lights on the police cruiser,



About the Author

Jim and his wife, Ilene, have lived in the same house in Warren, Ohio, for 50 years and have raised three daughters. They now have five grandchildren. Jim is retired from law enforcement as a Warren police officer for 30 years, with the last 21 years as a detective doing major crime scene investigation, polygraph, and other forensic sciences. After retirement, Jim served as an investigator for the Trumbull County prosecutor's office, where he spent another 15 years. He has also been involved in restoring vintage prewar antique automobiles and enjoys traveling in his fully restored 1931 Model A Ford. Amateur Radio is another of his hobbies. He is licensed as N8DOD and has contacted over 200 countries.



Jim Teeple with his grandson Sammy

but for now, I'll stick with incandescent lighting for the buildings.

The animated signs from Miller Engineering are great, and I plan to add more to the layout. I use the Miller Engineering power module to reduce 12–16 volts down to 4 volts and thus eliminate the battery packs. One module will power several signs.

Building the layout has not been without its challenges and even an occasional misstep. For example, I had an area on the layout that needed some sort of feature. I decided on a water tower. After completing construction and spending more hours shingling the tank's roof than I did on my real two and a half car garage. I placed it in the location it was intended for and quickly decided that it was too nice to hide way back there. So I brought it out, relocated an interlocking tower and an oil tank, and placed the water tower in their place. That original scene-challenged spot still needs some attention.

This keeps me well occupied for many hours and sure helps pass the long Ohio winters. Like many in the hobby, I sure could use more space to expand the layout, but I find that there is always something more to do with what I already have. 🚂

B&O Royal Blue A-B-A diesel passenger service exits the west tunnel as the Pennsy B6 takes on water from the Altoona Models 24' craftsman kit water tower.



A solution to problem road crossing locations

Test Your Nerve, Cross at the Curve

Article and Photos by Eliot Scher



1



I will be the first to admit having a great fascination with grade crossings and rails that appear to be buried in asphalt. Track is after all the most important scenic element on the Munoz Lines and just about any model railroad, and I have endeavored to make my track as realistic as possible. A modeler has only to watch real trains rolling by grade crossings to be motivated to re-create that important detail in 1:48 scale. We know that in most situations, a railroad is going to have to cross a street or highway at some point. If you have a realistic town or city, you'll likely need an equally realistic grade crossing somewhere. Obviously, it's both preferable and easier to model a road crossing on a straight section of track, but I've never really been one to do things the easy way. I decided to run a grade crossing across three curved tracks (Photo 1).

As is often the case, my imagination runs ahead of my strategies. I had never built a realistic grade crossing at a straight track. How did I know I could do so over three curves with decreasing radii? I have heard some say there is a fine line between bravery and foolishness. Nevertheless, my mind was made up, and I forged ahead.

I selected an area between two

structures in the town of Roseville, named for my 95-year-old mom, that would likely lead to the center of town. The grade crossing would traverse two main lines and a siding—all curved. To make things even more difficult, I decided my asphalt would meet the railheads with barely any perceptible gap. The interior of the grade crossings between rails would be wooden planks weathered for effect.

My initial plan included using Gator board, a laminate of polystyrene foam sandwiched between veneers of resin-impregnated wood fiber. This material can be painted without fear of warping or rippling. Gator board comes in various sizes and thicknesses. I decided to use 1/4" board I purchased in 2' x 3' widths. The other very basic and readily obtainable materials needed for this project are shown in Photo 2.

I began by creating templates made to match the exact curvature of the rails, one track at a time. I took a white 8-1/2 x 11 sheet of paper, held the paper firmly in place over the outside main line, and made a mask of the rails by running my fingers over the paper where it covered each rail. After four or five passes, the paper mask took on the exact curvature of the track and also reflected the depth of the rails (Photo 3).

I returned to my workbench and carefully cut out the exterior area of the outside of the curve and taped it to the foam board. Gator board is very difficult to cut cleanly, so you must use a new hobby knife blade for each piece of board. I slowly sank the blade into the board in 1/4" movements to score along the cut line and then used the knife to make the full cut. The knife left a very smooth edge, and I held my breath as I placed the foam board against the outside of the rail. It was perfect! I knew I was on to something.

I repeated this paper mask process for the opposite side of that track and once again was rewarded with a piece of foam board that was practically a perfect match for the edge of the rail (Photo 4). I used my hobby knife to cut slight adjustments to make the fit even better.

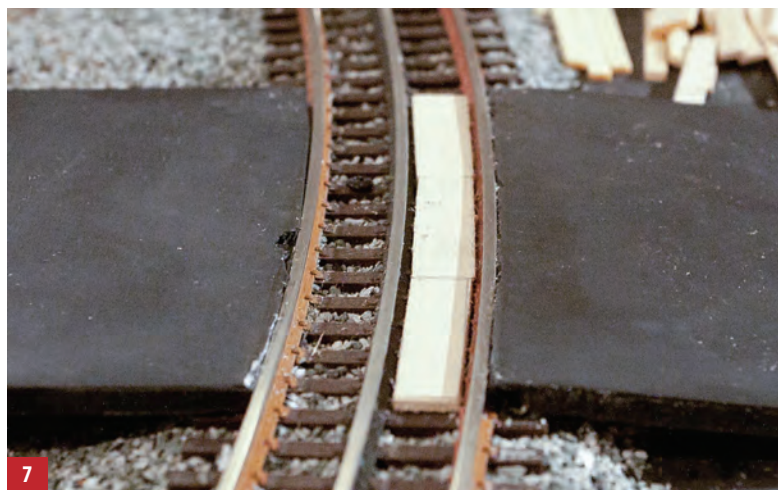


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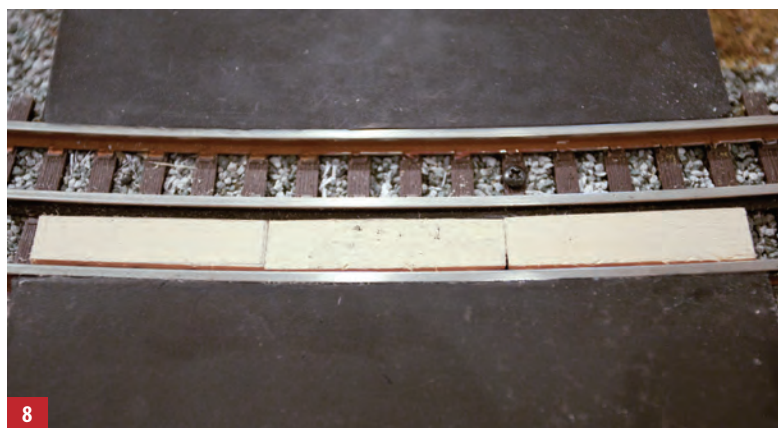
The process worked equally well for the inner main line and the siding. I used flat black camouflage paint by Rust-Oleum to create a base coat that I would later weather (Photo 5). When the paint had dried, I mounted the foam board against the track on the outside and on a downward angle away from the track since the road would slope upwards to the rails. The foam board on the other side would meet the outer track of the inside main line, so that piece was placed level in between the two main line tracks, as seen in Photo 6. I repeated that leveling process with the inner mainline curve and the outer rail of the siding. On the opposite side of the siding, the foam board was angled down again. I now had all the foam board crossings in their places.

I used yellow carpenter's glue to attach the board to the plywood tabletop. I do know that special noninvasive glues are needed with ordinary foam board, but I assumed the yellow glue would not be absorbed into the Gator board. Any areas adjacent to the track that were not snug against the rail were filled with spackle. When dry, I softly sanded it with very fine grit paper.

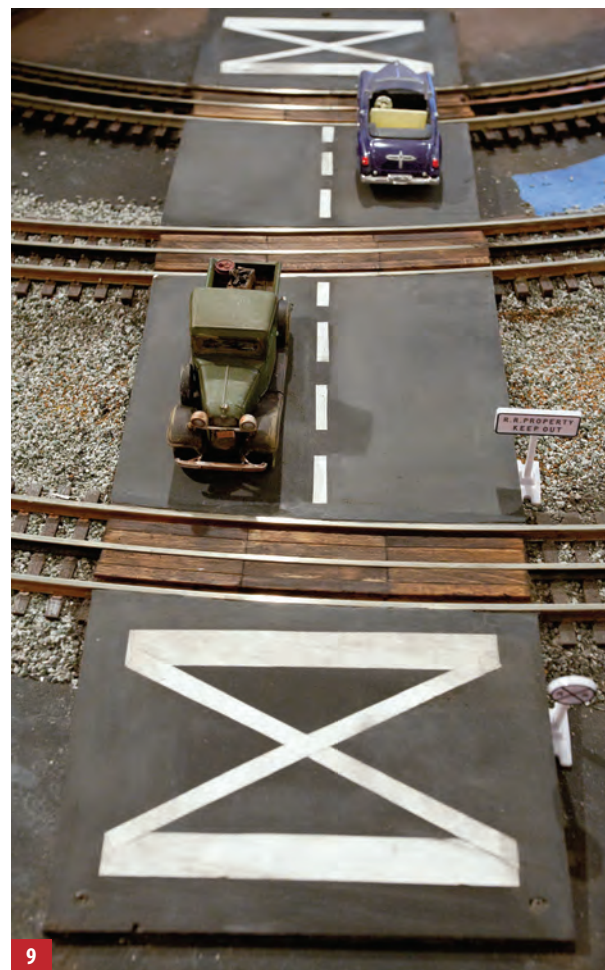
The next step was to insert wood planks between the rails. Atlas O track presents a problem in that regard, and a logistical solution was needed. In other words, some experimentation was in order. I soon discovered that the plastic spike heads and tie plates on Atlas O rail do not permit scale-size ties to be placed parallel to the track and to lay flat. So I cut sections of thin balsa wood



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that fit exactly between the spike heads and tie plates. I found that if the balsa wood was slightly too wide, I could push it down (balsa wood is very soft) and achieve a flat base for the next layer of planks (Photo 7).

I now placed three O scale ties end to end on the balsa against the center rail (Photo 8). I was careful to ensure that the center rail height was slightly higher than the planks; otherwise, my locomotives would be coming to an abrupt halt at crossings as pickup rollers touched wood and not rail.

Now I hit another snag. A second row of O scale ties next to the first was not wide enough and left too much space between the first tie and the outer rail. It simply didn't look good. Adding a third tie was just as bad because then there would be

insufficient room for wheel flanges. I was temporarily derailed. I was trying to avoid cutting lots of ties. I then remembered a bag of Woodsies Craft Sticks I had bought at a craft store. Woodsies come in various sizes. My Woodsies were the same thickness as the O scale ties and slightly wider and longer. The width was perfect for me to lay them down next to the O scale ties, and I could cut the length to fit. I was back in business. Once the planks were glued in place, I could get to the fun part of detailing and weathering (Photo 9).

I used painter's drywall tape for road markings. I cut long strips and then individually cut each marking. I based my street marking plan on regulation road marking standards found on the Internet. The tape is sticky, and after I cut and

applied the tape, I sprayed the road with Dullcoat. After the Dullcoat dried, I used Bragdon Enterprises powders in various shades of charcoal to weather both the asphalt and the planks.

The final test was to run trains over my new grade crossing (Photo 10). Of course, I pushed boxcars across as I worked—a good idea—so I had every reason to believe I would not have any serious problems. I cleaned the track with care and rolled a Santa Fe Northern through the crossing. I tooted the whistle for two longs, a short, and another long. Now I could blow the whistle for a legitimate reason. By law in the real world of railroading, I was required to do so and was more than happy to comply in my 1:48 scale world. 🚂

A layout to visit this holiday season



This MTH RailKing line Triplex is hauling a 50-car coal drag through farm country where a Mennonite barn and new farm house are under construction. The Mennonite community is an active part of the Blackstone area.

Bevell's O Gauge Seasonal Spectacular

Article by Ron Timma

Photos by Tom Thurston

For more than 32 years, people have made pilgrimages to the small farming town of Blackstone, Virginia, between Thanksgiving and January to see the free model train layout and Christmas display at Bevell's Hardware store, one of the largest holiday train displays on the East Coast. Visitors can see over 12 O gauge trains running at any one time ranging from a Southern Railway 0-6-0 hauling a logging train to a triple-headed set of scale UP Big Boys pulling more than 60 cars.

Bobby Daniels and his wife, Lynn, are

the owners of Bevell's Hardware, and when they got into the business in 1979, they created the store's first O27 layout on a 4x8 sheet of plywood. Bobby assembled the trains, and Lynn used her artistic talent to create the scenery with a Department 56 Christmas village. Their young son, Robbie, operated the layout. Each year the layout grew bigger and better, with the 2011 layout being 20' x 56'. Emphasizing scenes typical of a small town USA agricultural farming community, the highly animated layout depicted national and

local history, agricultural and military interests, Christmas villages, and other attractions. About 37,000 visitors saw the layout in 2011, including more than 1,600 school children. A record daily attendance of nearly 2,300 visitors was also set in 2011 a few days after the layout was featured on Virginia Public Broadcasting's "Virginia Currents" show. That's a long way from when Bobby started collecting trains with his dad, a former Norfolk & Western station agent in Blackstone in the 1940s.

As was the case with so many young boys

of the 1950s, Bobby's mom and dad gave him his first Lionel train set. The holiday layout today is a comprehensive display of Bobby's and Lynn's combined interests in trains, antique cars, trucks and tractors, Department 56 and Lemax buildings, Disney characters, and circus items. Much of Bobby's antique train collection isn't even on the holiday layout, but it is displayed year round in row after row of display shelves along the store walls.

The Bevell's Hardware train layout has many different facets that appeal to old and young alike by showing some railroad history, local Blackstone history, and small light-hearted animated scenes that entertain everyone. Examples include a man swimming who is being chased by an alligator, a boy flying his plane in the park, boys hanging out at the watering hole, children having a snowball fight, ice skaters in a park, and a hunter who never seems to be able to bag the rabbit.

Railroad and U.S. history is represented by scenes such as a reconstruction of

the May 10, 1869, golden spike ceremony at Promontory Summit, Utah, upon the completion of the first transcontinental railroad. A number of other scenes represent the Civil War period. If visitors look carefully enough, they will even find the presidents on Mount Rushmore. O scale riders in moving hot air balloons are treated to a bird's eye view of the whole scene.

Local and Virginia military history is commemorated by models representing Fort Pickett, located just outside Blackstone and Fort Eustis, headquarters for the U.S. Army Transportation Corps. Many Fort Pickett buildings, the airfield, and WWII prisoner of war stockades are represented, painted in their original camouflage paint schemes.

Most real military railroad operation and maintenance training is conducted at Fort Eustis, and Bobby's layout depicts the engine and maintenance facilities found there during the steam era. It's common to hear Army men and women comment on how they appreciate being honored for

their current service. It is especially heart-warming to hear someone talk about just getting back from Iraq or Afghanistan while looking at an army railroad car with a Welcome Home sign. A special train added in 2011 was the Welcome Home Troops Train, which had signs on many of the military cars acknowledging the various local National Guard units and remembering veterans of past and present wars. Running around the fort is an Abram's main battle tank that operates on K-Line SuperStreets track. Soldiers can be seen rappelling down a tower, while nearby others are on the firing range honing their marksmanship skills.

Many historical Blackstone buildings are represented including the John Thomas Antique Carriage Museum and Schwartz's Tavern, a completely restored 1790 tavern located in the city park next to Bevell's Hardware. There is action on one of the layout's most popular scenes: a city block of buildings with four different fires burning at one time. It takes the full attention



It's winter in Virginia when the layout is on public display, but there's always a clear lake, sunny beach, palm trees, sunbathers, and people swimming to remind visitors of the summer gone by and summers still to come.



The Abrams tank on the Ft. Pickett area of the layout actually operates on K-Line SuperStreets track. This scene also depicts the various firing ranges located at the installation.

of one layout operator to keep those fires burning. In this animated scene, the voices of the firemen, policemen, and emergency personnel are recordings of actual people who work in Blackstone's police and fire departments.

Also included is a drive-in theater like the one Bobby visited as a teenager, and it's always a toss up regarding which movie young visitors like better: *Thomas the Tank Engine* or *Cars*. The drive-in is one of the most popular scenes with youngsters.

In 2011, Bobby's layout went "green" with six power-producing windmills, a new oil field and gas producing facilities, and trains pulled by the new genset engines that rank as railroading's most efficient diesel engines.

For many years, Lynn has paid special attention to showcasing the circus collection including both the

trains and the circus. Two or three roller coasters run each year along with the many rides and the animated side shows associated with all circuses. Inside the main big

top are animated high-wire walkers, animal acts, and a full crowd of people.

In 2011, Bobby added a new 25' circus train that has the type of smooth-sided metal

A passenger station on the upper level helps to nicely integrate Ashe Rawls' old layout into sections of Bobby's display.





One of the key components of the layout's logging scene is this multifunction building that provides engine maintenance, car construction and repair, and operations support that includes coal and water services.

The game at the ballpark features calls being announced over loudspeakers. The small ice cream stand at upper right is a scale model of Bobby's first business venture after he graduated from high school. A few years later, he bought Bevell's Hardware.



cars currently being used to transport the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey consist, a mile long train in real life. This is in addition to Bobby's antique collection of circus cars made from Walthers kits built in the 1950s. Complete with animations and sounds, the circus scene also provides a great place to run Thomas the Tank Engine. A logging operation and gold mine were also added to the layout in 2011.

That layout is created on a platform covered by 3/4" plywood with holes cut for the various animated scenes. At 28" high, the plywood is supported by 2x4 modular sets of frames that are strong enough to walk on. Robbie developed and constructed all the modules for the 2011 layout as he has done for many years. The 28" overall height was selected because it provides an ideal viewing level for both small children and adults.

Plexiglas protects the edge of the layout and needs to be cleaned every evening. To provide access for track cleaning and main-



The 12' long fire scene ranks as a special favorite among the many animated scenes on the layout. The scene started with one MTH burning house and has been expanded each year.

An MTH trolley makes its run past one of Lynn's many Christmas and winter snow scenes. Since she has an extensive collection of ceramic buildings and seasonal animations, the scenes are changed to something new and different every year.



tenance, Bobby created a number of 2' paths between different scenes. These walkways are covered with rubber matting to help them blend in and provide good footing.

After the main table is finished each season, numerous loops of track are added. The track used is 3-rail Atlas O with minimum 72" curves. All wiring is at least 18-gauge or thicker stranded wire. The Atlas O service department has supported Bobby's efforts for many years by sending spare track and rail joiners via overnight delivery, sometimes as complementary aid to a worthy cause. Switches are included in many of the individual scenes, but to help assure consistent operational reliability, they are not used on the main lines.

Control systems include MTH DCS, Lionel TMCC (soon to be replaced by the Lionel Legacy system), and conventional transformer control. All are powered by five MTH Z-4000 transformers, two MRC transformers, and some older Lionel ZW transformers used for lighting, accessories, and animation power.

Even though Bobby's train collection is traditional and covers all scales and manufacturers, he normally runs new production trains from the



Headed by a Southern Railway switcher, the logging train crosses a long viaduct that was created using 10' of Hydrocal rock castings from rubber molds made by members of the local Crewe Railroad Museum.

Circuses are another of Bobby's and Lynn's favorite collecting interests, and the layout's circus area includes more than 20 animations and two new roller coasters from CoasterDynamix.





The working drive-in theater represents the Grove Drive-In, which was a popular destination for local teens including Bobby.

major manufacturers that are equipped with digital command control. It is common for Bobby's engines to log over 500 hours of running time each season, and the MTH system helps maintain a log of running time so maintenance can be performed in a timely manner. Two of his

MTH Big Boys have over 2,500 hours each.

Other members of the family, especially Lynn's daughter Kathy and daughter-in-law Ashley; family friends; volunteers from the local Crewe Railroad Museum in Crewe, Virginia; and the High Bridge Model Railroad Club in Farmville, Virginia,

have all contributed to creating this seasonal display. It takes about 12 weeks to set up the complete layout, and the platform is configured differently every year to give the overall layout a new look. That way, visitors always have to search for their favorite scenes and animations even if they appeared on the previous year's layout.

Ground cover is a mixture of real soil, real rocks, foam, fish tank gravel, and cat litter. Commercial scenery is by manufacturers such as Woodland Scenics and Scenic Express. A number of custom rubber molds were created for making the numerous rock retaining walls and rock outcroppings. The 2011 layout included more than 200 new trees, most in fall colors, that Bobby purchased from DC Rail and Hobby Depot with owners, Dave and Mary Ptak, delivering them personally to make sure they were the right colors for the fall scenery.

The 2011 layout took about six weeks longer to build due to floods, a leaking roof that had to be replaced, and incorporation of a 12' x 24' new center mountain section that was purchased as a complete layout built by Ashe Rawls of Richmond, Virginia.



A Southern Railway 0-6-0 pulls its train through a new part of the layout depicting the phases and equipment used in logging operations. This section was constructed on the back side of Ashe Rawl's original layout.



As if fires in four structures on the block were not enough to contend with, the emergency crews also have to deal with a major accident at the end of Main Street.



The Norfolk & Western renowned Powhatan Arrow passenger train passes an engine service facility with an N&W Class J locomotive in the lead.



The sawmill and adjacent company town represents hundreds of small logging and lumber operations all over the US in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

See Run 245 for photos and details of this nationally recognized mountain layout. The new section has highly detailed scenery and structures. Along with requiring wide load highway permits to move the layout from Richmond to Blackstone, all of the front windows of the store had to be removed so that a long forklift could insert the layout into the building. With additional track and scenes on both ends and back sections, this new mountain section runs four separate trains, and after the holidays it will become a year-long operating layout for the store.

Houses and buildings are typically Lionel and MTH. Other structures and customized commercial buildings, especially where animated, include highly detailed paper buildings. The different scenes spring to life thanks to the hundreds of figures in various positions and poses along with numerous vehicles, lots of signs, boxes, barrels, fences, and others. There is even an engine that has taken a nose-dive into the pond at Ft. Eustis.

The basic purpose of the layout is pure entertainment for a Christmas season, and Bobby is already hard at work on the 2012 version. Future plans are only as big as Bobby's, Lynn's, and their friends' imaginations, so the community can certainly look forward to another great layout in 2012. There even are plans to make the park-size train that runs outside Bevell's Hardware bigger and better for giving youngsters a train ride around the park. 🚂

About the Layout's Builder

Having lived in the Blackstone, Virginia, area for many years, Lynn and Bobby Daniels are well known for their free Christmas train



Lynn and Bobby Daniels

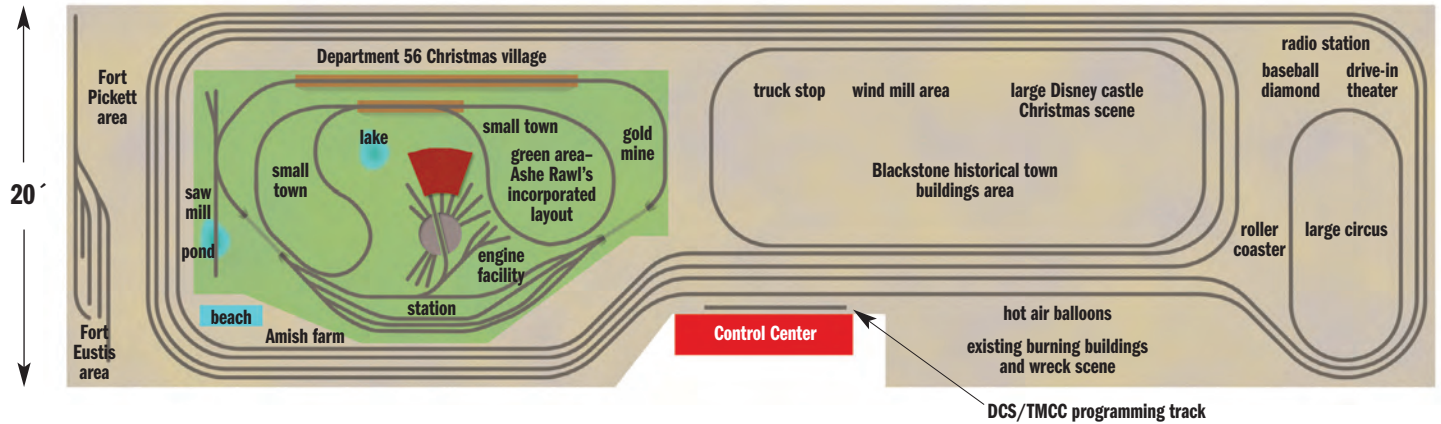
display at Bevell's Hardware and for the numerous occasions when they have provided antique trains, tractors, trucks, and cars to local tractor and steam shows, county fairs, and civic events. For many years, Lynn has helped local civic efforts, and continues to do so. Many have experienced Bobby's homemade ice cream made with the help of an antique hit-or-miss one-cylinder John Deere gasoline engine. Bobby has been an active and supporting volunteer at the Crewe Railroad Museum and has donated most of the materials in the museum's O gauge children's train layout known as "Rails Across Virginia."

Bevell's Hardware 109 N. High Street, Blackstone, Virginia

Train display is open to the public Friday, November 23, 2012, through Sunday, January 13, 2013 (except Christmas Day and New Years Day).

Display hours: 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday-Saturday; Noon-3 p.m. Sunday

Admission: free (Website: www.Bevellshardware.com)



About the Author and the Photographer

A train collector for many years, Ron Timma has helped Bobby Daniels build and operate his Christmas railroad layout for over 15 years. Ron and his wife, Jane, also support the Crewe Railroad Museum and have donated most of the track, trains, and structures for the children's layout. Now retired, they live on a farm in nearby Jetersville, Virginia, where they have a large O and On30 gauge train layout located at their small rural inn known as Hidden Depot Farms Bed and Breakfast (www.hdfbnb.com).

Tom Thurston is a professional photographer who lives in Florida and has a large O gauge layout located in Virginia. Tom's model train photographs have been published in a number of national model train magazines and he has photographed Bobby's Christmas layout on a number of occasions.



This engine facility supports a good many steam and diesel locomotives and includes a turntable, roundhouse, coal trolley, sand facility, and water tower. The yard tower on the lower right controls rail traffic into the yard and through the adjoining passenger station.

All Tanked Up

Article and Photos by Alan Arnold

I grew up in an industrial area in northern Indiana, and among my earliest memories were the massive refinery complexes in the area with all the different size storage tanks and their associated networks of piping and valves. When I started to plan industries for my O gauge layout, I decided early on that there was going to be a refinery.

Refinery tanks come in all shapes and sizes, with the spherical tank being what I regard as the most interesting. Spherical tanks are used for storing a variety of gases and liquids depending on the state of the material. I decided to build a few of these spherical tanks for the layout using, basically, items that I had lying around the house.

Materials I used included 1/4" and 1/8" balsa wood strips, a 6" diameter Christmas tree ornament, a leftover sheet of foam core board, a cutting board, straightedge ruler, scissors, tape, box cutter, CA glue, and various plastic straws and fittings (Photo 1). Plastruct in 1/4" and 1/8" or something similar is recommended, but I made do with all I had available at the time.

The tank is going to be made out of the Christmas tree ornament, which I got for 25 cents at my local discount store. It is 6" in diameter, so measure and cut a piece of foam

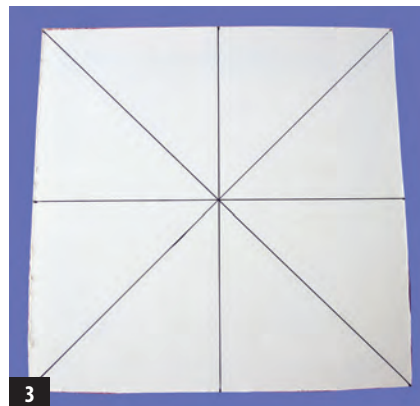
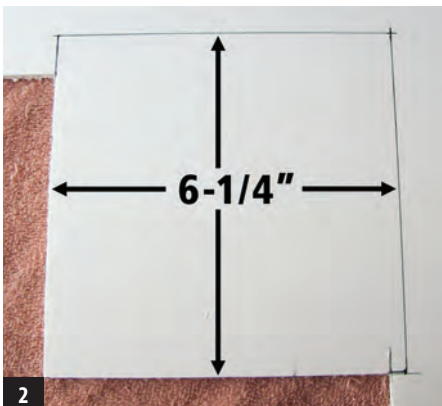


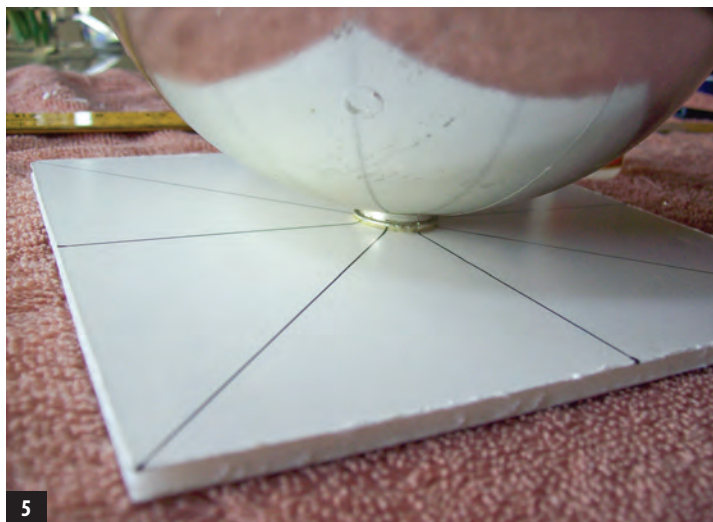
core larger than whatever size bulb you may use (Photo 2). This will provide the base for the tank.

The tank will be positioned on the center of the base, and determining the center is very easy. Simply draw diagonal lines from corner to corner using a straightedge ruler, and where they intersect will mark the center of the base.

Then draw two additional lines through that center point to separate the square base into four equal sections (Photo 3). The importance of these lines will become clear as this project progresses.

Remove the hanging clip on the ornament, then turn the ornament upside down and apply a small amount of CA glue to





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adhere the tank to the center of the base (Photos 4 and 5).

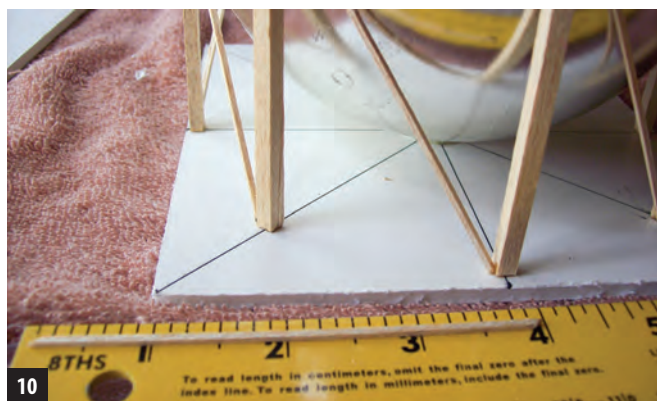
Using the straightedge ruler, determine the location and length of each support leg. In this example, each leg was cut to 3-1/4", and a location mark was made on the base where each leg meets the base (Photo 6). Photo 7 shows how you can quickly mark the other support locations by just measuring the first one from where the tank is sitting in the center to the mark. Then all you have to do is continue marking each location by that measurement for the remaining seven supports.

Since all I had on hand for this project were balsa strips in 1/4" and 1/8" widths, I used these as my support legs and diagonal braces. In my example, I cut the support legs 3-1/4" long and then mounted them in their respective locations (Photos 8 and 9). I then made a diagonal measurement from the top of one support to the bottom of the adjacent support to determine the length of each diagonal member. On my project, that ended up being 3-7/8" (Photos 10 and 11).

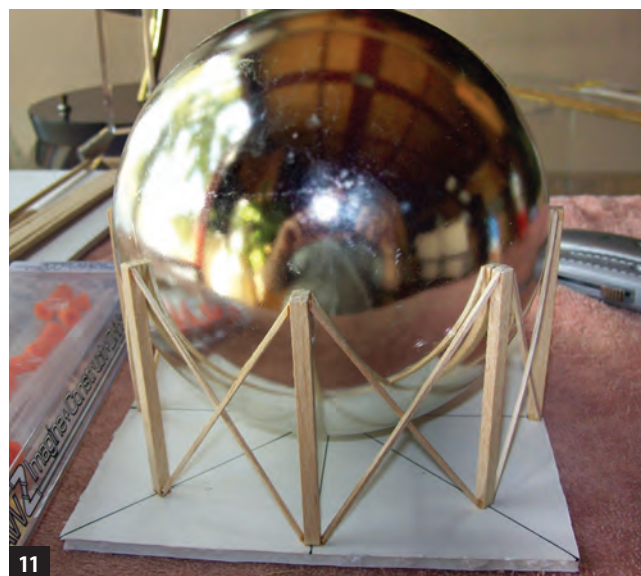
The completed raw tank structure was then detailed with contributions my wife, LaKeeta, made to this project. Some weeks earlier at a local yard sale, she had found a Strawz construction set made up of plastic straws and various connectors. An Internet search for Strawz will



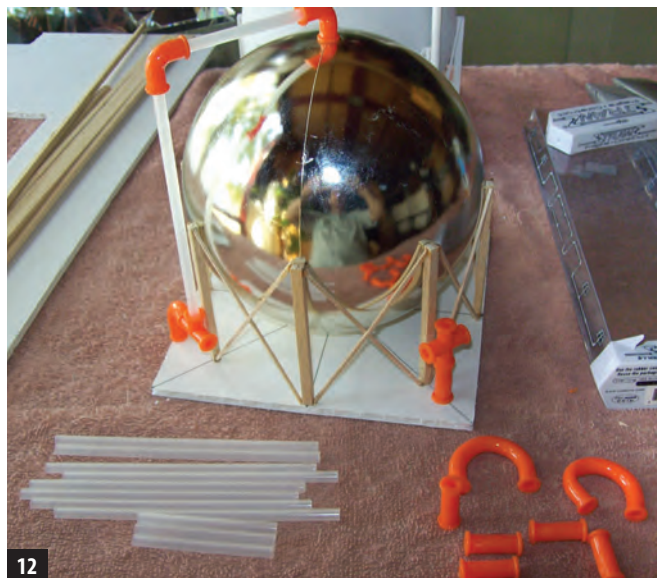
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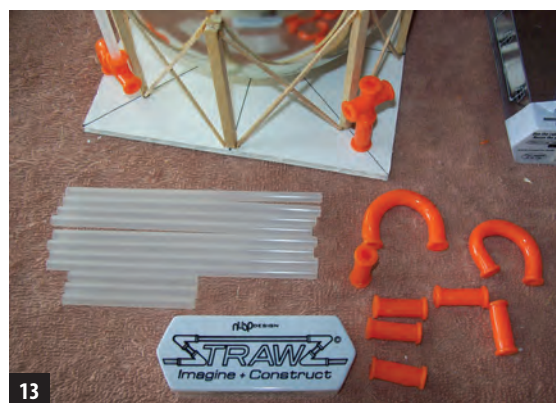
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13

locate retail sources for this product. She is always looking for things I might be able to use on the layout, and so for a buck these little parts came home with her. Since I needed to add piping detail on the tanks, she suggested I use her contribution to the project (Photos 12 and 13).

After adding the piping and fittings, using photos of prototype tanks as a rough guide, I sprayed several coats of flat white over the entire project. I had enough materials to build two of these tanks and added them to my refinery project (Photo 14). I eventually will add appropriate markings on the tanks using homemade decals.

Overall, this was an enjoyable project that can be improved upon using all plastic parts, but it still came out fine and gave me the incentive to build even more tanks. I will need more tanks of all sizes, so it's time for a visit to the plumbing department of a local home improvement center. Can you say PVC? 🛠️



14

Jerry Mickey's dream come true



ABOVE: The Illinois Central normally operates on the upper level, and the Union Pacific runs on the lower level, although other road names do show up on a regular basis.

BEAR CREEK RAILROAD

Article and Photos by Jerry Mickey

Having a large O gauge layout has been a dream of mine since childhood. My initial O gauge train of not many years ago was a Soo Line Lionel Service Station Set

along with enough track for a single loop powered by a 90-watt Lionel 1033 transformer. These purchases were set up on a ping-pong table. The rail line and surround-

ing community were named Bear Creek, a name inspired by a country road near my home town in central Illinois. From that point on, my hobby eventually spread to cover all available space.

The first permanent layout consisted of two 4x8 plywood sheets. This was later expanded with two more sheets to form a U. After three years, a third section was added, and the layout then measured 24'x12' with two levels at each end. After completion, I discovered that the fun is in the building and not simply looking at the finished product.

Construction of the present layout began in January 2006 with 36 particle board 1/2" sheets framed with 1x4s and cut to the correct size. These framed sheets were then assembled in the basement and supported on 2x4s. A shelf attached under the table holds all the transformers, and the area under the layout is left open. This affords ready access and makes cleaning chores much easier.

The Bear Creek Railroad is a two-level layout at each end. It was necessary to complete all track work for the lower level before installing the upper level. For sound control, 1/2" Homasote board painted green was added on top of the particle board. Then track was laid on cork roadbed. After completing the lower level, the upper level was installed. Removable panels, fitted with magnets for easy removal, were added between the upper and lower levels for access to the tracks and trains. A trim board around the edge of the

table finished the project.

The railroad has a walk-around configuration and measures 46' long and from 4' to 14' in width. The upper levels are 42" high, and the lower level is 34" off the floor. The 600' of track and all of the switches are from Atlas O. Curve diameters are 81", 72", and 54". Woodland Scenics ballast covers the roadbed with equal parts of "Gray Blend" and "Gray Ballast" together.

I have a couple of favorite railroads, and they are evident on the layout. The Illinois Central operates on the upper level, and the Union Pacific runs on the lower level. There are a total of five loops. The layout is equipped with DCS, which allows for simultaneous operation of up to 10 trains.

The MTH motive power, with the exception of a Union Pacific Big Boy, is diesel. At any one time, around 125 pieces of rolling stock are on the rails.

Power for the layout is provided by six MTH Z-4000 transformers, two MTH Z-750 transformers, and one Lionel 100-watt brick. Three of the Z-4000 transformers are used for track power running the 10 engines. The remaining three are used to power the 275 lights illuminating the building interiors and other areas on the layout. A Z-4000 can power 60 to 70 incandescent 14-volt Miniaturics lamps per side before tripping the internal overload. The Z-750 transformers and the 100-watt brick run accessories and a small display area. All track wiring utilizes 12-gauge wire soldered to Atlas track connectors with connections spaced 8' to 10' apart. As DCS performs most reliably with star wiring on this type of layout, 1,700' of 12-gauge wire was required. This combination produces a DCS signal reading of 10 throughout the line.

Buildings are the true highlights of the Bear Creek Railroad. All 110 structures are



The main yard is located on the middle area of my layout.



The Bear Creek nursery is complete down to the finest details.



Workers and equipment at this tunnel excavation site need to be especially vigilant for passing trains.



The highlight of the town area is the main station. The interior of this two-story building includes a detailed waiting room, ticket office, business office, board room, executive office, and grill. There are 25 lights and 80 figures in and around the station. The roof is finished with 18 packages of slate shingles from Builders In Scale.

built to scale with no models or kits used. Many buildings are patterned after those from my childhood or from my current home in central Iowa. Buildings visible from around the perimeter of the layout have detailed interiors complete with furnishings, accents, and 850 figures, most of which are from Arttista.

Trees, bushes, flowers, boulders, rock formations, and water features are hand-made. Approximately 250 dogs, cats, birds,

varmints, and farm animals have made Bear Creek their home. Cruising the hand-crafted roads are over 245 cars, pickup trucks, buses, semis, motorcycles, fire engines, police cars, and taxis.

The layout is divided into rural, middle, and town areas. There are 21 scenes in the rural area including a coal mine, barber shop, animal clinic, cafe, post office and general store, church, monument company, tavern, lumberyard, fruit and

vegetable stand, train depot, fur buyer, and Anti-Thief Association Hall. The farm is complete with house, barn, sheds, fields, farm animals, farm machinery, trucks, and figures—similar to the place I lived in until I was 16. The main attraction and largest structure in the rural area is the grain co-op.

The middle area is divided by an 8' hand-fabricated bridge. The bridge, with two tracks, connects the rural and town areas. Built of styrene, it stands a scale 31'



The ruling motive power on the Bear Creek is diesel-electric, a lot of which is both contemporary and big.



Bear Creek Co-op is the centerpiece of the rural area. It was constructed using bass wood and stands 20" tall. The roofs are corrugated strips of tarpaper made from masking tape painted black. Next to the elevator is a silo and office. The silo is constructed from a 16" section of 3" PVC pipe.

high and 384' long and supports heavy traffic. The smaller side of the middle area contains the yard and switch tower. The larger side has 10 attractions, including a hobo camp, sandlot baseball field, motel, and restaurant. A 9" monitor and DVD show movies and cartoons at the drive-in theater.

A highlight of the middle section is the two-hole golf course. The greens and tees are all elevated and contoured leading to demanding drives and challenging putts. This was accomplished using 1-1/2" thick foam board shaved to form sloping and undulating greens. Woodland Scenics supplied the grass in varied shades for length and tone. The 10 golf carts, 14 golfers, clubs, bags, balls, ball washers, and other accessories are from Kramer Products.

The largest area is the town and its 47 vignettes. Most of Bear Creek's business, commerce, and retail trade of Bear Creek occur here. There are four major streets with buildings on both sides that contain



The grain co-op office is brick made with foam brick sheets from Heki-dur. The interior is complete with desks, file cabinets, phones, typewriters, grain testers, soda pop machine, and ledgers. The exteriors of all structures are weathered using wash, paint, or chalk.

what is normally found in a town of 5,000 to 6,000 people in the 1950s and 1960s. Some examples include a school, bank, garage, library, auto dealership, movie theater, bike shop, city hall, florist, pool hall, YMCA, implement dealer, newspaper, hardware store, furniture store, and homes. All are built using Heki-dur brick or stone sheets. They are lighted, detailed, and populated.

The highlight of the town area is the railroad station. In deciding what this building should look like, I searched the Web for images of train stations. One was the old Chicago, Burlington and Quincy station in Creston, Iowa, which currently serves as Creston City Hall. After a road trip to see this great building, construction began. It took three months to complete. Heki-dur brick was again used with styrene substituting for concrete. The interior is detailed including pictures and paintings from Print Shop that adorn the walls.



Recreational activities abound for Bear Creek's ever-growing population. Here's the challenging two-hole golf course.



For evening relaxation and perhaps a bit of romancing, the drive-in theater features cartoons and movies, such as Goldfinger now showing on the live screen.



Baseball competes with golf as a favorite sport in Bear Creek.



A view through the main display window of Johns Bikes reveals an interior that is complete.



Farmers Produce provides the very freshest and finest organically grown vegetables.



This aerial view of downtown Bear Creek could just as well be a photo of any real-life small town.



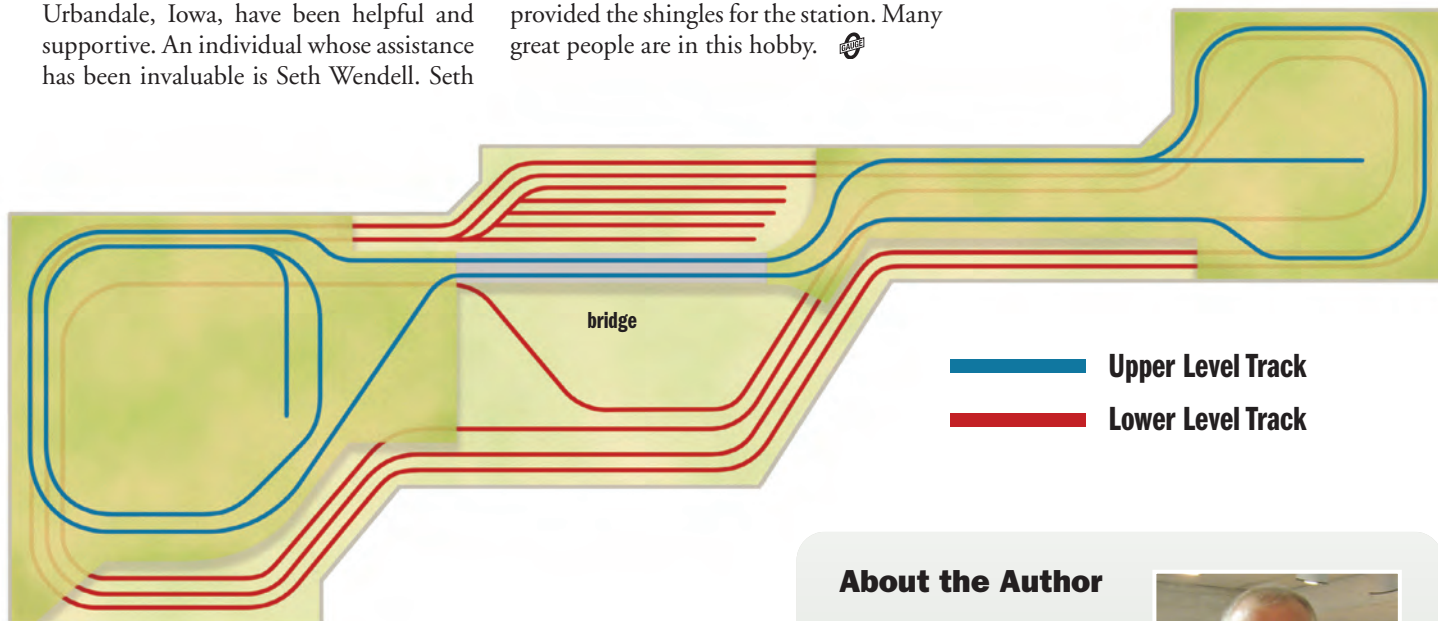
Sam's Barber Shop, like other buildings visible around the perimeter of my layout, features an interior that includes the smallest of details.



Here's an inside view of the barber shop, which contains the things found in a typical small-town tonsorial emporium.

In building the Bear Creek Railroad, I met many outstanding individuals. Dave Harvey and the guys at Hobby Haven in Urbandale, Iowa, have been helpful and supportive. An individual whose assistance has been invaluable is Seth Wendell. Seth

built the benchwork and will return any time a revision or change is needed. Another example is Clint at Builders In Scale, who provided the shingles for the station. Many great people are in this hobby. 🚂

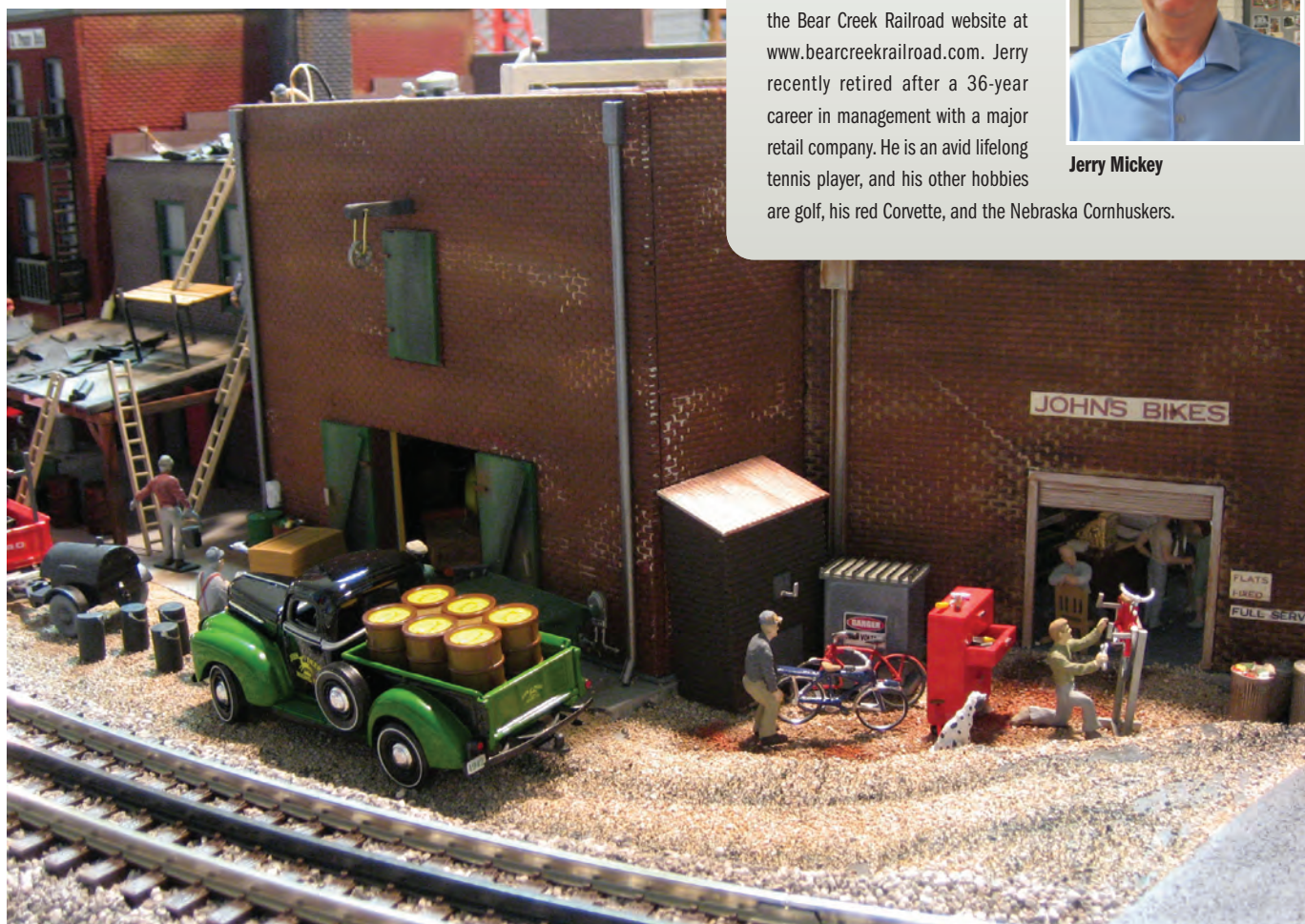


About the Author

Jerry and his wife, Gretchen, live in central Iowa. They have one grown son, John, who is the webmaster for the Bear Creek Railroad website at www.bearcreekrailroad.com. Jerry recently retired after a 36-year career in management with a major retail company. He is an avid lifelong tennis player, and his other hobbies are golf, his red Corvette, and the Nebraska Cornhuskers.



Jerry Mickey



Details make the difference as is evidenced in this scene at the rear of Johns Bikes and the adjacent John Deere dealership.



The Great Leap Backward: The Lionel Button Box

Lionel introduced the TrainMaster Command Control system with great fanfare in 1994, which promised to revolutionize the O gauge 3-rail market. For the first time, Lionel operators would be able to realize the decades-long dream of independently controlling more than one train on the same track at the same time. Locomotives with TMCC were also equipped with a digital sound system called RailSounds 2.5 that provided authentic train noises. The system reproduced railroad operating sounds, horns, whistles, and bells recorded from real trains with unprecedented clarity and fidelity.

Lionel touted the ease of use of the newly launched system in the 1994 Electric Trains and Accessories catalog with: "Running trains with Lionel TrainMaster is just like using a ZW. If you know how to run a Lionel, you already know how to use Lionel TrainMaster." The tone of the TMCC intro ads, like the one shown in Photo 2, said it all: "Combine this simplicity with advanced features like walkaround control, multiple-train operation, realistic locomotive speeds, and more. Nobody can match the advanced technology of Lionel TrainMaster. Nobody."

It was an exciting, innovative way to run 3-rail trains, and Lionel fully expected that this new digital train control and sound system would help the company cruise to an easy dominance of the upper end of the O gauge market. That did not happen for a variety of reasons including fierce and effective competition from M.T.H. Electric Trains and other rivals. Also playing a part were the negative attitudes toward command control of traditionalist adult collectors, who made up the bulk of buyers at the upper reaches of the 3-rail market.



Lionel's Button Box with CAB-1 and Legacy controllers in the background

High Ownership and Low Usage: A Command Control Paradox

By 2003 the TrainMaster system had been on the market for practically 10 years, and virtually all medium- and higher-priced Lionel steam and diesel locomotives were equipped with command control. During that time, thousands of TrainMaster Command Control Sets for running command control trains had also been sold. TMCC was in wide circulation, and TMCC capable locomotives were being marketed under license by Atlas O, K-Line, Weaver Models, and the 3rd Rail Division of Sunset Models, in addition to Lionel. There were lots and lots of TrainMaster engines and command sets out there, but actually using TMCC was another matter. TMCC defied the adoption curve for consumer electronics. After a decade on the market, a majority of Lionel O gauge hob-

byists should have been operating their trains in command control. However, most folks still chose to control their trains the old-fashioned way by moving their transformer handles up and down to vary the speed.

TMCC usage rates had become much more important to sales now that Lionel had an O gauge command control rival in the form of the MTH Digital Command System (DCS). Lionel was developing a more advanced command control system, but the introduction date for Legacy was uncertain, and Lionel wanted to do something as soon as possible to expand command control usage and train sales. One idea to boost acceptance rates was the Button Box, which some Lionel insiders dubbed "The Great Leap Backward" because it was a step back from true command control (Photo 3). The good news was the Button Box allowed traditionalists

2



to tiptoe into the world of digital train control without all its perceived complexities.

The Button Box

The Button Box was designed to appeal to the legions of nonusers who already had trains equipped with command control. The device allowed conventional operators, who used their transformers for speed control, access to many of the features inside their Lionel command-equipped locomotives. As you can see on top of the unit in Photo 4, there are buttons to control smoke and sound volume, TowerCom, CrewTalk, and front and rear ElectroCoupler activation, in addition to whistle, horn, and bell operation and other TMCC features. It was intended that a Button Box would be placed right next to a conventional transformer for easy access to command control functions. Compare it to this close-up of the CAB-1 remote in Photo 5. Many of the functions are the same, but the CAB-1 can do more including actually operating TMCC locomotives. Another important advantage of the CAB-1 is the operator is not tied down to one location and can operate trains from a variety of locations while walking around the layout.

You can run two different engines with the Button Box, but the operator is able to select and operate only one locomotive at a time. To control the functions of two locomotives, the Button Box required the use of two separate, properly phased transformers or a transformer with two separate throttles like the ZW. Basically, you could run two trains as long as each one was on a separate loop or in a different block on the same loop. A rear view of the Button Box shows the attachment points for wires that go to the track or tracks along with the special wall pack that powers the device (Photo 6). The instructions emphasized that only the wall pack that came with the Button Box should be used with it because it would not work properly with any other wall pack.

Appearance

When the Button Box is compared to a production CAB-1 controller, it becomes apparent that the Button Box in this form is a test unit, although it is fully functional (Photo 7). In the instructions that came with the Button Box, Lionel assured product testers that the production version would be properly glamorized for the faithful with a

3



4



pecially designed case, improved graphics, and replacement of the membrane keypad with actual pushbuttons. Individuals working for the big “L” at the time said it would receive a multicolored art deco treatment similar to what eventually appeared on the Legacy base unit (Photo 8). The shipping box also emphasized that this was by no means a production article, as evidenced by what can be seen in looking at a production TrainMaster Command Set box (Photos 9 and 10).

Why the Button Box Wasn't Produced

The Button Box was truly a great leap backward, and by the time it was ready for the marketplace, it's strictly limited capabilities were at odds with the direction the new management at Lionel was taking the company. Bill Bracy had been replaced as the CEO by Jerry Calabrese, who pushed aggressively to accelerate Legacy development and its advanced features to match or exceed the competing DCS already in the marketplace. Projected price escalation for the developed version made matters worse for the Button Box idea. It was likely that the suggested retail price would be unattractive when compared to the existing TMCC system, which could do a lot more for the consumer for the price (Photo 11). As a result, the Button Box became a technological side road that was not taken by Lionel, and the few in existence became collectibles by accident. George Brown and I managed to test two of them and found, ironically, that within their limitations, they worked quite well.

The Big Question

Is there still a need? The short answer is “yes.” There still is a need for a simplified version of the Lionel command system, and the marketplace rendered its verdict on the subject when Lionel announced it was no longer going to make the CAB-1. The price of units in pristine or excellent condition went up sharply as TMCC outfits that had never been used came out of hobbyist stashes in droves to meet the demand. Even with market price escalation, they were considered cost-efficient supplements to Legacy or reasonably priced replacements for worn-out units. 🚂



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18023 WM Shay NO BOX LN	1050.95	598.95
18030 Frisco 2-3-2 w/Sounds	1095.95	398.95
18045 Commodore Vanderbilt Hudson	999.95	649.95
18062 Santa Fe Hudson Scale TMCC	798.95	498.95
18166 Eric Lac. Alco PAA	498.95	298.95
18373 NYC S2 Electric TMCC	498.95	398.95
18434 Porky & Petunia Hand Car LN	58.95	49.95
18953 NYC Alco PA Diesel TMCC	398.95	298.95
28067 Eric Pac. 4-6-2 Odyssey TMCC	999.95	649.95
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28077 UP Lionmaster Challenger TMCC	699.95	598.95
28906 Rescue GP-20	159.95	98.95
30103 NYC 0-8-0 w/sounds & cab		149.95
30166 Coca Cola Set	319.95	249.95
30173 SF 0-8-0 from set, no box		149.95
31755 Burlington GP7	198.95	149.95
31775 Burlington GP7 Passenger Set	469.95	299.95
31778 Hudson Steam Passenger Set	609.95	498.95
31779 Amtrak HHP & Command Set	598.95	498.95
31960 Polar Express Set	329.95	298.95
38217 & 38218 Texas SP FTS A-ARS		298.98
38305 Milwaukee Road GP9 Classic	219.95	159.95
38310 NYC F3's AA from set	499.95	298.95
38687 Western & Atlantic 0-4-0	189.95	149.95
51000 Hiawatha Pass. Set no box LN	899.95	649.95
31747 PRR Ballast Train CMD		598.95
18939 Union Pacific NW2 Diesel set	198.95	179.95
2329 Virginia Rectifier	349.95	249.95
38690 PRR Berkshire w/Railsounds		279.95
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0000 Caterpillar 4-4-2 from set 55452		89.95
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18130 Santa Fe F3 AB Cmd	598.95	398.95
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2185-1 UP Veranda Turbine P-1	698.95	498.95
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1551-1E PRR K-4 P2	429.95	398.95
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20714/20814 NH F3's ABA	619.91	349.91
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20912 L&NE FA's AA	425.91	249.91
21113 Wabash FM Diesel	299.91	198.91
21197 Virginian FM Diesel	299.91	198.91
21210 NS GP 38 Diesel	269.91	198.91
21607 LV NW2 Diesel	299.91	229.91
40201 NYC Scale Hudson	749.91	598.91
41693 PRR GG1 Scale Size (silver)	469.91	298.91
43012 NH Alum. 2 pc. Pass Set	229.91	149.91
43062 NH Alum 4pc Pass Set	449.91	329.91
20404 Santa Fe Dash 9	279.91	198.91
3269 Pluto Water Reefer	59.91	29.91

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8050 Santa Fe C-628	249.95	159.95
8052 Santa Fe C-628	249.95	159.95
U19003LB&M Covered Hopper	45.95	29.95
U16009LD PRR Com. Coal Hopper	45.95	29.95
U2947LD GTW Caboose	53.95	39.95
8050 Santa Fe C-628 LN	249.95	139.95
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OB-100 Santa Fe Outside Braced Box	39.95

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OB-120 SP Overnight Outside Braced Box	39.95	
R-3005 REA Reefer	39.95	

LIONEL ROLLING STOCK

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6232 ILL Central Box Car	80.00	49.95
9815 DYRB Reefer	40.00	29.95
17302 SF Reefer w/ETD	89.95	59.95
36223 Chessie Box	29.95	19.95
29918 Toyfair Box 2003	49.95	29.95
16248 Conrail Box	39.95	29.95
15052 Amtrak Box	39.95	29.95
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19525 Speedy Alka Seltzer Reefer	39.95	29.95
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36861 PRR Dispatch Poultry Car	79.95	49.95
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29855 LL Operating Milk Car	140.95	89.95
6-6464 500 Timken Box	49.95	39.95
6-3662 Operating Milk Car	140.95	89.95
6-3464 SF Box Car	49.95	29.95
6-6414 Auto Transport Car	69.95	49.95
27315 Western Dairy Milk Reefer-Scale	64.95	49.95
27370 Borden's Milk Reefer-Scale	69.95	49.95
17353 Neeham packing Reefer-Scale	54.95	39.95
27366 Sheffield Farms Reefer-Scale	69.95	39.95
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27268 NYC Double Door Box Car-Scale	69.95	49.95
27317 SF Reefer-Scale	59.95	49.95
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19575 REA Reefer-Scale	59.95	49.95
17727 MOPAC Steel Reefer-Scale Reefer	79.95	69.95
17726 Ill Central Reefer-Scale	79.95	69.95
17724 Canadian National Reefer-Scale	79.95	69.95
17725 Northern Pacific Reefer-Scale	79.95	69.95
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9115 Planters Peanuts LN	29.95	19.95
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26433 CN-ACF 2 Bay Covered Hopper	59.95	39.95
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6456 Lehigh Valley	49.95	29.95
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36574 SF LN	39.95	25.95
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78063 Blue Hen Beer Reefer	42.95	29.95
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78130 Hamm's Beer Reefer	42.95	29.95
78111 Schott Brewing Company Reefer	42.95	29.95
78132 Wacker Brewing Reefer (Bad Box)	42.95	29.95
78089 Goete Pale Reefer	42.95	29.95
78525 Alaska Reefer	42.95	29.95
78123 Christmas Ale Reefer	42.95	29.95
78133 Lebanon Special Reefer	40.95	29.95
78127 Valley Forge Beer Reefer	42.95	29.95
78125 Old Reading Cream Ale Reefer	42.95	29.95
4155A AB Anheiser Busch Reefer	42.95	29.95
74613 NH 40' DD Box Car	44.95	29.95
74672 Milwaukee Rd. Box Car	44.95	29.95
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78131 Craft Ale Reefer	42.95	29.95
73370 NYC Tank Car	49.95	34.95
73331 UP Tank Car	49.95	34.95

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73323 PRR Tank Car	49.95	34.95
7005 UP 33K	49.95	34.95
75363 CN Cyl. Hopper	49.95	34.95
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4213A CSX Husky Stack Tank Car	59.95	49.95
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4214C UP Husky Stack ETD	59.95	49.95
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79109 CAT Work Caboose	49.95	29.95
4189 UP Caboose	49.95	29.95
4188 NYC Caboose	49.95	29.95
1497 NYC Caboose	49.95	29.95
77161 Pitt. & Shaw Caboose	49.95	29.95
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40-1002 O31 Curve	4.49	1.49
40-1034 Elevated Tressel 8pc	34.95	24.95
40-1068 O72 Wye Switch	89.95	59.95
40-1021 O72 Left Switch	89.95	69.95
40-1055 O54 Right Switch	79.95	59.95
40-1056 O54 Left Switch	79.95	59.95
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37057 Bethlehem Culvert Car	64.95	59.95
37952 #346 Culvert Uploader	189.95	149.95
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16852 Sunoco Oil Storage Tank	89.95	69.95
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90650 CN Reefer	54.95 49.95
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93534 B&M 40' OB-Box	54.95 44.95
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94343 Clipper 36' Reefer	49.95 29.95
94168 Hoods R50 Exp. Reefer	69.95 59.95
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94157 Santa Fe/REA R50 Reefer	69.95 59.95
3415 PFE Exp Reefer	59.95 49.95
94235 Pullman Pale Ale Reefer	54.95 39.95
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30-67631 B&M 2pc Sleeper Diner Streamline	129.95	98.95
30-1551 PRR 4pc Madison Set	229.95	198.95

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Pumpkin Truck Squashed by Freight Train

Article and Photos by Steve Phetterplace



From an October 31, 1971, Staten Island Advance newspaper account by reporter Steve Phetterplace:

What started out as a cool and pleasant October morning turned into what could have been a major tragedy near Staten Island's New Dorp station.

A truck owned by local farmer Jeffrey Greenjeans was crossing Staten Island Rapid Transit Railway Company tracks (SIRT, a subsidiary of the B&O) on Rose Ave. near the S. Railroad Ave. intersection when it was struck by a southbound freight that had been switching cars at a nearby siding.

The truck, which was transporting a load of giant pumpkins destined for competition at the local Oktoberfest celebration, was overturned by the slow-moving train. There were no injuries to the driver Mr. Greenjeans, the train crew, or any nearby pedestrians.

Although the crossing where the accident occurred is fully protected by gates and warning lights, Mr. Greenjeans insisted that the gates were up when he entered the crossing. A preliminary inspection by SIRT and local officials supported the driver's account, and a railroad spokesman later confirmed that a brief power outage caused the gates to fail to lower.

A local towing firm assisted in righting the farmer's truck, and normal commuter operations resumed on SIRT less than an hour after the accident occurred.

Later that same day, one of the victims of the accident—a giant "Big Max" variety pumpkin raised by Mr. Greenjeans—emerged unscathed from its tumble and took first place in the Oktoberfest competition. 🎃





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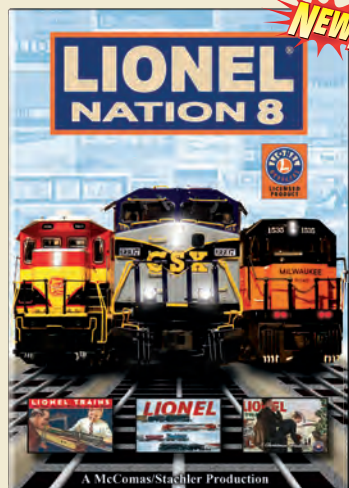
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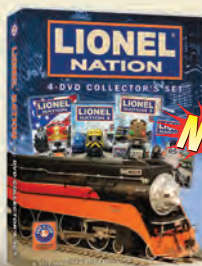
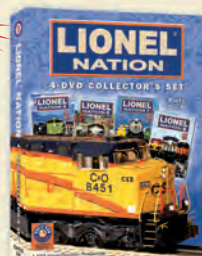
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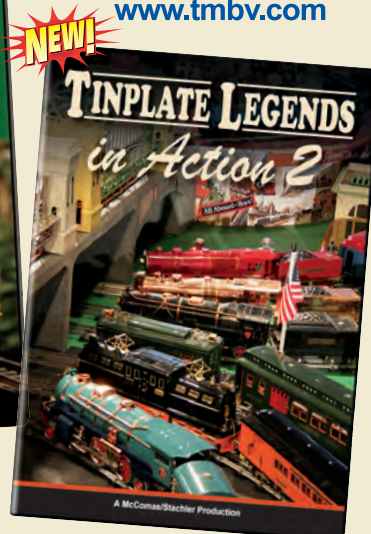


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Scene Along the Rails

Thoroughly Thoroughbred

Article by Allan Miller Photos by Lawrence Vontran

While our nation was celebrating its 236th birthday this past July 4th, the Norfolk Southern Railroad (NS) commemorated its 30th anniversary at a special event on July 3rd and 4th honoring 20 of the predecessor railroads that make up today's NS system.

The tribute, designated a "Family Portrait," was held at the North Carolina Transportation Museum in Spencer on the former site of Southern Railway's Spencer Shops, once a major steam locomotive servicing facility.

Starring in the event was the NS heritage diesel fleet made up of 20 GE ES44AC and EMD SD70ACe locomotives adorned in liveries representing many of the major lines that now make up the extensive NS network. Norfolk Southern employees in Altoona and Chattanooga, Tennessee, painted the GE locomotives, while the EMD units were painted at the Progress Rail Services facility in Muncie, Indiana. The heritage locomotives are now at work hauling freight across the railroad's 20,000-mile, 22-state network.

"This is the first and probably only chance we'll have to get all these locomotives together in one place at one time," said Norfolk Southern CEO Wick Moorman.


"We're proud of the role railroads play in keeping the country's economy strong, and July 4th is an opportune time to showcase that heritage of service and safety."



North Carolina Transportation Museum Executive Director Samuel Wegner said, "Having these engines gathered together is a phenomenon, not just an event. The N.C. Transportation Museum's

37-stall Bob Julian Roundhouse is obviously a great place to frame this Family Portrait. It's a great partnership with Norfolk Southern to host this historic occasion."

There's more good news for the O gauge

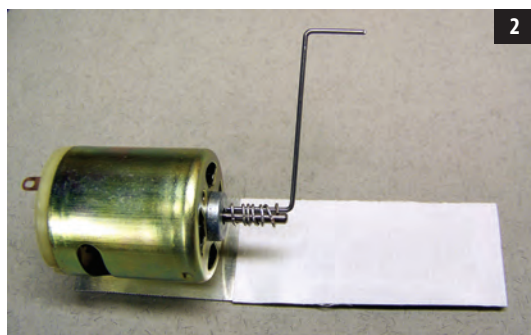
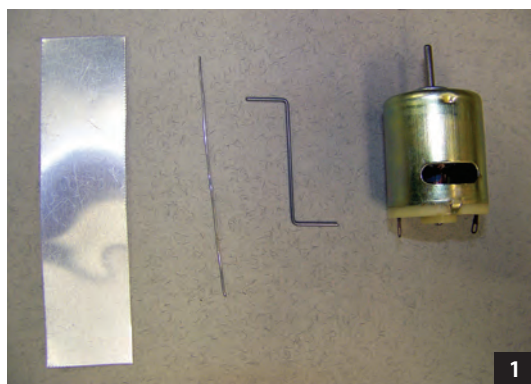
hobbyist. Both Lionel and MTH have announced plans to introduce these 20 colorful locomotives in their respective lines. What a spectacular addition that will make to any layout or collection! 



Here's an Idea

Remote Control for Lionel's Postwar 027 Manual Switches

Article, Photos, and Diagram by David Smith



On my Lionel postwar 027 layout, I like the look of the manual 1022 switches better than the remote control 1122 switches. Also, the 1022 manual switch is great for use on industrial sidings because it automatically routes power to the siding. In places where I can easily reach the switches, I also enjoy working them by hand. But in difficult to reach areas on the layout, I use an easy to construct add-on remote control that does not harm the original switch in any way.

The few simple parts can be obtained from Radio Shack. They include a 9–18 volt hobby motor (#273-256), normally open momentary push button (#275-1547), 1N5399 3-amp, 50-volt diodes (#276-1114), and a plastic project box (#270-1801).

Start by bending the 1/32" steel wire to the shape shown in Photo 1.

Attach one end of the shaped wire to the motor shaft by wrapping with soft copper wire and soldering the connection (Photo 2). Cut a piece of thin sheet metal or thin plastic to 1"x 4". Attach the motor to the end of the metal or plastic piece; I used hot glue.

Attach the remaining section of the strip to the bottom plate of the switch using double-sided tape (Photo 3). With double-sided tape, the mechanism can easily be removed later if desired. In positioning the motor with its attached arm and before sticking it firmly in place, be sure to align everything so the motor shaft is directly opposite the switch arm pivot (Photo 4).

Assemble the two push button switches and diodes in a small plastic project box and run wires to the AC accessory terminals of your transformer and to the switch motor using 20-gauge wire. Refer to the diagram.

The completed mechanism is in Photo 5. I also wrapped the motor assembly with black electrical tape. This covers the brush openings, helps disguise the

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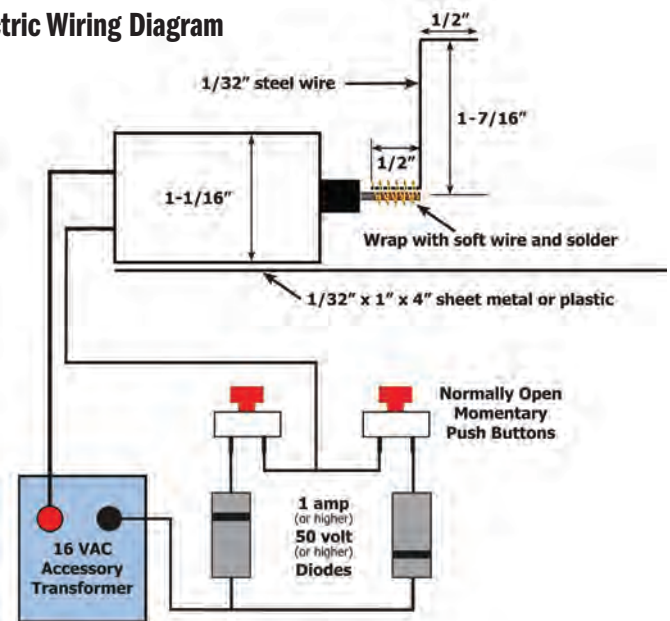
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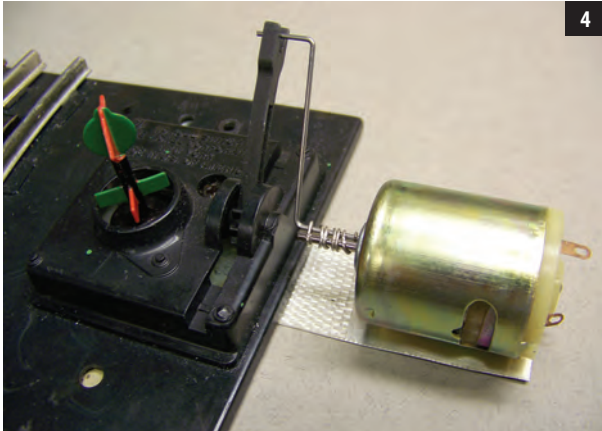
mechanism, and adds strength to the glued joint. The completed mechanism can easily be disguised with scenic materials such as shrubs (Photo 6). You can also use a variety of structures or other objects that might typically be found trackside. 

Electric Wiring Diagram



PARTS FROM RADIO SHACK

Part No. 273-256 - 9 to 18-volt Hobby Motor
 Part No. 275-1547 - Normally Open Push Button Switch
 Part No. 276-1114 - 1 amp, 50-volt diodes
 Part No. 270-1801 - 3" x 2" x 1" Plastic Project Box



4



5



6



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More Favorite Backshop Articles

The first 25 of my favorite 50 “Backshop” articles were covered in Run 257, and here are 25 more. It’s tough to settle on just 50 favorite articles, and I freely admit that in some cases I’ve combined a couple of issues into one topic due to similarity or because the topic was split between

more than one issue of the magazine.

As I explained in Run 257, some that were personal favorites at the time they were published just don’t qualify now due to technological advancements and other developments. Today, for example, most of us have access to computers. If you see

something in this list and no longer have that particular issue of the magazine, you can easily reproduce not only my “Backshop” articles but every word, diagram, and photograph of every issue using the *OGR Digital Archives* at 800-980-6477 to purchase any CD.

Run 204, December 2004 – “The Ultimate Track Cleaning Machine”



How about a totally dry method of cleaning track? Even the worst of age and all things that make track a mess can be easily maintained by making some simple modifications to Lionel’s original postwar track cleaning car. Find out how to do it in this

“Backshop,” complete with detailed photographs.

Run 205, January 2005 – “Soldering Tips for Making Great Solder Joints”

You know, soldering isn’t really hard at all. Most of us have learned all the wrong ways to solder instead of the one right one. This “Backshop” article shows you how to do it right—the first time.



Run 208, June 2005 – “Making the Grade”

With this one, you can learn the right way to create a gradual and even grade for your track as it rises to another level, even around curves. This “Backshop” describes and employs methods used by the real railroads to make gradual and even grades.



Run 209, August 2005 – “I Spy - Tracking Hidden Trains”

Want to learn how to keep track of your train as it progresses through a tunnel or some other hidden area of

your layout? This “Backshop” will tell you how it can be done.

Run 215, June 2006 – “Driving the DCS Truck”

Here is a nice visual “Backshop” article using screen grabs from a computer to show you how to obtain the MTH DCS Consumer Loader for DCS sound systems, change them from engine to engine, and open up the technological doors to the DCS control system.

Run 216, August 2006 – “Getting Some DCS Deliveries”

Using the DCS Loader (above article), this “Backshop” shows you how to get just about anything you want for your DCS engines from the online files available from MTH.

Run 217, October 2006 – “The Disappearing Test Track”

This is a nice how-to article on making a test track that can be folded up and tucked away to conserve space when you aren’t using it.



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Run 218, December 2006 –

“Operating Accessory Rails on Hi-Rail Track”

This article shows you how to install Atlas O operating rails on all kinds of track produced by other manufacturers. If you like those postwar operating cars and don't want to see them disappear from your

hi-rail layout, this “Backshop” is a must-read for you.

Run 219, January 2007 –

So Where Did the Uncoupling Track Go?

This “Backshop” describes how to install old O27 uncoupling magnets anywhere you might want them in GarGraves or Ross track and how to disguise them so the hi-rail look isn't disturbed.

Run 220, February 2007 –

“Lie down, Relax, and Wire Up Your Layout”

Here you can modify a standard auto creeper from Sears to the height needed to roll around under your layout and make wiring easy and more comfortable.



Run 222, June 2007 and Run 223, August 2007 –

“Working in Styrene Plastic for Trackside Buildings”

These two “Backshop” articles share tips on how to work with styrene plastic to modify walls for any structure you might want to create for your layout.

Run 224, October 2007 and Run 225, December 2007 –

“Installing PS2 Upgrade Kits into Older Locomotives”

These two “Backshop” articles describe the installation of MTH PS2 upgrade kits into any diesel or steam locomotive equipped with a DC motor and fly-wheel. It is still relevant even with today's newer upgrade kits.



Run 227, February 2008 –

“Best Tools for O Gauge Repairs”

I'm always asked what tools I recommend for working on trains. Well, here they are. These recommendations represent the best small hand tools that I have found work well with anything I do in the model train world.

Run 232, December 2008 –

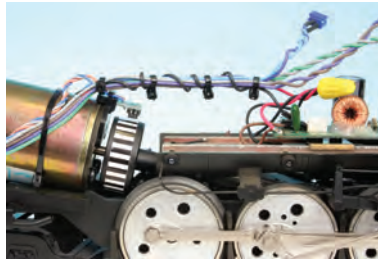
“End of Track with a Warning”

Wouldn't it be nice if your lighted end-of-track bumper actually performed the service of warning you when you've reached the end of the siding? It is simple to make it do this—so simple you probably won't believe it.



**Run 234, February 2009 –
“Putting Your AIU to Work”**

This one is a short tutorial with photos on how to get your MTH Accessory Interface Unit (AIU) to work for all of your operating accessories. Items such as postwar accessories and any other operating accessory can be wired to the AIU, and this article describes how it's done.



**Run 235, April 2009 –
“Forming Good GarGraves Curves”**

This one is a most frequently asked for tutorial. The article includes a couple of easy tips—some might even call them secret tips—for working with GarGraves flex track to create perfectly formed curves, even when there is a track joint in the middle of the curve.

**Run 237, August 2009 –
“Non-Derailing Tricks for
Hi-Rail Switches”**

This “Backshop” shows how to easily make a Z-Stuff for Trains DZ-1000 switch machine work in the same non-derailing mode as postwar Lionel switches.

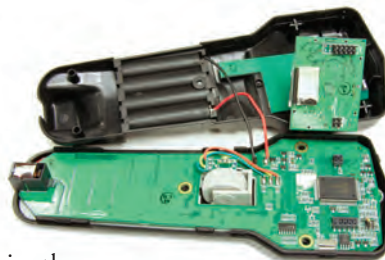


**Run 238, October 2009 –
“Eliminating Dead Spots in Hi-Rail Switches”**

Using the Z-Stuff for Trains DZ-1008 relay in conjunction with the DZ-1000 switch machine, you can eliminate dead spots in hi-rail switches by using the relay to power short sections of rails in the switch depending on which way the switch is set.

**Run 242, April 2010 –
“A Failure to Communicate”**

This “Backshop” covers an easy fix for a common problem in some MTH DCS remotes when they are dropped or bumped too hard. It shows how to check for a dislodged RF or radio frequency communications board within the remote and how to correct it and prevent it from happening again.



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Run 243, June 2010 –

“Shedding Some New Light on K-Line Interiors”

Ever have a K-Line Heavyweight passenger car start burning out bulbs until they all burn out? This “Backshop” tells you where you can find replacement bulbs and describes how to install them in your darkened passenger cars.

Run 244, August 2010 –

“Got a Lazy Thumbwheel?”

Here is a photo and text tutorial showing you how to replace a broken thumbwheel in your DCS remote complete with correct part numbers and how to order them from MTH.



Run 246, December 2010 –

“Basic Maintenance”

This “Backshop” deals with the basics for maintaining locomotives and rolling stock to keep them new and performing at their best. These are common tips and tricks I’ve discovered over time along with my recommendations for materials you should have on hand to maintain your model railroad.

Run 247, January 2011 –

“Making Believable Pavement”

Here’s a way to bury your rails into a paved intermodal parking and loading area.

Run 251, August 2011 –

“A Dead Man’s Switch”

This “Backshop” describes a simple and foolproof method for stopping trains when they are approaching a lift-out or removable bridge. All it takes is one heavily damaged engine that has fallen to the floor to convince you of the need to install this simple device.

Run 253, October 2011 and Run 254, December 2011 –

“Moving Mountains and Making Use of Dead Space”

These two “Backshop” articles deal with using a wonderful product called foam-core board. This material is used to make lightweight and easy-to-build mountains, which, by the way, can also be easily removed to allow you to use the otherwise hidden and empty space under the layout’s scenery.



That’s it! I’ve picked these particular articles because they cover the most frequently asked questions I receive on a daily basis. Check with us at 800-980-6477 if you need any of these back issues.

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On the Way to the Forum




I find occasionally surfing for and watching YouTube videos of railroading on real rail lines and O gauge layouts to be a unique treat.

Checking that the colors in the photos in my reviews and column are what I expected in the *OGR Digital Edition* is a once-every-issue activity. Why? Well, photos in our digital edition are more true to what I photographed than those in the printed magazine, so I'm curious to see how they reproduce on the screen. Yeh, it's a vanity thing.

And last but certainly not least is exchanging e-mails with *OGR* readers, staffers, and hobby friends, which is a daily including Sunday run. Actually, e-mail is an ongoing activity throughout the day and even in the evenings...that is, when the computer is working.

Of course, all of the above came to a screeching halt when the screen froze and my last-ditch attempt to reboot Windows delivered the final blow. Rats! And I had such great plans for that evening—plans that sure didn't include putzing with a computer that was not unlike an entire train on the ground—stuck! But hey, that's Windows, and that's also what incremental file backups and a set of recovery disks are for.

So after loading the factory image back onto the computer's hard drive, and then while waiting for Windows to download its hundred and some-odd OS and security updates over the next hour plus, I bugged out to my train room and had a particularly good time setting up and running a couple of my favorite steam-era trains. So I reckon the evening wasn't a total loss after all.

As I learned years ago, it's a really big and dark cloud that doesn't have a silver lining somewhere, and this one did have its bright side. In the nanoseconds that it took my computer to execute a corrupted command, I had my topic for this column. 

A funny thing happened on the way to the forum the other night—the OGR forum of course. But it wasn't in any way connected to either the Stephen Sondheim musical of the same name or to its bawdy humor. My computer crashed! So what does the crash have to do with O gauge trains? Well, a bunch actually. Like a large number of computer users, I use my production computer for both work and play. Okay, okay—your right, and I admit that being an associate editor of a model train rag is a lot more like playing than working. It really is! Oh, and don't worry about spilling the beans to Rich about my using what is essentially *OGR*'s production computer for play—he knows already.

My point is that the tall metal box packed with electronics and disk drives is my portal to the model and real train world, as it is for a lot of y'all. With the mere click of the mouse, I'm cruis'n our forum, which, as a member of the magazine's staff, is an obligatory daily visit for me. Or it was before Windows went off into the weeds.

Another unfortunate hit was losing the

capability to monitor the product ship dates posted by several manufacturers of O gauge trains, specifically, Atlas O, Lionel, and MTH. As anyone who has been there can tell you, life in the magazine world is dynamic to say the least, especially when dealing with new products for reviews and even announcements. Naturally, perusing dealer ads for pricing of new products is an integral part of my production process for reviews, to say nothing of an occasional shopping spree for new trains as birthday and Christmas presents...mine.

Oh yes, the new product catalogs are another periodic stop along the line of my favorite cyber depots. These stops are primarily the websites for Bachmann Industries, Lionel, Sunset/3rd Rail, and Weaver because I usually don't get paper catalogs from them.

The Internet has become a major source of historic information for my reviews and even for my amusement. Then there are those occasional times when I have a case of writer's block, so I go on the Web looking for an inspiration in one form or another. And as a change of pace,

Scheduled Meets

Special Note About Scheduled Meets

Our next issue, Run 260 (December 2012), will be the last issue to include free Scheduled Meets listings. Starting with Run 261 (January 2013), Scheduled Meets listings will cost \$25.00 per issue. You will be able to place your listing online (preferred), via e-mail, or by regular mail. For full details about the listing procedure, please visit the OGR website (www.ogaugerr.com). Instructions will be posted there prior to August 31.

Scheduled Meets listings for Run 261, the January 2013 issue, will include events taking place between December 15, 2012, and through the end of January 2013.

Rich Melvin, Publisher

September 22, 2012

ROXANNA, DE – Indian Summer Toy & Train Show, Firehouse, Rte. 20. 9a-3p, Adm: \$4, 10 and under free. Info: (302) 827-4278 or www.delawareseasiderailroadclub.com.

BROOKSVILLE, FL – Regal Railways Model Train Toy Show & Swap Meet, Elks Lodge, 14494 Cortez Blvd. 10a-3p, Adm: \$4, 12 and under free. Info: Joe (727) 244-1341 or www.regalrailways.com.

September 23, 2012

WALLINGFORD, CT – Classic Shows LLC Train & Toy Show, Zandri's Stillwood Inn, 1074 S. Colony Rd. (Exit 13 off I-91). 9a-2p, Adm: \$5, 12 and under free w/adult. Info: (203) 926-1327 or www.classicshowslc.com.

September 23-24, 2012

ALLENTOWN, PA – Spring Thaw Train Meet, Fairgrounds, 302 N. 17th St. Sat. 9a-4p, Sun. 9a-3p, Adm: \$7, under 12 free w/adult. Info: (610) 821-7886 or www.allentowntrainmeet.com.

September 29, 2012

SPRING, TX – TCA Toy Train Show & Swap Meet, Cypress Creek Christian Community Center, 6823 Cypresswood Dr. Adm: \$6, family \$9, under 12 free. Info: Carl Olson, (218) 277-7630 or www.tcagulfcoastchapter.org.

September 29-30, 2012

MONROE, WI – 34th Annual Green County Model Train Show & Swap Meet, Stateline Ice and Community Expo, 1632 4th Ave W. 10a-4p. Info: Kevin Johnson (608) 325-9779 or www.gcmrrinc.org.

September 30, 2012

BOARDMAN, OH – Model Train Show, all scales and accessories. Operating Engineers Hall, 291 McClurg Rd. 10a-3p, Adm: \$4, 12 and under free w/adult. Tables \$20. Info: Denny (330) 503-5510, modeltrainshows@gmail.com.

October 6, 2012

SACRAMENTO, CA – TTOS River City Toy Train Meet, Scottish Rite Masonic Center, 6151 H St. 10a-3p, Adm: \$5, 12 and under free, family \$9. Info: Bryan Stanton brsta@comcast.net.

DELAND, FL – 41st Florida Railfair, Volusia County Fairgrounds, SR 44 and I-4 (Exit 118). 9a-4p, Adm: \$7, under 12 free. Info: Charles Miller (703) 536-2954, rrshows@aol.com or www.gserr.com.

October 6-7, 2012

BEREA, OH – Carnival of Model Trains, Cuyahoga County Fairgrounds, 164 Eastland Rd. Sat. 10a-5p, Sun. 11a-4p, Adm: \$7, under 16 free w/adult, 2-day pass \$10. Info: Gary Sole (216) 650-2192.

October 7, 2012

FARMINGVILLE, NY – All Gauge Swap Meet, Island Bingo Hall, 1055 Portion Rd. 8:30a-2:30p, Adm: \$4, under 12 free w/adult. Info: www.centraloperatinglines.com.

ARCADIA, CA – TTOS Southwestern Div. Train Meet, Masonic Center, 50 W. Duarte Rd. 10:30a-3p, Adm: family \$5. Info: Larry Pearson (818) 225-1710.

HAWLEY, PA – Hawley Fire Dept. Model Train Show & Sale, 17 Columbus Ave. 9a-3p, Adm: \$3, under 12 free w/adult. Info: Bill Delling, 618 Fern St., Hawley, PA 18428.

ORANGE, CT – 20th Annual New Haven & Derby Model RR Train Show, High Plains Community Center, 525 Orange Center. 9:30a-3:30p. Info: www.newhaven-derbymodelrailroadclub.org.

October 13, 2012

PAINESVILLE, OH – Rail Fanning Day, Painesville Depot, 475 Railroad St. 10a-5p, Info: (216) 470-5780 or www.painesvilledepot.org.

October 13-14, 2012

FORT WORTH, TX – SouthWest O Scale Meet, Lockheed Martin Recreational Area, 6900 Bryant Irvin Rd. 9a-5p. Info: swoscalemeet@gmail.com or www.swoscale.com.

October 14, 2012

ALTOONA, PA – Altoona Model Train Museum Train Show, Blair County Conv. Center, 1 Convention Center Blvd. 9a-2p, Adm: \$5, under 12 free. Info: Ron Kennedy (814) 696-9671, ronjane@atlanticbb.net or Greg Miller (814) 695-3246, gmaflyer@verizon.net.

October 20, 2012

ENGLEWOOD, FL – Regal Railways Model Train Toy Show & Swap Meet, Elks Lodge, 401 N. Indiana Ave. 10a-4p, Adm: \$4, 12 and under free. Info: Joe (727) 244-1341 or www.regalrailways.com.

October 21, 2012

KINGSTON, NY – Model Train & RR Hobby Show, Murphy Midtown Center, 467 Broadway.

10a-4p, Adm: \$6, under 12 \$1. Info: (845) 481-4198 or kingstonmts@aol.com.

FAIRFIELD, CT – Station Stop 2012 Train Show, Ludlowe High School, 785 Unquowa Rd., 10a-4p, Adm: \$6, child \$2. Info: Jack Ciarletto (203) 374-1118 or www.housatonicmtr.org.

October 27, 2012

SUGARCREEK, OH – Old El's Train & Toy Show, Valley View Church, 2772 Simons Dr. 10a-4p, Adm: \$3, under 12 free. Tables \$10. Info: Galen Eli Hoover (330) 763-1184.

HUNTSVILLE, AL – TCA Magic Valley Chapter Annual RailFest, Jaycee Bldg., Jaycee Way. 10a-3p, Adm: \$5, spouse and family free. Info: Morgan Lynch, 2111 Conway Dr. SW. Info: (256) 881-1661.

October 27-28, 2012

TIMONIUM, MD – Great Scale Model Train Show, Maryland State Fairgrounds. 9a-4p, Adm: \$9, under 15 free, family \$18, good both days. Info: Howard Zane (410) 730-1036, hzone1@verizon.net.

TROY, NY – Greenberg's Train & Toy Show, Expo and Conv. Center, 4320 Chantilly Shopping Center. 10a-4p, Adm: \$7, under 12 free. Info: Greenberg Show, (630) 279-4087, Staff@GreenbergShows.com, www.GreenbergShows.com.

October 28, 2012

MILWAUKEE, WI – Lionel RR Club All Gauge Swap Meet, Clarion Hotel, 5311 S. Howell Ave. 8a-12p, Adm: \$4, under 13 free w/adult. Info: Art Oseland (414) 764-5375.

FARMINGTON HILLS, MI – Redford Model RR Club Trainorama 2012, Costick Community Center, 28600 Eleven Mile Rd. 10a-4p, Adm: \$5, under 12 free w/adult. Info: Pierre Willmermet, (734) 953-2546, pwillmermet@gmail.com.

FRANKLIN SQUARE, NY – RR Lines Train & Toy Show, Plattduetsche Park Restaurant, 1132 Hempstead Turnpike. 8a-1p, Adm: \$5, under 12 free w/adult. Info: John Koenig (516) 486-6658 or Jerry Nappi (516) 384-4566.

November 2-3, 2012

TUCSON, AZ – Toy Train Show, Tucson Expo Center, 3750 E. Irvington Rd. Fri. 2a-7p, Sat. 9a-2p, Adm: \$6, 13 and under free. Info: Dave Hoverstock (520) 909-0722, trainshow@gpdttoytrainmuseum.com or www.gpdttoytrainmuseum.com.

November 3, 2012

KISIMMEE, FL – Model Train Show & Swap Meet, Knights of Columbus, 2000 Neptune Rd. 10a-3p, Adm: \$5, 12 and under free. Info: Joe (727) 244-1341 or www.regalrailways.com.

November 3-4, 2012

SYRACUSE, NY – 38th Annual Great New York Model Train Fair, Fairgrounds. 10a 5p, Adm: \$8, 15 and under free. Info: www.modeltrainfair.com or (315) 451-6551.

November 4, 2012

GAITHERSBURG, MD – 7th Annual Model Train Show, Montgomery County Fairgrounds. 9a-4p, Adm: \$7, under 12 free. Info: Charles Miller (703) 536-2954, rrshows@aol.com or www.gserr.com.

November 10, 2012

ST. CLOUD, MN – Granite City Trade Show, National Guard Armory, 1710 Veterans Dr. 10a-3p, Adm: \$5, 12 and under free. Info: edwardolson@cloudnet.com or www.granitecitytrainshow.com.

COLUMBIA, MO – Ozark Div. TCA Open Show & Swap Meet, Knights of Columbus Hall, 2525 N. Stadium Blvd. 10a-3p, Adm: \$3, under 12 free. Info: Richard Malon (573) 445-2446

November 10-11, 2012

MONROEVILLE, PA – Greenberg's Train & Toy Show, Convention Center, 209 Mall Blvd. 10a-4p, Adm: \$7, under 12 free. Info: Greenberg Show, (630) 279-4087, Staff@GreenbergShows.com, www.GreenbergShows.com.

ALLENTOWN, PA – First Frost Train Meet, Fairgrounds, 302 N. 17th St. Sat. 9a-4p, Sun. 9a-3p, Adm: \$7, under 12 free w/adult. Info: (610) 821-7886 or www.allentowntrainmeet.com.

November 11, 2012

POUGHKEEPSIE, NY – Hudson Valley RR Society 41st Annual RR Exposition, Mid-Hudson Civic Center. 10a-3p, Adm: \$5, student/senior \$4, under 12 \$2. Info: Denny Evald (845) 297-0901.

November 17, 2012

PORT RICHEY, FL – Model Train Show & Swap Meet, Knights of Columbus, 5850 Knights of Columbus Dr. 10a-4p, Adm: \$4, 12 and under free. Info: Joe (727) 244-1341 or www.regalrailways.com.

November 17-18, 2012

WILLMINGTON, MA – Greenberg's Train & Toy Show, Shriners Auditorium, 99 Fordham Rd. 10a-4p, Adm: \$7, under 12 free. Info: Greenberg Shows, (630) 279-4087, Staff@GreenbergShows.com, www.GreenbergShows.com.

November 18, 2012

ALBANY, NY – Mountain Toy & RR Club Swap Meet, Polish Community Center, Washington Ave. Ext. and Rapp Rd. 9a-2p, Adm \$5. Info: George Washburn (518) 828-7902.

MILWAUKEE, WI – Lionel RR Club All Gauge Swap Meet, Clarion Hotel, 5311 S. Howell Ave. 8a-12p, Adm: \$4, under 13 free w/adult. Info: Art Oseland (414) 764-5375.

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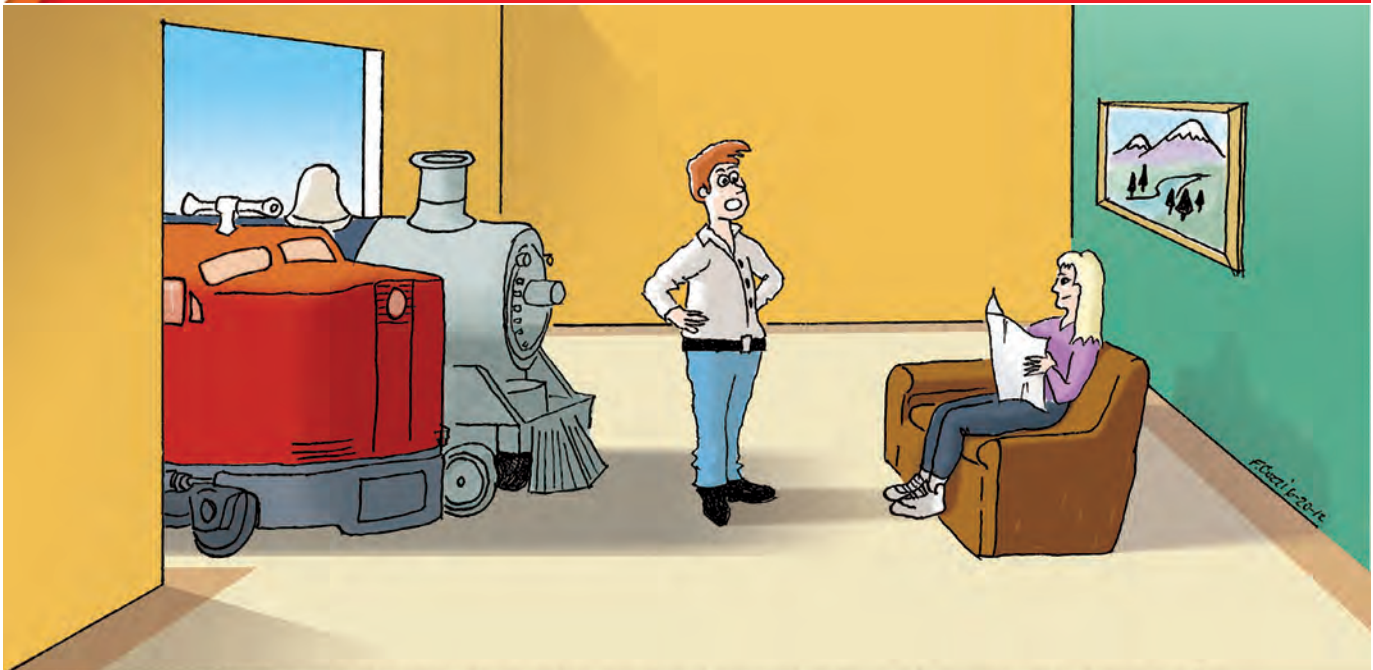
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