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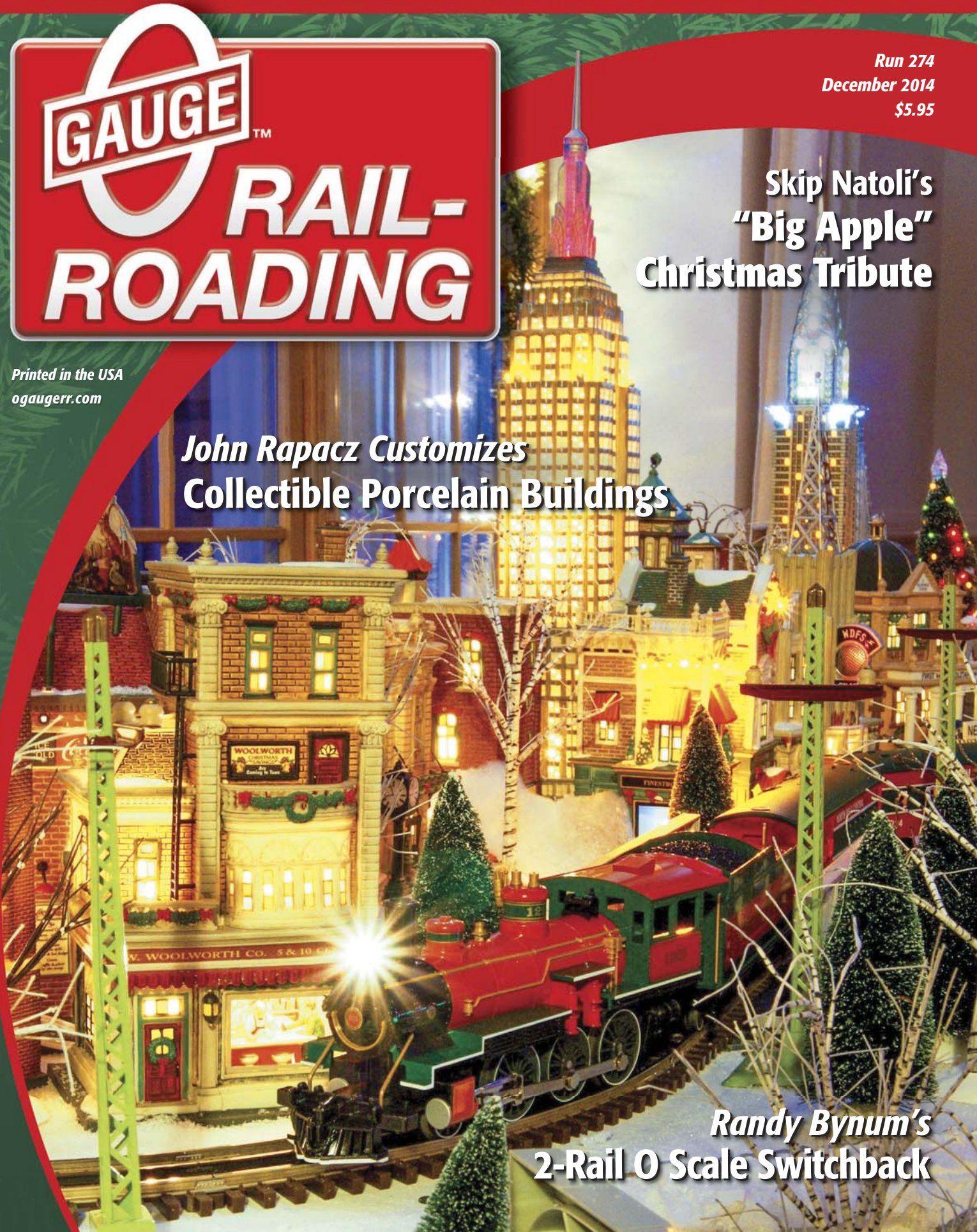
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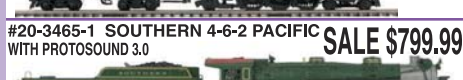
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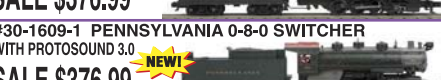
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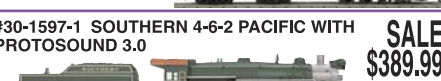
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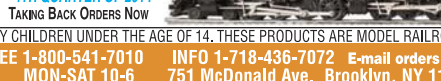
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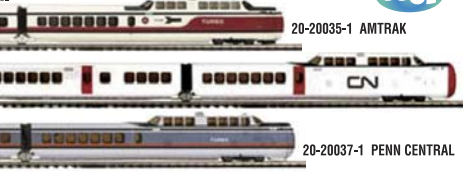


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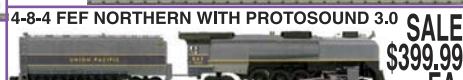
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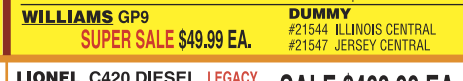
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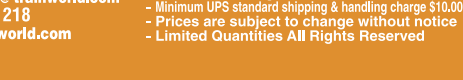


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# An Open Letter from Steve (Ross) Brenneisen

Hello everyone, Steve Brenneisen here from Ross Custom Switches. One of the first questions I am asked when someone is trying to figure out what track and switches to use on their empire is "Okay Steve, why should I get it from Ross?" Some folks think I am going to go into a list of what is wrong with Atlas or MTH switches (our main competitors) but I am not here to bash the other guys product. I do know, however, that after 41 years of building these things we are doing alot right. You may also ask why I don't mention GarGraves and that is because we have more of a synergistic relationship with them than a competitive one. I originally started building Ross switches to mate with GarGraves flex track, which was then, and still is, the standard of the O gauge world in flex (yep, you can bend it to any radius). Our sectional track (not bendable) and switches mate right up using the same track pins.

Our main objectives at RCS are to make switches (and track) that work as flawlessly as possible with all O gauge equipment, regardless of manufacturer. We have worked hard to get there and have made a lot of changes through the years to make that possible. Because it is relatively easy for us to make a change in our hand-built switches and track, we can keep up with innovative new ideas and modern equipment needs. Believe it or not, train manufacturers have few or no industry standards to which they build their equipment. It is a real challenge to make switches that are able to handle all the various locomotives and cars that are out there these days, but we do it!

Secondly, we want them to look as good as possible. Now I happen to lean towards brunettes, but would never tell someone that blondes are not attractive, too, so to each his own. However, most real railroad ties are made of wood infused with creosote, so ours are made of wood and are black just like creosote (not brown).

Thirdly, we want to, and do, make our products right here in the USA in our Connecticut shop. Now our aforementioned competitors are made in China and that alone does not make them inferior. It does make it hard to make improvements and changes though and that's where we shine (see goal #1). It also can make product hard to get, and as of this writing (the fall of 2013) at least one of our Chinese made friends are having difficulty getting product at all. Not something you want to hear if you are a layout builder! We are making our ALWAYS available track and switches right here in your back yard. That means your money stays right here in your back yard, and that is a real plus for America and the families that the guys who work here are responsible for.

Finally we make 54 different switches and crossings, and 14 different radii of track, along with straight track, too. No one else comes close! Here is the score;

(From websites Sept. 2013)

MTH switches and crossings....8.....track radii...4 (ScaleTrax)

Atlas switches and crossings....21....track radii...9

Ross Custom Switches and crossings....54...track radii...14

(Atlas will mate with Ross using regular Atlas rail joiners. ScaleTrax does not easily mate with either)

As you can see, in sports terms, those numbers add up to a real butt kickin! Absolutely no one but **Ross** gives you the variety and the chance to do everything the real railroads do. And another one of the real advantages of **Ross** is that it is EASY to cut so you have even more versatility! You are not bound by the constraints that some other track "systems" put on you. Our steel rail works with Magna-Traction too, the others above do not.

Last but not least, don't forget to check your local dealer to see if they carry **RCS**, or if you prefer, call us... 800-331-1395 ...and talk to a real live person who actually builds our track and switches (9am-4pm and/or from 11-4 Eastern most Mondays-Fridays, me.) We can answer any questions on layout building or design that you may have, and oh yeah, take an order too!

Or email for a catalog; [steve@rossswitches.com](mailto:steve@rossswitches.com) or check out our website: [rossswitches.com](http://rossswitches.com)

Nice talking with you, and Happy Railroading!



Steve



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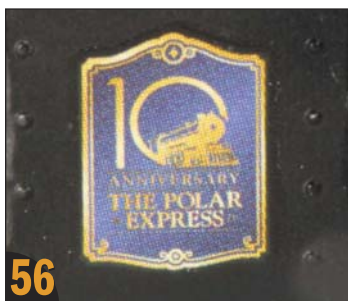
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## ON THE COVER

All the color, action, bright lights, and excitement of a Christmas season in New York City are more than amply captured in this scene on the outstanding holiday layout built by Skip Natoli. Here, a commuter train, headed by a Williams by Bachmann 2-6-0 Mogul in appropriate Christmas livery, is loaded with happy holiday shoppers as it winds its way through one of the city's noted boroughs.

*Photo by Skip Natoli*



### Publisher

Richard P. Melvin  
publisher@ogaugerr.com

### Editor-in-Chief

Allan Miller  
editor@ogaugerr.com

### Special Projects Editor

Ed Boyle  
ed@ogaugerr.com

### Associate Editors

Jim Barrett  
jim@ogaugerr.com

George Brown  
george@ogaugerr.com

Kathryn Brown  
kitty@ogaugerr.com

### Advertising Sales Manager

Alan Arnold  
adman@ogaugerr.com

### Advertising Production Manager

Don Pedicini, Jr.  
don@ogaugerr.com

### Design & Layout / Pre-Press

W-Graphics Digital Services, Inc.  
ogauge@teamwgraphics.com

### Subscription Manager

Linda Melvin  
linda@ogaugerr.com

### Merchandising Manager

Cari Fanta  
cari@ogaugerr.com

### Section Gang

Bill Bramlage  
John Ciccarelli  
Don McCuaig  
Alex Müller  
Jim Policastro  
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## A Season to Believe



In addition to the evolving line of Polar Express starter sets, add-on cars, and other accessories, Lionel has also produced scale-size Polar Express items including this 1:48 scale 1225 Berkshire seen on Emile Henault's 2013 Christmas layout. Emile tells me that this year he'll be adding the new gold-painted version of this same locomotive to his layout.

This being the 10th anniversary of the Polar Express, at least as far as the movie and the O gauge railroading world are concerned, it seems appropriate to expound on the story that initially sparked interest in this magical train and to touch on how Lionel has contributed to perpetuating the magic and the message.

In summary, the story of the Polar Express is a fanciful account of the adventures of a young boy simply named Hero Boy in the 2004 movie's credits. You'll need to read Chris Van Allsburg's book or see the film to fully appreciate this tale.

The lad has reached the point in his young life where he is starting to lose some of his childhood innocence and, in particular, his belief in that ever-popular honcho of toy-making elves: Santa Claus. Hero Boy's sleep on Christmas Eve is disrupted by the rumblings of a train on the street outside his bedroom

window. Venturing out to see what is happening, he is enticed to board the train by its conductor. "Well? You coming?" the conductor impatiently inquires. "Where?" asks the lad. "Why, to the North Pole, of course. This is the Polar Express!" the conductor exclaims.

At the last possible moment, Hero Boy somewhat reluctantly hops aboard. In the passenger car he meets his fellow travelers who will share this magical journey to the North Pole and Santa's headquarters. Their action-packed adventure is filled with excitement en route to and at their ultimate destination. It's a trip filled with significant messages for young and old alike relating to trust, faith, friendship, loyalty, and a host of other human values. Above all, it's an affirmation of the spirit of the season and the importance of simply believing.

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Emile Henault's Polar Express collection also includes a new 10th anniversary diesel streamliner passenger set headed by an FT locomotive.

So where and how does Lionel fit into all of this? Well despite the story line and Tom Hanks in the leading role in the film, the true star of this inspirational tale is the train. It's a distinctive and handsome train in regard to its paint scheme, with power provided by a fictionalized representation of the real Pere Marquette 1225, a 2-8-4 Berkshire built by Lima Locomotive Works in 1941. The owner of the 1225 provided the prototype blueprints as well as the sounds for the animated film. Note the coincidental, I assume, seasonal symbolism of the engine's number of 12-25.

Lionel's decision to market a Polar Express train set to coincide with release of the filmed version of the story was obviously a wise one. It was likely planned a couple of years or more in advance of the movie's debut—definitely a good move on the part of Lionel leadership at the time.


The Lionel Polar Express set is pretty much the ideal around-the-Christmas-tree toy train. Further inside this issue, you'll find Dave Siburn's and Ed Boyle's detailed history of this special product line from inception to the present.

I imagine that more than a few Polar Express sets from Lionel

have also inspired their owners to explore the world of O gauge model railroading in more depth after the holidays. It's been my experience that these sets seem to appeal to a good many experienced hobbyists as much as they do to the young crowd.

Lionel has done a fine job of keeping the Polar Express story and the message it conveys front and center in countless holiday celebrations for a decade with no end in sight. In so doing, the nation's oldest maker of toy trains has helped to reinforce and perpetuate the long-standing traditional link between trains and Christmas established by Joshua Lionel Cowen. I imagine he would be quite proud.

Near the end of the film as Hero Boy returns home aboard the Polar Express, the conductor provides this sage advice as he helps the boy off the train, "One thing about trains, it doesn't matter where they're going. What matters is deciding to get on." If even a few Polar Express fans are enticed to "get on" with O gauge railroading this holiday season and beyond, the magic will continue.

Believe! And here's wishing you, your family, and your friends, a very Merry Christmas and a joyous holiday season! 



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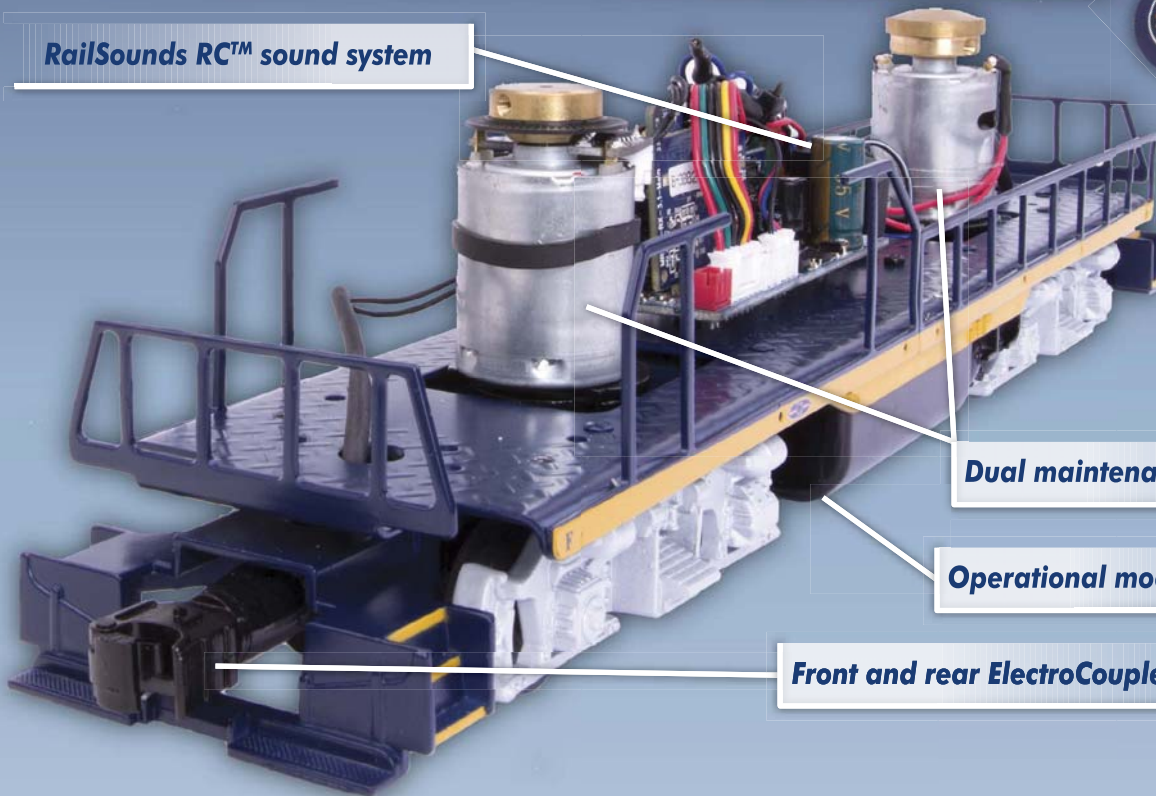


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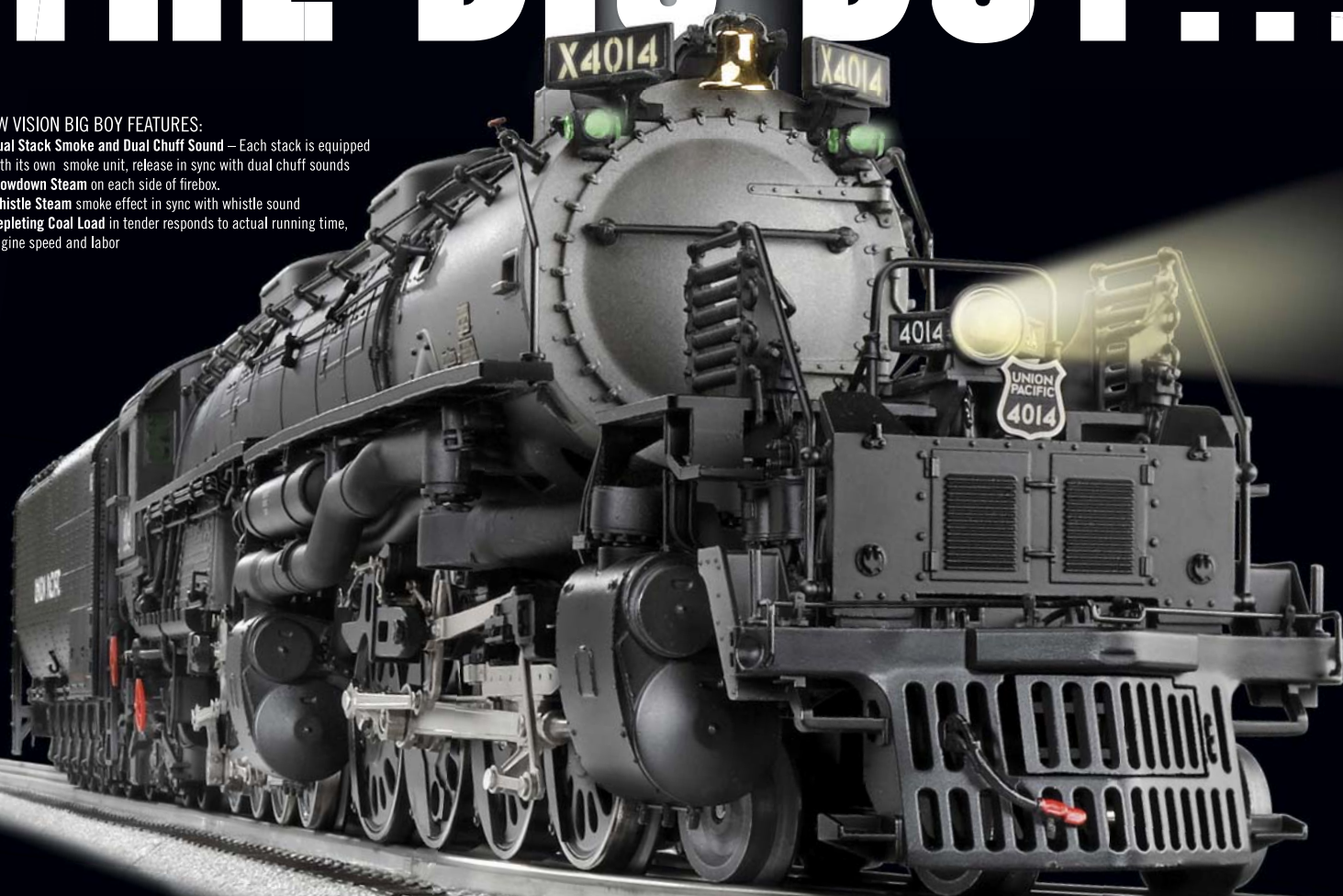
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### I Want a Transfer!

A new transfer table is available from Millhouse River Studio. Features include all-aluminum construction, mounting tabs to secure to layout, and a DC gear motor. Bridge length is 28", which is prototypical and accommodates all O scale diesel engines. The drive mechanism uses dual timing belts and drives the table evenly. Both the pit and bridge are prototypical in design and depth using five rails in the 1/2" (scale 2') deep pit. Main bridge deck is 3/16" aluminum plate with Atlas track. Decking and control cab are laser cut and include cast railing stanchions with wire railings. The auto indexing system lets the operator program four to six tracks anywhere along both sides of the bridge travel. \$1,650.00 plus shipping. Visit Millhouse River Studio at [www.studiozphoto.com](http://www.studiozphoto.com).

### Taking Your Layout to a New Level

American Made Steel Bridges, Inc. is offering its L Bridge Line for hobbyists who want to add an elevated curved bridge to their layouts. The 34" diameter version is shown with two tracks on top and a third lower line running through the trestle supports. 90-degree curves are \$50.00 each, and support trestles are \$15.00 each. A 72"x 34" loop is \$490.00. Larger diameters are also offered. Contact Chris Eirich, 274 Hernando Rd., Winter Haven, FL 33884; 863-207-2638; [chris.obridge@gmail.com](mailto:chris.obridge@gmail.com).



### Sweet Tanker

Add festive color to any freight train with this LifeSavers 2014 Cal-Stewart Candy Cane Peppermint tank car. Produced by Lionel for the Cal-Stewart group, this special-order O gauge tank car is based on LifeSavers 2013 holiday seasonal candy. The car costs \$62.95 plus \$12.00 shipping. California residents add \$5.67 for sales tax. Order deadline is February 28, 2015. Visit [www.cal-stewart.org](http://www.cal-stewart.org) and click on the Cal-Stewart Souvenir Car page for information and order form. Contact Bruce Lazarus at [cars@cal-stewart.org](mailto:cars@cal-stewart.org) or 818-225-1710. LifeSavers is a registered trademark of the Wm. Wrigley Jr. Co. and is used by permission.



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## Layout Defense

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Army Flatcar with Tank available exclusively from Menards. A futuristic tank that is not actually based on any particular existing prototype is painted in Northern European camouflage and comes complete with ammunition shells and box plus wheel chocks. With a tap of your finger on the tank's roof hatch, lights on the tank body and at the business end of the gun barrel light up, and the unit emits various combat-type noises. The 10" long flatcar has operating couplers and will negotiate O27 curves. Item No. 279-0863 is available for \$24.99 plus shipping directly. Check out the Collectables section of [www.menards.com](http://www.menards.com).

## Line 'Em Up and Head 'Em Out

The Millhouse River Studio new auto indexing system affords operators enhanced flexibility to place turntable whisker tracks wherever they best fit the available layout space. There is no need to align tracks with a predetermined degree of spacing such as 7.5, 10, or 15 degrees. An encoder determines the exact one of 8,191 possible encoder positions of the bridge within the full 360 degrees of the pit. This precise alignment system also enables realistic speed steps in the operation of the turntable. Action can be controlled and programmed by the keypad or with a TMCC/Legacy remote. The system works on the Millhouse River turntable or transfer table and is backward compatible with previous Millhouse River turntables. Includes power supply, auto indexing system, and stainless steel keypad faceplate for \$347.00 plus shipping. Visit [www.studiozphoto.com](http://www.studiozphoto.com).



## Great Graphics

J & A Hobbies produces dry transfer lettering for Lionel and American Flyer trains made between 1901 and 1969 as well as for



Ives. Advancements in graphic technology have enabled J & A Hobbies to improve the clarity and shelf life of its product. Its new line includes locomotive/tender, and caboose lettering for eight fallen flag railroads including C&NW, SP, GN, PRR, MKT, T&P, CB&Q, and Erie. Graphics for eight short lines (Michigan Central shown) are also in production. Custom services are available upon request. For full information or to order, contact Arthur C. Warnick at J & A Hobbies, 4479 Marsh Rd., Waynesboro, PA 17268; 717-762-2242; [warnick@pa.net](mailto:warnick@pa.net).

## Enjoy a Round at Sully's

Sully's Tavern from Woodland Scenics represents a typical neighborhood pub that features interior LED lighting along with a printed interior and window treatments. \$139.99 at your favorite Woodland Scenics Built-&-Ready structures dealer.



## A Different Kind of Roof

Harry Hieke's Sawtooth Roof Factory with Brick Arch Run-Through Base occupies just 1-3/4" x 33" of layout space because it sits over the track. The structure is 26" high, and each polyurethane piece can be purchased separately. The model was designed with 5" increments so it can be customized for any layout and includes high-definition brick and concrete detail with over 200 Tichy and Grandt Line window products. Windows of the skylight face windows in the saw-tooth roof. Victorian finials, never before offered quoins for exterior decorative angles, and witches hat or cap rooftop tower are integral to the ambiance. Custom thin film decals preserve the brick detail. The structure can be mounted flush to backdrop or freestanding. Available in kit or built up and weathered as shown. Instruction video available on YouTube by typing in Harry Hieke. Visit [www.HarryHieke.com](http://www.HarryHieke.com).



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**SATURDAY, JANUARY 17th - 10:00 A.M.**  
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We have been commissioned to sell the entire Modern era O/27 gauge train collection of Richard Newman who collected for over 20 years. There are nearly 1,000 catalogued lots. This exceptional collection includes a selection of over 45 Lionel engines including Century Club, tenders, passenger cars, etc.; Lionel sets; rolling stock; Over 14 MTH including #30-1446-1E 4-8-8-4 Big Boy & 4 Weaver engines; large assortment of Lionel & MTH buildings including 5 stall roundhouse; accessories; Carnival fixtures; track; transformers; glass shelving; Conductor uniforms; RR lanterns; neon signs; RR route schedules; large assortment RR magazines; RR pad locks & much more. NOTE: The vast majority of this collection has original boxes. For detailed listing go to Proxibid. Terms: 10% with Cash or Check. 13% with Visa, MC, Disc. 6% Michigan Sales tax unless you provide a copy of sales tax license.

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Lou Ignarro built a big O gauge layout in his specially remodeled garage and he can't wait to tear it down! Lou enjoys building a layout so much that he is about to take what he learned building his first layout and tear it down so he can build another one. Lou won the Nobel Prize for medicine in 1998. He is the only Nobel laureate to own a model railroad.

## Bill Thompson Bridges the Gap on his Layout

Bill Thompson enjoyed a successful career in the investment banking business. But the high-speed, high-pressure world of investment banking is a long way from what really trips his trigger; working on his O gauge layout. Bill's layout is a wonderful combination of western scenery, tall mountains, deep gorges, and high bridges, with a few scratchbuilt structures here and there that are Bill's handiwork.

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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](mailto:editor@ogaugerr.com).

### Executive Gateman

Nearly a year ago in Christmas 2013, 19-month-old Lynette Raible had just received a remote control Lionel Thomas set from Santa and watched it run every day. She was also saying the words "coat" and "hat" at the time, obvious references to Sir Topham Hatt, the Fat Controller of the North Western Railway in the popular *Thomas and His Friends* series. Today, Sir Hatt just happens to be pulling Gateman duty along the line. Lynette's dad, Dan, snapped this photo.



### Tinplate Train Tradition

No album depicting toy trains at Christmas would be complete without at least one photo of the Marx tinplate trains that were so much a part of the around-the-tree tradition in the postwar era. David Smith's Marx layout was featured in Run 254, our January 2012 issue, and this scene is an outtake from that article. Even Lionel and American Flyer fans often included the very affordable Marx Girard station on their layouts, making it possibly the best-selling tinplate train station of all time.

### ***Polar Express Proud***

Young Lucas DeVleeschouwer is a huge fan of the Polar Express. This photo taken during the 2013 Christmas season amply demonstrates that the youngster is very proud of his special train. Lucas is now four years old, and his dad, Jim, and mom, Karyn, report that their young engineer still runs the Polar Express almost daily and is anxious to have it set back up around the tree again this year.



### ***Trains for Thomas***

Eliot Scher, whose finely detailed 3-rail Munoz Lines layout was featured in our October issue, also enjoys the fun and fanciful aspect of toy trains. Here for the holidays, he has captured a shot of Thomas the Tank Engine out doing some Christmas shopping for toy trains for his friends. And what better place to find what he needs than at the local Lionel train shop. You can also be sure that the young lad seen posting his wish list to Santa has included a toy train, O gauge of course, in the lineup.

### ***Seasonal Symmetry***

Here's a colorful and symmetric overall view of Ron Sholand's 2013 Christmas layout in the Seattle area. This is a four-loop, multi-gauge setup that includes LGB large scale trains and a variety of MTH reproductions of Lionel Standard gauge trains and accessories. Ron stated that he and his wife, Linda, share their home with a couple of cats and a four-year-old black lab, all of whom are pretty much content to ignore the trains. Given the extent of this holiday setup, that's probably a good thing!





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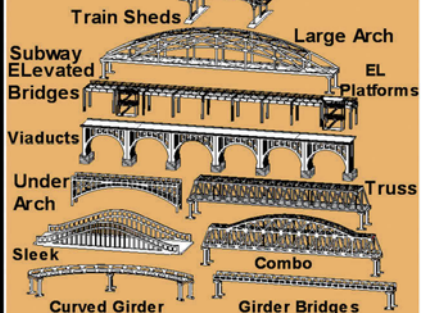
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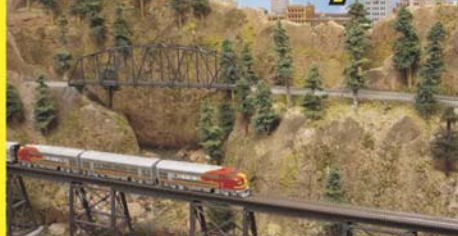
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# Product Reviews



## Lionel Corporation Tinplate 269E Distant Control Freight Set

Review and Photos by George Brown

A large number of years have passed since I last got to play with a Lionel tinplate freight train. In fact, the year was 1948, and the train was a prewar Standard gauge Lionel 390E steam locomotive with three cars. So when MTH Vice President Andy Edleman offered me the O gauge 269E Christmas set for review, my response was an immediate and enthusiastic yes.

For the O gauge neophyte, Lionel Corporation Tinplate trains are reproductions of O and Standard gauge electric trains produced and sold by the original Lionel Corporation before WWII. Today, M.T.H Electric Trains manufactures and sells these reproductions using the Lionel name and circle-L logo under license from Lionel LLC.

Although the packaging and the trains inside were manufactured this year, they all exuded an aura of the late 1930s, which was before even my time, actually. I've not seen any original packaging for Lionel trains of that era, so I can't comment on the authenticity of the decoration on the set box or the individual boxes within. Authentic or not, the excitement of a lad getting a new toy train at Christmas was definitely there as I unpacked the set—discounting the 99-degree July afternoon outside.

The sidebar lists the components of the ready-to-run set I reviewed. As a curious side note, the set box and catalog both identify the set as the 269E Distant Control Freight Set, yet the

outer shipping box and operation manual call it the 261 Steam Ready-To-Run Set—interesting. Regardless, everything needed to set up the track and run the train under the Christmas tree or anywhere else is included with the set, except the electricity of course. As to the train's physical sizes over the couplers, the locomotive measures 17-1/2", each car is 9", and the entire train is 42-1/2". Measurements without the couplers are 16" for the locomotive and 6-1/2" for each car.

### MTH 269E Distant Control Freight Set Components

- No. 261E steam locomotive with Proto-Sound 3.0
- No. 2653 hopper car
- No. 2654 tank car
- No. 2657 caboose
- 31"x 51" oval of RealTrax
- 50-watt transformer
- DCS Remote Commander controller and receiver
- Illuminated track lockon
- RealTrax wire harness
- Operation manual and other material





Fabricated predominantly from stamped steel, painted in baked gloss enamel, and trimmed with brass-plated accoutrements, the train in our evaluation set was a blast into decades past. The finish on the locomotive and all three cars was flawless. I'm not normally attracted to specially decorated theme trains, but with this set I found the overall visual effect to be downright exciting.

### No. 261E Steam Locomotive

Three major assemblies on the engine include the stamped steel boiler and cab assembly, a die-cast frame with a separate cylinder saddle, and the exposed-gear motor with stamped steel frames. On the front of the boiler, the cast smokebox opens for access to the headlight inside. The undersized feedwater heater on top of the boiler is actually the latch for opening and closing the smokebox.

The boiler and frame ride on the traditional tinplate locomotive motor complete with a reproduction nameplate of the prewar Lionel Corporation. Spur gears on the left side of the motor frame mesh with integral gears on the drivers, so for all outward appearances this mechanism is the archetypical "sidewinder" motor that powered toy trains since the early 20th century. But a closer look inside reveals that there are no trans-



verse-mounted armature, brush holders, and field coil mounted between the frames. Instead, a longitudinally mounted DC can motor with a flywheel/optical speed sensor drives the mechanism via the worm and gear design that's universal in today's 3-rail O gauge world. For all intents and purposes, this is a thoroughly modern motivator with Proto-Sound 3.0 and DCS, fan-driven ProtoSmoke unit, coil-actuated Proto-Coupler, constant brightness headlight, and tetherless drawbar.

Two steel stampings comprise the tender body, which is fastened to the stamped steel frame. Inside is the Proto-Sound 3.0



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electronics package with a speaker. Screws and bent-over tabs hold the tender body and frame together. As a historical side note, inserting tabs that are on one piece of a product into slots stamped into an adjoining piece was a common and inexpensive way to assemble tinplate toys in the years before WWII, and also for a few years afterward. However, disassembly of the toy for any reason was usually destructive in one way or another. Damaged paint at the tabs and slots was almost always the result of even the most careful disassembly. So with this history and experience from many years ago, I opted to not disassemble the tender to study its internal components. At a minimum, my straightening and then reseating the two tabs that held the cover sheet of the body to the frame would likely have damaged the flawless baked enamel paint, so I aborted my exploration into the tender.

Although I haven't seen a traditional version of the 261E as listed in the current Lionel Corporation Tinplate catalog, that locomotive has got to be a definite throwback all the way back into the past. According to the description in the catalog, an open-frame AC motor and a mechanical E-unit power the engine, with the tender housing an air whistle and manually opened box coupler. Of course, a traditional tab and loop drawbar joins the engine and tender. I can well imagine the nostalgic growl and traditional aroma of ozone from the series-wound brush motor. And let's not forget the ever-present AC buzz emanating from the coil-operated E-unit. But I digress—back to the modern version.

Smoke and sound volume controls for conventional transformer-controlled operation are underneath the tender. I found it interesting that although a DCC decoder is built into the Proto-Sound 3.0 electronics package, no switch exists to select DCS or DCC operation. Should someone want to run the 261E using DCC, the pertinent information is in the operation manual.

On both the modern and traditional versions of the 261E, two small white staffs with flags, also stamped metal, are owner-inserted into receptacles cast into the smokebox front. On our evaluation sample, the staffs were a tight fit, so they dutifully stayed in place throughout the entire review.



## 2600-Series Freight Cars

All three of the cars complemented the traditional prewar tinplate style of the locomotive, which was no surprise. I especially liked the red and green finish on the caboose that matched the locomotive. Naturally, all three cars had stamped steel bodies, frames, and trucks.

On the topic of the trucks on the cars as well as tender, I really liked the nickel-plated wheels and axles in addition to the plated journal boxes. The wheels are actually two stampings crimped together. Unlike contemporary fast-angle wheelsets where the wheels are pressed onto their axles and function as a single piece, the tinplate wheels revolve independently on their axles, as did those on postwar Lionel rolling stock.

To manually uncouple the cars was a simple matter of raising the two mating couplers' molded plastic boxes to unlatch both coupler hooks. For remote control uncoupling, each truck has a coil inside that lifts its respective coupler box. This coil and the one on the adjoining car receive their actuation power from a shoe on each truck. These shoes slide along the control rails of a separately purchased operating track section. Such a section matches the RealTrax included with the set and is available from MTH dealers.

As I unpacked the hopper car, I noticed a small handwheel on one side of the body. Rotating this wheel lowered and raised the hopper chute located underneath the car for some special play value.

The cars were the same width as traditionally sized postwar Lionel rolling stock but were noticeably taller. All three cars have the same fishbelly-style stamped steel frame; however, the frame for each car differs slightly according to the type of car. In my running a finger around the perimeter of each car's frame and also the trucks, I didn't run across any sharp edges that might cut a youthful hand—or for that fact, a senior one either.

To add an additional car to the Christmas set, the specially decorated No. 2655 O gauge boxcar, MTH #11-70101, is available at \$59.95. Of course other 2600-series freight cars are also available in traditional decoration for tinplate rolling stock.

## Track, Power, and Control

Eight O31 curved sections and four 10" straight sections comprise the set's oval of MTH RealTrax. Solid nickel-silver rails with a realistic cross section are mounted on molded plastic roadbed with ballast and crossties. Unlike other types of 3-rail O gauge track, these rails do not have metal pins or fishplates that mechanically and electrically join them. Instead, copper alloy leaf springs in the roadbed provide the electrical connection between the sections. Clips and tabs molded into the roadbed mechanically align the sections and hold them together. The operation manual has illustrated instructions for assembling the track sections and installing the illuminated lockon.

What is colloquially referred to as a brick, the Z-500 transformer is no more than an iron-core voltage step-down device with an input of 120 volts and a maximum 50-watt output at 18 volts. The only control on the transformer is a 4-amp circuit breaker.

The DCS Remote Commander control system included a handheld remote controller and a receiver. Installing the two owner-supplied AA batteries in the controller was no more involved than removing a Phillips screw and unlatching the battery cover. With the batteries installed, the cover latched into place. Because I'd be removing the batteries from the controller before shipping the set back to MTH, I debated leaving the screw out. But a modicum of caution won out, and I put the screw back into the controller.

Connecting the transformer to the Remote Commander receiver and then wiring the receiver to the track are ultra-simple to the point of being goofproof. A coaxial plug on the output cord from the transformer fits into a coax receptacle on the receiver. Between the receiver and the track is the RealTrax wire harness, which

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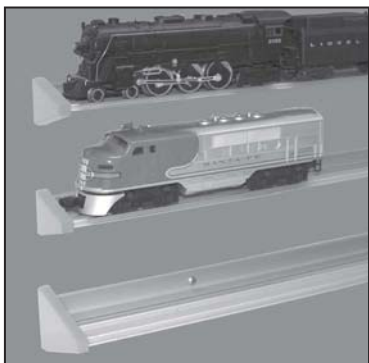
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is no more than a red wire and a black wire with a banana plug on each end. These plugs go into matched color receptacles on both the receiver and the lockon.

Basically, the Remote Commander system issues a reduced set of DCS commands to the locomotive. These commands include bell, whistle, various dialog and mechanical sounds, coupler actuation, Proto-Sound startup/shutdown, sound volume, Christmas freight announcement, direction, and—last but not least—speed increase or decrease. Communication between the remote, which functions as the transmitter for the DCS commands, and the receiver is unidirectional; that is, one way. By comparison, the full DCS Remote Controller and TIU use bidirectional communication. Additionally, signals from the remote to the receiver are transferred via infrared light rather than radio frequency as with DCS. I'll get more into this topic under the At Tracksides heading.

### Printed and Digital Media

Included with our evaluation set was an operation manual, RealWare DVD with track layout software, 2013 Lionel Corporation Tinplate catalog, information about DCS and the M.T.H. Railroaders Club, and special-offer subscription cards to hobby magazines

including *O Gauge Railroading*. Of the 54-page operation manual, 28 pages are about setting up and running the set as well as troubleshooting tips. The remaining pages cover running the locomotive using DCC. As to the 2013 catalog, I understand that the 269E sets were manufactured and packaged before the 2014 catalogs were printed.

### At Tracksides

Assembling the track and lockon was an exercise in careful alignment of each pair of sections before snapping them together. Once assembled on our thick carpeted living room floor, the loop of RealTrax proved capable of carrying the train. Oh, that loop included four extra straight sections of RealTrax, which I use when photographing MTH products. These extra sections let the train straighten out completely before it entered the next curve.

Electrically connecting the transformer, receiver, and lockon took less than a minute with no tools required.

Anyone who is familiar with DCS will pick right up with the Remote Commander. If not, the operation manual provides instructions for using the system to play with the train. By the way, the set also runs great using either a full DCS setup or a conventional transformer. A list of compatible transformers is in the operation manual.

The one sound sequence that's unique to the Christmas 269E set is the PFA that's definitely oriented to Christmas. As to the steam exhaust chuff sounds, they occur only twice for each revolution of the drivers, rather than the realistic four times. But then, in today's world of scale 3-rail O gauge trains, realism is *not* one of the attributes of tinplate trains. Given the small drivers on the 261E, I can understand why a rate of two chuffs was used.


In typical MTH fashion, the "little red engine that could" started and pulled its train slowly and smoothly and accelerated or decelerated each time I pressed the "+" or the "-" bar in the remote. Each time I pressed the speed bar or a button, the green LED on top of the receiver case blinked once indicating successful reception of the command. Even with its spur gears, the engine ran as smooth and mechanically quiet as any MTH locomotive I own or have reviewed in the past. To be candid, I've come to expect this type of quality performance from MTH locomotives. Anything less disappoints me, and I've rarely been disappointed.

All three cars trailed their locomotive without problem one. Because I'm used to modern wheelsets that roll rather precisely along the rails, the tinplate wheels immediately attracted my attention during the train's initial run. A number of them wobbled and shook noticeably on their axles throughout the train's first and all successive running sessions, but derailments were zero.

To replace the brass-colored bell that abandoned the engine during the first 30 minutes of operation, I found

removal and installation of the boiler and cab assembly to be relatively easy. The job took less than five minutes each direction using #0 and #1 Phillips screwdrivers plus a small flat-blade screwdriver. I cheated—illustrated instructions were in the operation manual.

Successful operation of the DCS Remote Commander is not unlike that of an infrared remote for a TV or other electronic entertainment device. When pressing a button on the Remote Commander controller to issue a command, such as blowing the whistle, the controller has to be pointed more or less at the receiver with a clear visual path between them. That is, if something obstructs the infrared light from the remote, such as the train passing between the remote and the receiver, the receiver's green LED doesn't blink, and the locomotive continues on with whatever it's doing. As a test of the system's operating range, at over 15' with no obstructions between the remote and receiver, the DCS Remote Commander worked great.

Proto-Coupler operation of the prewar-style box couplers was fun to watch. The simple mechanism lifted the coupler box on both the tender and lead car simultaneously to unhook the two couplers from each other. Actually, the whole train was fun to watch as it trundled its way around the loop of track at a slow and realistic speed. And as a speeding toy train that barely stayed on the rails through the track loop's O31 curves, the 261E and three 2600-series freight cars were in their natural element—fast, but not as fast as Santa's sleigh! 

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## LIONEL O GAUGE DEALER EXCLUSIVE TRAIN SETS (Transformer Controlled - No Track or Transformer Included)

L81021	Boston & Maine Paul Revere GP-9 Set	\$374.95
L81023	Jersey Central Yard Boss 0-4-0 Set	374.95
L81025	Pocono Berkshire Set	359.95
L81028	Marquette Freight GP38 Set	324.95
L81029	C&NW Windy City GP38 Set	299.95
L81030	Union Pacific Gold Coast 0-8-0 Flyer Set	324.95

## LionChief REMOTE CONTROL TRAIN SETS

L30183	Lionel 2-4-6 Scout Remote Set	\$149.95
L30205	Silver Bells Christmas Remote Set	179.95
L30206	Area 51 Remote RS-3 Remote Set	189.95
L30207	Santa Fe RS-3 Scout Freight Set	149.95
L30214	Peanuts® Halloween 2-4-2 Remote Set	224.95
L30233	Pennsylvania Flyer Remote Set	189.95
L81031	Dinosaur Diesel LionChief Set	134.95
L81101	Remote Polar w/10th Anniv. Decoration	299.95
L81259	Pennsy 0-8-0 "Broadway Ltd" Set	279.95
L81263	CNU Passenger LionChief Set	279.95
L81264	Western Union LionChief General Set	279.95
L81266	Amtrak LionChief Freight Set	329.95
L81279	"Albert Hall" LionChief 4-6-0 Euro Set	299.95
L81280	"Saint Nicholas" Victorian Remote Set	299.95
L81284	Frosty the Snowman Remote Set	224.95
L81286	Lionel Junction "Little Steam" LionChief Set	134.95
L81287	Lionel Junction UP LionChief Set	134.95
L81288	Pet Shop Diesel LionChief Set	134.95
L81395	Thomas Kinkade® Remote Set	284.95
L81475	DC Comics Batman Subway Set	264.95
L81479	Batman M7 Add-On Pair	99.95
L81480	New John Deere RS-3 Remote Set	224.95



## THOMAS & FRIENDS

L18771	Percy Engine w/Remote System	\$109.95
L18774	James Engine w/Remote System	109.95
L18775	Diesel Engine w/Remote System	109.95
L30162	Thomas & Friends™ Christmas Remote Set	149.95
L30190	Thomas & Friends™ Remote Set	149.95
L30221	Diesel Remote Set	149.95
L30222	Percy Remote Set	149.95
L30223	James Remote Set	149.95
L81331	Iron Arry Remote Locomotive	109.95
L81332	Iron Bert Remote Locomotive	109.95
L81423	Sodor Coal and Scrap Cars 2 Pack	50.95



## THE POLAR EXPRESS™

L31960	The Polar Express™ Set (Whistle)	\$279.95
L30184	Polar Express™ Steam Freight Set (Whistle)	279.95
L30218	Polar Express™ O Gauge Remote Set	299.95
L81101	Remote Polar™ w/10th Anniv. Deco	299.95
L81450	The Polar Express™ Trolley	79.95
L25134	Polar Express™ Diner	50.95
L25135	Polar Exp. Baggage Car	50.95
L25186	Polar Exp. Chocolate Car	50.95
L31301	Polar Express™ Disappearing Hobo Car	54.95
L36875	Polar Express™ Coach w/Announcement	94.95



## THE POLAR EXPRESS™ O' SCALE

L11450	Polar Exp. Scale Berkshire <b>Gold</b> (L) (BTO)	\$1079.95
L25795	Polar Express Scale <b>Gold</b> Coach	154.95
L25796	Polar Express Scale <b>Gold</b> Observation	154.95
L11451	Polar Exp. Scale Berkshire (Black) (L) (BTO)	1049.95
L25576	Polar Express Scale Observation	151.95
L25586	Polar Express Scale Heavyweight Baggage Car	151.95
L25598	Polar Express Scale Combination Car	151.95
L25630	Polar Exp. Scale Diner Car (L) = Legacy	151.95
L81945	Polar Exp. Scale Coach (BTO) = Built To Order	151.95

## VISION LINE BIG BOY LOCOMOTIVES

L11434	Union Pacific Big Boy #4006 (L) (BTO)	\$1999.95
L11435	Union Pacific Big Boy #4018 (L) (BTO)	1999.95
L11436	Union Pacific Big Boy #4005 (L) (BTO)	1999.95
L11437	Union Pacific Big Boy #4014 (L) (BTO)	1999.95
L11438	Union Pacific Big Boy #4017 (L) (BTO)	1999.95
L11448	Union Pacific Big Boy #4012 (L) (BTO)	1999.95
L11449	Union Pacific Big Boy #4004 (L) (BTO)	1999.95
L81908	PFE Steel Sided Reefer 3 Pack	172.95
L81142	PFE UP/SP SS Reefer w/Frt. Snds 3 Pack	215.99
L81840	Union Pacific Ca-4 Caboose #3880	64.95



**BIG BOY  
DISPLAY CASE**

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## 2014 CHRISTMAS ITEMS

L30193	Peanuts® Christmas Set (Whistle)	\$279.95
L30205	Silver Bells Christmas Remote Set	179.95
L30219	Gingerbread Junction Dockside Set	219.95
L81280	"Saint Nicholas" Victorian Remote Set	299.95
L81284	Frosty the Snowman Remote Set	224.95
L81395	Thomas Kinkade® Remote Set	284.95
L30162	Thomas & Friends™ Christmas Remote Set	149.95
L39361	Coke Polar Bear Boxcar	50.95
L81316	Personalized Message Christmas Boxcar	57.95
L81426	Frosty the Snowman Animated Gondola	43.95
L81427	Frosty the Snowman Aquarium Car	50.95
L81428	Frosty the Snowman Boxcar	35.95
L81534	Christmas Toys Stock Car	50.95
L81699	Polar Express™ GLA Twin Hopper	55.95
L81733	2014 Lionel Christmas Boxcar	46.95
L81895	North Pole Central 52'-6" Gondola	57.95
L81984	#1887 Christmas Flatcar with Reindeer	50.95
L81985	#6428 Christmas Mail Car	43.95
L81986	Christmas Wish Tank Car	43.95
L81987	2014 Angela Trotta Thomas Boxcar	46.95
L81990	Christmas Gondola with Reindeer Feed Vats	46.95
L81992	Santa Claus Bobbing Head Boxcar	46.95
L81993	Santa Finder Searchlight Car	39.95
L81999	Pennsylvania Gondola w/Xmas Gifts & Trees	46.95
L82000	Pennsylvania Christmas Crane Car	54.95
L82001	Merry & Bright Hot Cocoa Car	50.95
L81249	10' Christmas Girder Bridge Track	19.95
L81290	Thomas Kinkade® Holiday Covered Bridge	52.95
L81425	Frosty the Snowman Passenger Station	48.95
L81627	Christmas Hopper Shed	26.95
L81988	Angela Trotta Thomas Christmas Billboard Pack	12.95
L82002	Old St. Nick Operating Billboard	44.95
L82003	Christmas Blinking Water Tower	27.95
L82005	Christmas Wreath Clock Tower	32.95

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Listing

## LIONCHIEF REMOTE CONTROL DIESEL LOCOMOTIVES WITH RAILSOUNDS

L38778	Chicago & North Western RS-3 Diesel	\$239.95
L38779	New York Central RS-3 Diesel	239.95
L38816	Pennsylvania RS-3 Diesel	239.95
L38819	Denver & Rio Grande RS-3 Diesel	239.95
L38821	Santa Fe GP7 Diesel	239.95
L38824	Northern Pacific GP7 Diesel	239.95
L38825	Union Pacific GP7 Diesel	239.95
L38827	Burlington GP7 Diesel	239.95



## LIONCHIEF REMOTE CONTROL STEAM LOCOMOTIVES WITH RAILSOUNDS

L81295	Santa Fe 2-8-2 Mikado Steam	\$309.95
L81296	Great Northern 2-8-2 Mikado Steam	309.95
L81297	Pennsylvania 2-8-2 Mikado Steam	309.95
L81299	Chessie System 2-8-2 Mikado Steam	309.95
L81301	New York Central 4-6-4 Hudson Steam	309.95
L81302	Chesapeake & Ohio 4-6-4 Hudson Steam	309.95
L81303	Union Pacific 4-6-4 Hudson Steam	309.95
L81304	Canadian National 4-6-4 Hudson Steam	309.95
L81307	Baltimore & Ohio 4-6-2 Pacific Steam	309.95
L81308	Canadian Pacific 4-6-2 Pacific Steam	309.95
L81309	Southern Pacific 4-6-2 Pacific Steam	309.95
L81311	Alaska 4-6-2 Pacific Steam	309.95



## STANDARD O SCALE STEAM LOCOMOTIVES

L11452	C&O Berkshire (L) (BTO)	(L) = Legacy \$1049.95
L11453	ERIE Berkshire (L) (BTO)	(BTO) = Built To Order 1049.95
L11454	Nickel Plate Berkshire (L) (BTO)	1049.95
L11456	Pere Marquette Berkshire #1227 (L) (BTO)	1049.95
L11462	SP AC-12 Cab Forward #4294 (L)	1229.95
L11463	SP AC-12 Cab Forward #4291 (L)	1229.95
L11464	SP AC-12 Cab Forward #4286 (L)	1229.95
L11465	SP Daylight AC-12 Cab Fwd. #4275 (L)	1229.95
L81245	Pennsylvania M1A #6771 (L) (BTO)	1079.95
L81246	Pennsylvania M1A #6764 (L) (BTO)	1079.95
L81184	P&WV 2-8-2 Heavy Mikado #1152 (L)	939.95
L81185	CNJ 2-8-2 Heavy Mikado #854 (L)	939.95
L81186	Frisco 2-8-2 Heavy Mikado #4126 (L)	939.95
L81188	NYC 2-8-2 Heavy Mikado #9506 (L)	939.95
L81192	GN 2-8-2 Heavy Mikado #3148 (L)	939.95
L11416	Pennsy #6200 6-8-6 S2 Turbine (L)	939.95
L11401	Undecorated 2-8-8-2 H7 Pilot (L)	979.95
L11469	Undec. AC-12 Cab Forward Pilot (L) (BTO)	1229.95
L81179	Undec. Heavy Mikado Pilot (L) (BTO)	939.95
L81243	Undecorated M1a Pilot (L) (BTO)	1079.95

## STANDARD O SCALE DIESEL LOCOMOTIVES

Multiple units available for most roadnames - Call or See Our Web Site

L81134	BN SD70MAC #9424 (L) (BTO)	\$399.95
L81137	BNSF SD70MAC #9858 (L) (BTO)	399.95
L81141	Conrail SD70MAC #4138 (L) (BTO)	399.95
L81144	CSX SD70MAC #781 (L) (BTO)	399.95
L81147	KCS SD70MAC #3950 (L) (BTO)	399.95
L81151	Alaska SD70MAC #4002 (L) (BTO)	399.95
L81154	UP ES44AC #7361 (L) (BTO)	399.95
L81160	CSX ES44AC #937 (L) (BTO)	399.95
L81170	Iowa Interstate ES44AC #507 (L) (BTO)	399.95
L81171	Ferromex ES44AC #4617 (L) (BTO)	399.95
L81176	CN ES44AC #2812 (L) (BTO)	399.95
L81207	CP H24-66 TrainMaster #8900 (L)	399.95
L81209	CNJ H24-66 TrainMaster #2401 (L)	399.95
L81211	RDG H24-66 TrainMaster #801 (L)	399.95
L81213	Southern Pacific H24-66 TrainMaster #4803 (L)	399.95
L81215	SOU H24-66 TrainMaster #6300 (L)	399.95
L81217	N&W H24-66 TrainMaster #151 (L)	399.95
L81219	AT&SF E8 AA (L) (BTO)	669.95
L81222	Penn Central E8 AA (L) (BTO)	669.95
L81225	Rock Island E8 AA (L) (BTO)	669.95
L81228	C&O E8 AA (L) (BTO)	669.95
L81231	Erie E8 AA (L) (BTO)	669.95
L81234	MKT E8 AA (L) (BTO)	669.95
L81237	Seaboard E8 AA (L) (BTO)	669.95
L81240	Wabash E8 AA (L) (BTO)	669.95
L81504	Ann Arbor FA-2 AA (L) (BTO)	539.95
L81522	Ann Arbor Powered FB-2 #53-B (L)	324.95
L81528	Ann Arbor Non-Pwr FB-2 #53-C (L)	254.95
L81507	B&O (L) FA-2 AA	539.95
L81523	B&O (L) Powered FB-2 #817X	324.95
L81529	B&O (L) Non-Powered FB-2 #827X	254.95
L81510	Erie (L) FA-2 AA	539.95
L81524	Erie (L) Powered FB-2 #736B	324.95
L81530	Erie (L) Non-Powered FB-2 #736C	254.95
L81513	MKT (L) FA-2 AA	539.95
L81525	MKT (L) Powered FB-2 #331B	324.95
L81531	MKT (L) Non-Powered FB-2 #331D	254.95
L81516	NYC (L) FA-2 AA	539.95
L81526	NYC (L) Powered FB-2 #3327	324.95
L81532	NYC (L) Non-Powered FB-2 #3348	254.95
L81519	PRR (L) FA-2 AA	539.95
L81527	PRR (L) Powered FB-2 #9608B	324.95
L81533	PRR (L) Non-Powered FB-2 #9610B	254.95

(L) = Legacy  
(BTO) = Built To Order

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L81439	Halloween Pumpkinheads Handcar	\$61.95
L81440	Western Union Handcar	61.95
L81444	PRR Command Control Tie-Jector	144.95
L81445	MOW Command Control Tie-Jector	144.95
L81446	Santa Fe Command Control Tie-Jector	144.95
L81447	Norfolk Southern Command Control Tie-Jector	144.95
L81448	Amtrak Command Control Tie-Jector	144.95
L81449	Zombie Birney Trolley	71.95
L81450	The Polar Express™ Trolley	79.95

## U.S. PRESIDENTIAL BOXCARS - MADE IN THE U.S.A.

L81487	President Reagan Boxcar	\$46.95
L81488	President Jackson Boxcar	46.95
L81489	President Harding Boxcar	46.95
L81490	President Eisenhower Boxcar	46.95

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## MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL SERIES BOXCARS

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L81195	Pennsylvania Railroad Boxcar	\$46.95
L81196	Timken Boxcar	46.95
L81197	Santa Fe Boxcar	46.95
L81198	Great Northern Boxcar	46.95
L81199	Pennsylvania Railroad Tank Car	46.95
L81200	Timken Tank Car	46.95
L81201	Great Northern Tank Car	46.95
L81202	Santa Fe Tank Car	46.95
L81203	Pennsylvania Railroad Flatcar	46.95
L81204	Santa Fe Flatcar	46.95
L81205	Timken Flatcar	46.95
L81206	Great Northern Flatcar	46.95

## BOXCARS

L25973	Seaboard Single Door Rnd Roof Boxcar #19297	\$57.95
L38393	PRR Single Door Rnd Roof Boxcar #76648	57.95
L81000	BNSF Waffle-Sided Boxcar	32.95
L81006	PRR Hi-Cube Boxcar	32.95
L81007	Seaboard Waffle-Sided Boxcar	32.95
L81008	Central of Georgia Boxcar	32.95
L81013	Frisco Boxcar	32.95
L81066	MILW RD Double-Sheathed Boxcar #8775	57.95

Continued next column

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BOXCARS (Continued)		
L81081	Alaska Steel-Sided Reefer #10806	\$57.95
L81090	NS 86' Hi-Cube Boxcar 2-Pack	136.95
L81095	CR 86' Hi-Cube Boxcar 2-Pack	136.95
L81619	RDG PS-1 Boxcar #109448	57.95
L81703	AT&SF 86' Hi-Cube Boxcar 2-Pack	136.95
L81704	GT 86' Hi-Cube Boxcar 2-Pack	136.95
L81705	MILW RD 86' Hi-Cube Boxcar 2-Pack	136.95
L81706	Frisco 86' Hi-Cube Boxcar 2-Pack	136.95
L81707	NYC 86' Hi-Cube Boxcar 2-Pack	136.95
L81708	AT&SF 86' Hi-Cube Boxcar #36715	68.95
L81710	MILW RD 86' Hi-Cube Boxcar #4980	68.95
L81711	Frisco 86' Hi-Cube Boxcar #9125	68.95
L81712	NYC 86' Hi-Cube Boxcar #67001	68.95
L81827	PC Single Door Rnd Roof Boxcar #100104	57.95
L81828	GN Single Door Rnd Roof Boxcar #5217	57.95
L81829	WP Single Door Rnd Roof Boxcar #10211	57.95
L81836	Erie Double-Sheathed Boxcar #71107	57.95
L81837	Frisco Double-Sheathed Boxcar #128528	57.95
L81838	CNJ Double-Sheathed Boxcar #14014	57.95

REEFERS		
L15094	Halloween Reefer	\$39.95
L25934	Santa Fe Map & Slogan Reefer 3-Pack	99.95
L81011	Pacific Fruit Express Reefer	32.95
L81015	Boston & Maine Reefer	32.95
L81081	Alaska Steel-Sided Reefer #10806	57.95
L81839	PFE Halloween SS Reefer #81839	57.95
L81142	PFE UP/SP SS Reefer w/Frt. Snds 3 Pk.	215.99
L81908	PFE Steel-Sided Reefer 3-Pack	172.95

AUTO CARRIERS		
L19388	BN '89 Auto Carrier Car	\$79.95
L19389	Southern Pacific '89 Auto Carrier Car	79.95
L19390	Canadian Pacific '89 Auto Carrier Car	79.95
L29338	BN 89' Auto Carrier Cars (2 Pk.)	159.95
L29345	Santa Fe 89' Auto Carrier Car	79.95
L29346	Soo Line 89' Auto Carrier Cars (2 Pk.)	159.95
L29349	SP 89' Auto Carrier Cars (2 Pk.)	159.95
L29377	CP 89' Auto Carrier Cars (2 Pk.)	159.95
L81003	CP Bi-Level Auto Carrier	32.95

TANKCARS		
L81002	Union Pacific 3 Dome Tank Car	\$32.95
L81009	Southern 2-Dome Tank Car	32.95
L81012	T&P Single-Dome Tank Car	32.95
L81076	Penn Salt 8000-Gallon Tank Car #4770	52.95
L81077	PM 8000-Gallon Tank Car #71710	52.95
L81078	NYC 8000-Gallon Tank Car #107898	52.95
L81079	NKP 8000-Gallon Tank Car #50277	52.95
L81080	BN 8000-Gallon Tank Car #977100	52.95
L81292	Valley Central Single-Dome Tank Car	31.95
L81419	Alien Ooze Single-Dome Tank Car	43.95
L81615	Union Pacific Single-Dome Tank Car	32.95
L81617	Pet Shop Single-Dome Tank Car	32.95
L81680	Dinosaur Single-Dome Tank Car	29.95

GONDOLAS & ORE CARS		
L81010	FECC Gondola with Reels	\$32.95
L81014	D&RGW Ore Car	32.95
L81420	PRR Truss Rod Gondola w/Tarp Load	43.95
L81891	BNSF 52-6 Gondola w/Covers #523300	57.95
L81892	Bethlehem Steel 52-6 Gon. w/Covers #303022	57.95
L81893	GTW 52-6 Gondola w/Covers #145390	57.95
L81894	CSX 52-6 Gondola w/Covers #709190	57.95

FLATCARS & MAXI STACK CARS		
L81001	SP&S Flatcar with Stakes & Bulkheads	\$32.95
L81004	B&O Dep. Ctr Flatcar w/Stakes/Transformer	32.95
L81465	SP Flatcar with Two Piggybacks	50.95
L81466	BN Maxi-Stack (Pair)	89.95
L81436	Intermodal Container 4-Pack	31.95
L81486	NYC Patrol Helicopter Flatcar	43.95
L81896	NYC PS-5 Flatcar with Piggybacks	71.95
L81897	MILW PS-5 Flatcar with Piggybacks	71.95
L81898	Lionel PS-5 Flatcar with Piggybacks	71.95
L81899	CP PS-5 Flatcar with Piggybacks	71.95
L81900	UP PS-5 Flatcar with Piggybacks	71.95
L81901	NYC Semi-Tractor & Piggyback Trailer	64.95
L81902	MILW Semi-Tractor & Piggyback Trailer	64.95
L81903	Lionel Semi-Tractor & Piggyback Trailer	64.95
L81904	CP Semi-Tractor & Piggyback Trailer	64.95
L81905	UP Semi-Tractor & Piggyback Trailer	64.95

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L81437	York Peppermint Patty Vat Car	\$46.95
L29694	Hershey Mint Car	53.95
L81469	Great Northern Bi-Level Stockcar	43.95

HOPPERS		
L81005	Maine Central 2-Bay Hopper w/Coal Load	\$32.95
L81435	N&W NS Heritage Quad Hopper w/Coal Load	39.95
L81686	PRR GLA 50-Ton Twin Hopper 3-Pack (Matches Cars in L81247 M1a Set)	159.95
L81687	Lehigh Valley GLA 50-Ton Twin Hopper 2-Pack	104.95
L81688	CB&Q GLA 50-Ton Twin Hopper 3-Pack	159.95
L81689	C&O GLA 50-Ton Twin Hopper 3-Pack	159.95
L81789	NH GLA 50-Ton Twin Hopper 2-Pack	104.95
L81793	Berwind GLA 50-Ton Twin Hopper 3-Pack (Matches Cars in L81247 M1a Set)	159.95

L81824	P&WV GLA 50-Ton Twin Hopper 2-Pack	104.95
L81858	PRR GLA 50-Ton Twin Hopper 3-Pack	

CABOOSES		
L81806	Pennsylvania N5B Caboose #477814	\$68.95
L81807	Conrail N5B Caboose #22882	68.95
L81808	Penn Central N5B Caboose #22802	68.95
L81809	LIRR N5B Caboose #2	68.95
L81810	Lionel Lines N5B Caboose #2	68.95
L81840	UP Ca-4 Caboose #3880 (Matches Vision Line Big Boy)	64.95
L81841	UP MOW Ca-4 Caboose #903224 (Silver)	64.95
L81967	UP MOW Ca-4 Caboose #903019 (Green)	64.95
L81968	Halloween Ca-4 Caboose #X6734	64.95

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SCALE OPERATING CARS		
L81881	SP Command Control Crane Car (L)	\$359.95
L81886	SP RailSounds Boom Car (L) (L = Legacy)	174.95
L81882	DT&I Command Control Crane Car (L)	359.95
L81887	DT&I RailSounds Boom Car (L)	174.95
L81883	CSX Command Control Crane Car (L)	359.95
L81888	CSX RailSounds Boom Car (L)	174.95
L81884	Bethlehem Steel Command Control Crane Car (L)	359.95
L81890	Bethlehem Steel RailSounds Boom Car (L)	174.95
L81885	MOW (Yellow) Command Control Crane Car (L)	359.95
L81889	MOW (Yellow) RailSounds Boom Car (L)	174.95
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OPERATING ROLLING STOCK		
L37082	Peanuts Animated Trick or Treat Chase	\$50.95
L81256	Personalized Message Birthday Boxcar	57.95
	Records Three 8 Second Personal Messages	
L81491	Jersey Central Coal Dump Car	39.95
L81568	4th of July Parade Operating Boxcar	57.95
L81725	UP Operating Merchandise Car #9143	57.95
L81726	REA Operating Merchandise Car #6282	57.95

PASSENGER CARS		
L81462	Pennsy "Broadway Ltd" Add-On Baggage	\$50.95
L81464	CNJ "Montclair" Add-On Passenger Car	43.95
L81625	Amtrak Add-On Baggage Car	61.95

18" ALUMINUM PASSENGER CARS		
L81800	Southern 2-Pack (Observation/Coach)	\$229.95
L81801	Southern 2-Pack (Combo/Vista Dome)	229.95
L81812	Rock Island 2-Pack (Observation/Coach)	229.95
L81813	Rock Island 2-Pack (Combo/Vista Dome)	229.95
L81818	C&O 2-Pack (Observation/Coach)	229.95
L81819	C&O 2-Pack (Combination/Vista Dome)	229.95
L81830	MKT 2-Pack (Observation/Coach)	229.95
L81831	MKT 2-Pack (Baggage/Diner)	229.95
L81842	Wabash 2-Pack (Observation/Coach)	229.95
L81843	Wabash 2-Pack (Combo/Vista Dome)	229.95
L81866	Rock Island 2-Pack (Baggage/Diner)	229.95
L81869	C&O 2-Pack (Baggage/Diner)	229.95
L81872	Wabash 2-Pack (Baggage/Diner)	229.95
L81875	MKT 2-Pack (Combination/Vista Dome)	229.95
L81878	Southern 2-Pack (Baggage/Diner)	229.95
L81969	PRR 2-Pack (Parlor/Coach)	229.95
L81972	B&O 2-Pack (Baggage/Sleeper)	229.95
L81975	SP 2-Pack (Sleeper/Coach)	229.95
L81978	UP 2-Pack (Sleeper/Coach)	229.95
L81981	KCS 2-Pack (Sleeper/Coach)	229.95

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- Twin motors with flywheels
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# Williams by Bachmann NS Heritage SD90

Review and Photos by George Brown

Designed in the 1990s at the peak of the horsepower race between EMD and GE, the SD90 from EMD was a huge locomotive at 80' in length. But the locomotive's biggest feature was to be its new 16-cylinder four-stroke 265H prime mover rated at 6000 hp. However, when the SD90 made its debut to the rail industry in 1996, the new H engine was not ready for prime time live. In a stopgap effort to garner orders for its new locomotive, EMD sold and shipped initial-production SD90s as convertible units powered by the company's proven 4300 hp two-stroke

16-710 diesel and AC traction motors. This lower-powered convertible version was called the SD9043MAC. The plan was that after the 265H entered production, EMD would then convert the existing 4300 hp units to 6000 hp using the new prime mover.

The stopgap plan may have been a good one, but unfortunately the 265H was not. On the road, the new prime mover experienced one failure after another with its fate sealed by high fuel consumption and the inability to meet upcoming emissions requirements. The only roads that ordered SD90s were the Union Pacific and the Canadian Pacific, and most of those units were the SD9043MAC. Not one of the 4300 hp units was converted to 6000 hp.

In 2012 as part of its 30th anniversary, the Norfolk Southern ordered 20 new locomotives to be painted in color schemes that honored the company's predecessor railroads. Ten of these were new SD70ACe units from EMD, and the other ten were ES44AC units from GE. One of the SD70s, cab number 1074, was painted in colors commemorating the former Lackawanna Railroad.

The Williams by Bachmann SD90 featured in this review actually looks quite similar to the Norfolk Southern SD70ACe heritage unit. At nearly 17" between its end sills, the model is within 1-1/2" of the scale 74' length of a real SD70ACe and is designed to negotiate O31 curves. Other Norfolk Southern heritage color schemes currently offered honor the Erie, Jersey Central, New York Central, and Reading.



## Construction and Features

Locomotives from Williams by Bachmann have a well-earned reputation for simple construction that can withstand a lot of...let's call it stress at the hands of overly enthusiastic owners or operators. Because of my experience with several Williams and Williams by Bachmann locomotives that I own plus those I've reviewed in the past, I consider them bullet proof. Of course, the fact that all Williams by Bachmann locomotives operate using conventional transformer control, the complexity, expense, and potential for reliability glitches that can penetrate the command operating environment simply do not exist. But for those operators who want the simple and robust construction plus the benefits of command operation, the SD90 has the internal space for owner installation of the necessary electronics.

The body shell is substantial with the grille, door, fan, and other details molded into the plastic. Molded inside the shell is the former Williams Reproductions logo, which sure identifies the origin of the tooling. Four self-tapping Phillips screws hold the shell to the frame, which is stamped from 0.055" sheet steel. Because the handrails on the sides and ends are part of the frame stamping and are formed to the prototypically correct 90 degrees to the floor, the frame is absolutely ridged. Removing the body from the frame for periodic occasional maintenance or repair takes about a minute, with installation equally as quick and easy.

Housed inside the body shell are the electronic reverse and

sound generator printed circuit boards and also the speaker. The reverse unit features an AC-DC rectifier for the DC can motors and also the digital sound generator board. A slide switch located underneath the frame locks the reverse unit in forward or reverse, depending on operator preference.

In a heart-thumping change from the archconservative architecture that exemplifies Williams by Bachmann locomotives, gone are the frame-mounted incandescent bulbs for the front and rear headlights. At each end of the body shell, two white LEDs on a small circuit board move this model diesel locomotive into the 21st century.

On each truck, a reasonably sized can motor with a flywheel drives two of the three axles via metal gears. For operation on tight 3-rail curves, the wheelset closest to the fuel tank is an idler with no flanges on the wheels. To keep tooling costs down and thereby the SD90's price, the three-axle truck blocks and side frames are the same design used by Williams by Bachmann on its previous releases of six-axle diesels with EMD prototypes.

Decoration of the SD90 is some of the best I've seen from Williams by Bachmann, if not the best. Color separation is sharp and crisp with no bleed, even across the several molded-in panels, shelves, and grab irons that comprise the locomotive's exterior. Overall the paint, lettering, and graphics are excellent. Additionally, parts of the handrails are masked and painted with hand-trimmed edges on the steps and also the frame above the steps. Bottom line, the SD90 is a handsomely finished model.



### Williams by Bachmann SD90 Features and Details

- Die-cast truck blocks, side frames, pilots, and fuel tank
- 6-amp electronic reverse unit with direction lockout
- True Blast Plus 16-bit digital sound of the
  - EMD diesel prime mover
  - Horn
  - Bell
- Dual DC can motors with flywheels
- Metal drive gears
- Glazed windows
- Separate grab irons, windshield wipers, and sand fills
- Separate five chime horns
- Die-cast thumbtack-style operating couplers
- Die-cast truck blocks with bronze axle bushings
- Four traction tires
- LED headlights
- Spare traction tires

## At Trackside

All Williams by Bachmann locomotives, as did predecessor units from the former Williams Reproductions, power up in forward with the sequence of forward, neutral, reverse, neutral, forward. At initial power-up with our official test train coupled to it, the SD90 smoothly started its train as the sound system cut in with the sound of a recent-production EMD prime mover at idle.

Williams diesel locomotives have always run fast, actually very fast even at low power settings, and the Williams by Bachmann SD90 carries on with that characteristic. The SD90 proved to be a bona fide speed merchant on the relatively flat profile of the editorial Carpet Central Railroad. Even when I ran the engine on my outer loop with its wide O72 curves, the throttle lever on my ZW-L never went beyond the first quarter of its travel. Coupling a heavy train of 22 weighted O scale freight cars to the big gray diesel improved its low-speed performance; that is, the heavy train noticeably loaded the engine for a realistically slow and smooth start and acceleration.

As I've reported in previous reviews of the True Blast Plus sound system, it generates sounds of what could be the prototypically correct prime mover for the model, such as the EMD 16-710 in a real SD90, in eight rev levels from idle to wide open. As to the horn, it represents the sound that emanates from a modern diesel, and the bell...well, it clangs like a bell should.

Raising or lowering the track voltage increases or decreases the rev levels, but I have to admit that I verified the sounds while the engine was sitting in neutral. With the SD90 running at a scale 60 mph, only the second rev level roared, and there was a lot of



unused throttle still available on the transformer. I was reasonably certain that enough voltage on the track to trigger the third, fourth, or higher rev level would likely launch the big diesel and its train from one of my O72 curves. As a side note, with the train running at a scale 60 mph, I could barely hear the sounds of the prime mover over the din from the train's wheels on the rails. Unfortunately, there's no way to adjust the sound volume up or down or to turn it off.

The minimum curve for the SD90 is O31, and I'm sure that's an accurate specification. With its short wheelbase of 1-1/2"

between the two flanged wheelsets on each of the free-swinging trucks, the engine negotiated my Atlas O36 curves and switches without a problem other than a lot of overhang to the inside of the curve. Of course, extreme overhang on O31 or even O36 curves is to be expected from a locomotive that's nearly 17" long with approximately 11-1/2" between the truck pivot points.

One of several benefits from the new LED headlights is constant brightness. To me, the best benefit is no more light flooding the inside of the body shell as did previously released diesels with two incandescent light bulbs. Running the new SD90 in twilight or darkness was a distinct pleasure. For that matter, running the engine under any condition was fun. It was smooth, predictable, and dependable. I couldn't ask for more from an O gauge locomotive.



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### At the End of the Run

I've seen SD90s in the five available Norfolk Southern heritage color schemes advertised in the \$230–\$250 price range, plus shipping, by mail-order dealers on the Internet. For the conventional operator, the recently released SD90 from Williams by Bachmann is hard to beat. 

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### Williams by Bachmann SD90 Conventional Performance

(sound: on)

**Length:** 17-1/2" over couplers; 16-7/8" between end sills

**Distance Between Locomotive Pickup Rollers:** 7-3/8"

**Weight on Driving Wheels:** 4 lbs, 13 oz

**Distance Between Pickup Rollers:** 7-3/8"

**Tractive Effort:** 2 lb, 8 oz @ 7.2 VAC, 5.6 A, 40 W

**Minimum Sustained Speed:** 16 scale mph @ 5.9 VAC, 1.3 A, 8 W

**Maximum Tested Speed:** 60 scale mph @ 8.8 VAC, 2.1 A, 11 W

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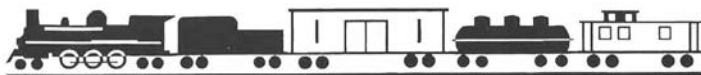
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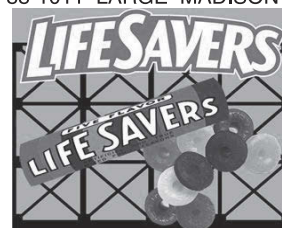
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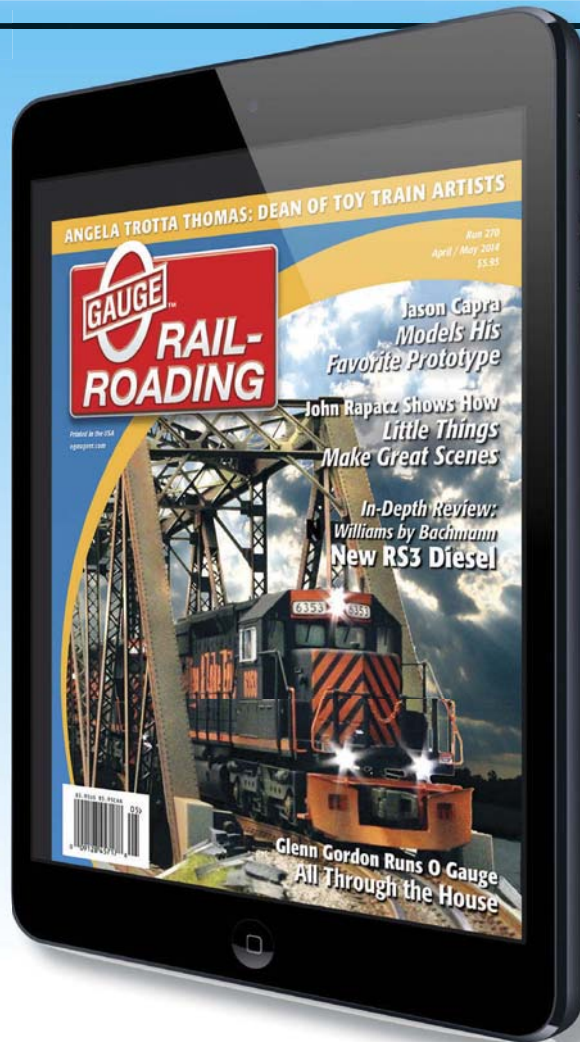
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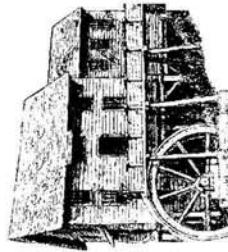
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Christmas in the Big Apple is spectacular, even in O gauge.

# Christmas, Memories and a Cherished City

Article and Photos by Skip Natoli

What do Lionel trains, New York City, and Christmas have in common? To a young boy growing up in the New York metropolitan area during the 1950s, the correct answer is...a whole lot!

Lionel trains had already been around for over 50 years and had long been established as a big part of Christmas folklore—American-style—and a perfect complement to Santa Claus and the evergreen tree. The Lionel Corporation originated in New York City and established its headquarters at 15 East 26th Street

where generations visited several magnificently detailed train layouts during the Christmas season. I was one of the lucky ones who got to visit the “showroom layout” many times with my parents on our annual holiday trips to the city. These trips also included stops at Madison Hardware, Macy’s Herald Square, Gimbel’s, Polk’s Hobby Center, Carmen Webster’s hobby shop, FAO Schwarz, and Rockefeller Center. As you might well imagine, these little excursions left quite an impression.

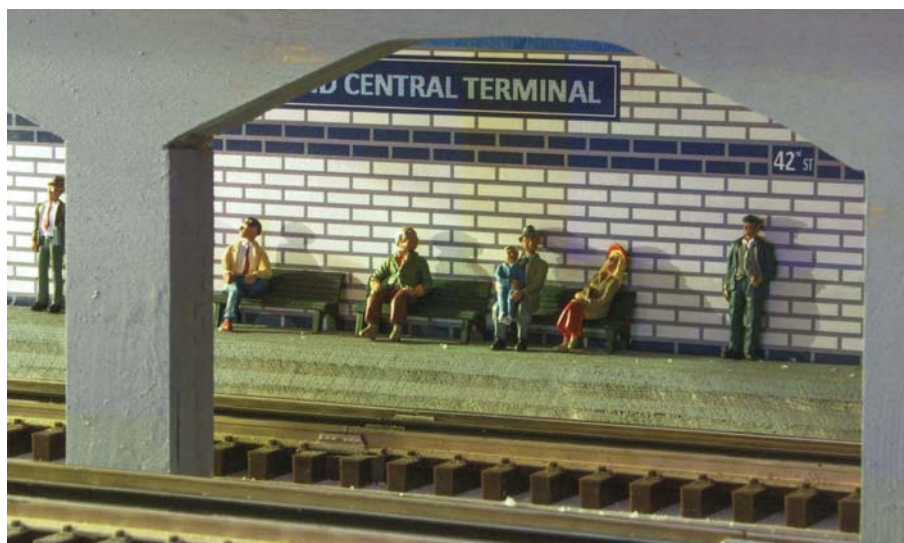


**A Lionel dockside winds its way through the snowy landscape.**

There was something magical about the colorful store decorations, the holiday music coming out of conical speakers, the ringing bells of the sidewalk Santas, the sparkling lights spanning city thoroughfares, and toy trains almost everywhere—more than enough to keep a child mesmerized for an entire exhausting shopping day.

The trips to New York City continue to this day as a family tradition. My children and I take a train into the city for our annual “New York City Toy Train Walking Tour” during the Christmas season. We visit Lionel train layouts in Santaland at Macy’s on 34th Street and in the NY Transit Museum Store in Grand Central Terminal, all the while soaking in the Christmas spirit in midtown Manhattan.

Every Christmas meant trains at home, too. From my dad setting up his childhood Lionel set on the living room floor in 1955, Santa bringing my first Lionel set in 1956, my dad building a 4x8 train board that magically appeared on Christmas



**Any respectable New York City layout needs a subway.**

morning 1957 in front of our old DuMont TV, and on to the layout seen here. In fact, I can’t remember a single Christmas when there wasn’t at least one train with a loop of O gauge track around or near the tree.

Christmas and Lionel have always been something of a perfect match in my family.

In 1987, Department 56, the makers of the popular “Dickens Village” series of lighted porcelain buildings, introduced a



Ten-wheeler No. 1225, a Williams by Bachmann model, prepares to make a stop at the East Harbor Ferry Terminal.



Shortly after the vintage 10-wheeler departs, a more modern Dryfuss Hudson passes by the ferry terminal. A variety of motive power sees action on the layout over the holiday season.



The imposing Radio City Music Hall, from the Department 56 “Christmas in the City” series, is just one of many New York City landmarks featured on the layout.

new series of structures called “Christmas in the City.” The first buildings looked much like the brownstones one would see in Manhattan or Brooklyn. Along with some buildings with storefronts, the first year’s releases made a nice representation of a city neighborhood. When I first saw these buildings on display at a local shop, I knew I wanted to add them to my annual Christmas Lionel train layout.

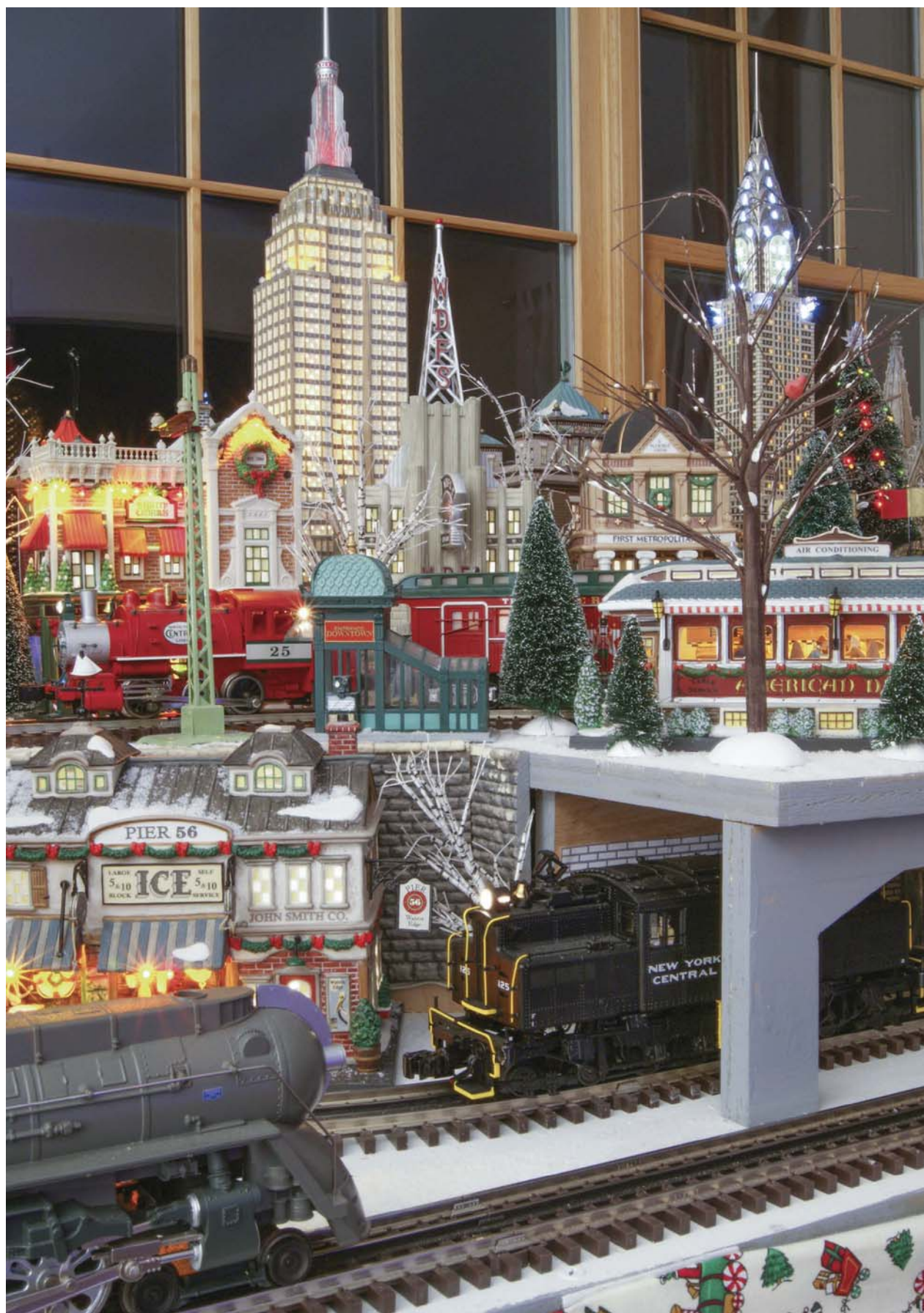
In 1999, Department 56 took things one step farther when they announced an actual New York City landmark as one of the new releases. The One Times Square Building, long famous for the New Year’s Eve ball drop, was going to be the latest addition to the “Christmas in the City” series. This building was chosen especially to usher in the new millennium with an actual working ball drop.

In the years that followed, other New York City landmarks were added to the series. The series now includes the Empire State Building, Radio City Music Hall, Rockefeller Plaza, the Brooklyn Bridge, the Flat Iron Building, the Automat, the Ed Sullivan Theater, Ferrara’s Bakery, and most recently the Chrysler Building added in 2013.

So, as you can see, it all came together—Christmas, New York City, and Lionel trains all are now in my living room window for the Christmas season. The layout you see here was all new for 2013. The Christmas layout I had in previous years had been damaged during a summer renovation of my basement. That layout had seen six Christmases and served us well. I began construction on this new layout on



Here is the scene from the outside looking in.



Three trains can operate simultaneously and continuously with two on the tabletop level and one on the upper level.



The No. 6 train arrives to take weary shoppers back to their warm homes.

Election Day 2013 and finished it just before Thanksgiving.

The new layout measures 4'x 8'. I constructed four 2'x 4' tables to facilitate carrying and storage. The tables are constructed of 1x4 pine framework with 5/8" birch plywood tops. The track plan is simple, having no switches or crossovers that might cause trouble. It can handle three operating trains. There are two ovals on the tabletop along with an elevated section with a modified dog bone to add interest. The elevated section is made up of two separately constructed components, again designed for easy carrying and storage. Keeping it simple allows the layout to literally run by itself for hours without worry.

Placement of the buildings is an important factor when trying to make a convincing representation of an actual geographical location. That was the case when I had to figure out the placement of



Grand Central Terminal—the proper name although it's also often called Grand Central Station—is also a requisite feature on any New York City layout.



Lights, color, and plenty of action! What more could one ask for on a Christmas layout?



Pier 56 is a busy place as Christmas Eve approaches.




A Lionel dockside switcher in North Pole Central livery has been pressed into passenger service on this crisp winter night.

the various New York City buildings. My references for doing so were photos of the Manhattan skyline. Hopefully, when people look at the layout, they immediately recognize it as

representative of New York City with the Empire State Building and the Chrysler Building dominating the midtown skyline as they did in the 1950s.

The layout usually stays up from Thanksgiving until Super Bowl Sunday. During the two months of operation, I will change locomotives and rolling stock several times. I run traditional size and smaller scale trains varying from my favorite New York Central equipment to more whimsical Christmas trains. I have a preference for steam locomotives, but I do run electric locomotives and subways as well. I do not discriminate when it comes to manufacturers and buy what I like from Lionel, MTH, 3rd Rail, and Williams by Bachmann. The layout is operated conventionally with Lionel ZW and LW transformers.

At the end of the Christmas season, the buildings are packed safely and lovingly in their Styrofoam boxes, and the trains return to their set boxes. The track is carefully removed and stored, and the layout tables are returned to the basement. Many fellow hobbyists enjoy Christmas with Lionel trains. My ability to make New York City part of my Christmas layout adds an extra dimension to my enjoyment of our hobby. Occasionally, during a relaxing moment, the layout comes to life, and I find myself being magically transported back to a Christmas many years ago in the city I love. 



Skip Natoli



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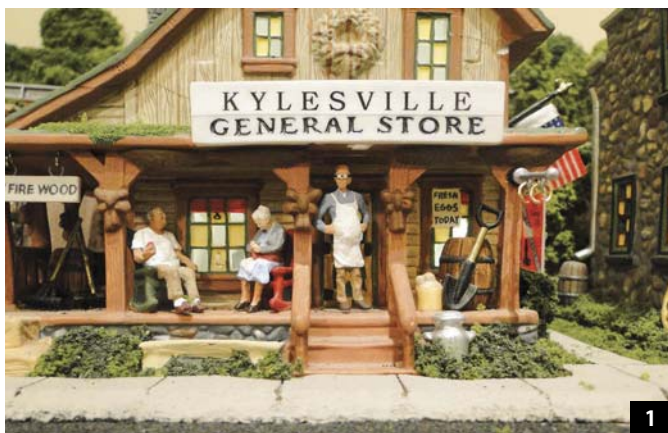


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# Buildings for the Holidays and Beyond

Article and Photos by John Rapacz



Department 56, Hawthorne Village, Carole Town, Lemax, and other porcelain structures are common around Halloween and the Christmas holiday season when new buildings are introduced on an annual basis. Many model railroaders would not consider using these types of buildings on their layouts. However, one or more of these buildings are often seen on layouts featured in the various model train publications. I have 39 porcelain buildings and use them as additions on my layout, not as collectibles. Therefore, I customize them for specific purposes even though altering these buildings from their original form may significantly reduce their future value.

## Scale and Size

One of the main objections to using these buildings is that they generally are not made to any specific scale. Many tend to be small for O gauge. For example, I have buildings with doors that are only 1" tall and some that are 2". To overcome this proportion problem, I place my figures in a manner that either disguises the problem or does not draw attention to it. For example, in Photo 1 the shopkeeper is too large for the door, but the seated figures appear normal in size. In Photo 1A the shopkeeper has been moved down the stairs, and now the short door is not as apparent. As a very simple rule, I place the figure so that its head is below the lintel of the door.

The overall smaller size of most of these buildings could be another objection. Some are as small as 4"x 4" or as large as 6"x 11". I consider this size discrepancy to be an advantage. I would not have had space in the nine separate sections of my layout if I had used all Ameri-Towne, Lionel, and MTH buildings. For example, the porcelain depot in my resort area of Seasons' Bay is 6-1/2" x 9-1/2". The Lionel depot is 6-1/8" x 15-1/4", and the MTH station is 6-5/8" x 18", almost twice the length of my depot.

## Christmas Decorations

Many of these buildings come adorned with a Christmas wreath and garland. In many cases, the wreath is a separate piece that has been glued on and can easily be pried off with a small screwdriver and the affected area then painted over (Photos 2 and 2A). If a decoration is actually part of the original mold, it often can be painted to match the building or covered with an appropriate sign. Decorations can also be disguised. For example, the firehouse featured a Christmas garland strung across its entire front. Because this is a municipal building, I simply painted the garland as a red, white, and blue patriotic bunting (Photos 3 and 3A). The paint I used was a common craft store acrylic such as Ceramcoat, Americana, or Folk Art. This paint can be removed by soaking the building in warm soapy water and scrubbing with a soft brush to restore the building to its original state.



2



2A



3



3A



4



4A

## Snow

Buildings in the Department 56 "Original Snow Village" collection are larger than those of other series, are of ceramic construction instead of porcelain, are glossy and brightly colored, and are generally not as detailed, so I dealt with matte porcelain buildings. Many of these porcelain buildings are meant for Christmas displays and will have snow on the roof, on the ground surrounding them, and occasionally on door and window frames.

I painted the snow on the roof the same color as the roof to look like a tarpaper or built-up roof (Photos 4 and 4A). Sometimes I sprinkle on fine ballast to simulate a flat gravel roof (Photo 5). Because my layout has a large freshwater lake and harbor, I occasionally paint snow on the roof with a mixture of 1/3 white glue and 2/3 green paint and then sprinkle on fine ground cover to simulate moss on the roof (Photo 6). Snow on other parts of the building can be painted to match the building and is seldom noticed.



5



6



7

To deal with snow on the ground, paint the snow with a mixture of 1/3 white glue and 2/3 paint that is the color of the ground. While the mixture is still wet, sprinkle on the ground cover of dirt, grass, black ballast, or so forth to match that surrounding the building. In other ways, the large snowdrift against the building was disguised as a large bush, and the snow-covered side yard was covered with grass and a gravel walkway (Photos 7 and 8).

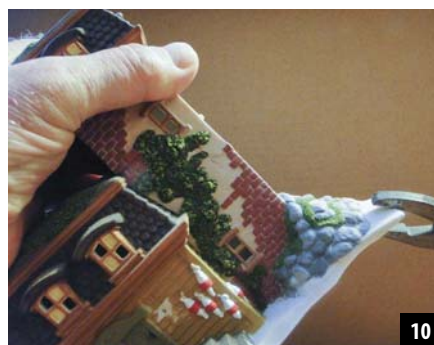
The snow often extends outward from the building causing difficulty in placement on the layout. I remove most of this snow with grozier pliers that are used by stained glass workers (Photo 9). By applying pressure and dragging the curved end of the pliers across the snow, small pieces will break off. Have patience and do not attempt to remove too much at once (Photo 10). I use full-contact safety glasses because the brittle ceramic being removed splinters into small sharp pieces that are ejected forcefully and can cause eye injury.



8



9



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## Lighting

The light bulb in most porcelain buildings is 7 watts, commonly referred to as a night-light bulb. In most of the newer buildings, the light cord comes through the bottom and is held in place by a metal or plastic brace around the socket for the bulb. Light cords under the building are easily concealed. On older buildings, the bulb and cord enter through the back, which is very apparent if your building is not against a wall. One way that I deal with this is to break off or cut off the bracket because it protrudes too far from the surface of the building. Then I cover the opening with an addition to the building, which I build from wood and paint to match the original wall.

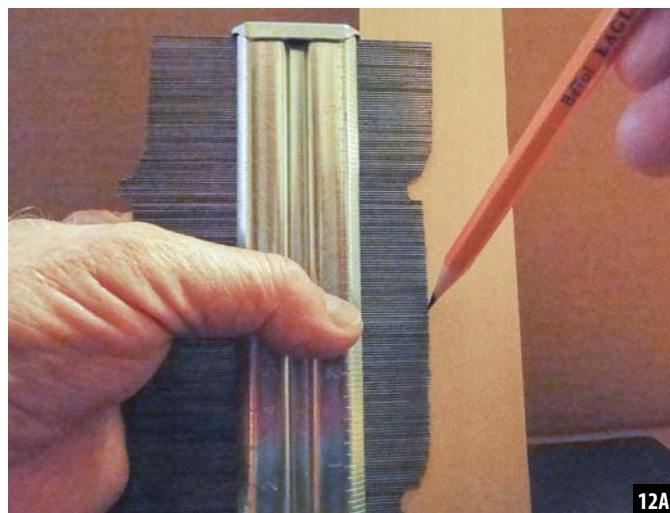
11

## LED Lighting

Light bulbs are held in place by a bracket to evenly shed light and radiate heat. If allowed to lie on the floor of the building, the bulb creates a hot spot in the porcelain. I have changed all of my 7-watt lights to 0.6-watt LEDs. Although more expensive initially, LEDs create no heat, draw only 0.6 watts compared to 7 watts for each incandescent bulb, and last for many years. Nearly 12 LEDs use the same energy as one incandescent bulb, so they can be left on all day without overheating the porcelain. The LEDs are about \$1.50 each. I prefer the bright white LEDs that give a bright light of 5 lumens. For a winter snow layout, daylight LEDs have a slightly blue tint and look great in snow scenes.



12



12A



13

I use a contour gauge costing less than \$10 (Photo 11). Using this gauge, I measure the shape of the wall of the building and then transfer this shape to the wood (Photos 12 and 12A). Then I fit the gauge to the other side because the sides are not exactly the same on these buildings. There is some sagging, contraction, and uneven baking while the porcelain is in the kiln.

Now I cut out my sidewalls, attach the front wall, and add any roof or other parts that are similar to the main building (Photo 13). Then the addition is finished to match the original building and attached with a tacky wax so it can be removed to change the bulb if necessary (Photos 14 and 14A). Some Lemax

buildings have an opening high on the wall, which can be turned into a loading bay (Photos 15 and 15A).

Occasionally a building will have an opening that is not easily covered. In the harbor master building and in the firehouse, the openings are in stone walls. Here I purchased regular corks and cut them almost flush with the opening. If cut too small, they will come out in pieces! I cut a groove to the midpoint of the cork to accommodate the cord (Photo 16). Then I painted the cork face to match the wall, threaded the cord through the groove, squeezed the cork closed, and eased it into the hole (Photos 17 and 17A). If a bulb change is needed, pulling on the light cord will remove the cork.



14



14A



15



15A



16



17



17A



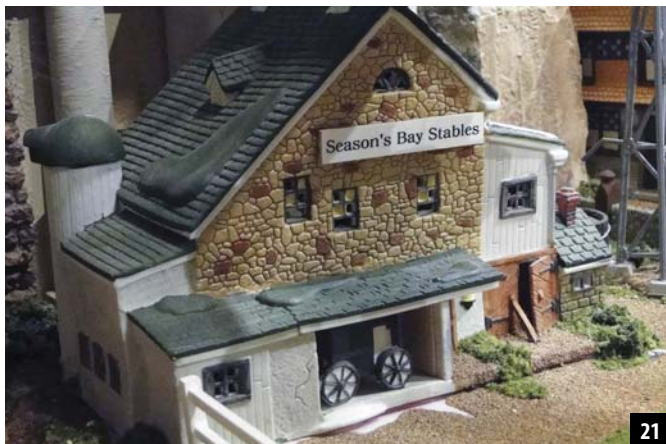
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18A


## Customization

Many of these buildings out of the box were not suited for my purpose and had to be customized. The inn had a patio eating area but no door until double doors were added (Photos 18 and 18A). Doors were also added to the loading dock at the creamery, and the area behind was painted a flat black for depth (Photo 19). The hotel had no opening to the outside for service deliveries. I created sliding double doors for the service area, and now it accommodates the piano movers and the florist (Photos 20 and 20A). If at all possible, when I add a door to a building, I make it partially open. I feel that a closed door is too final, whereas a partially opened door is both inviting and arouses curiosity.



I wanted to use the Department 56 Amish Barn for the riding stables, but the scale was all wrong. There was no front door for horses, and the Amish buggy in the front of the building was the size of a baby buggy. I built an addition with a peaked roof and partially open double doors and glued half of a horse figure in the opening with a figure of a groom (Photos 21 and 21A).

And finally, to create an exit from the ballroom onto a terrace, I printed an image of a formal ballroom from my computer, sized it, and glued it into place. Then I added large French doors to create an elegant-looking scene (Photo 22).

These are only a few of the many possible changes to porcelain buildings that can be realistic, interesting, and detailed complements to model train layouts. 





# *© Tannenbaum*

Photo by Tom Thurston



With the Thanksgiving holiday just completed, a workforce is busy on and along the right-of-way of Tom Thurston's Richmond & Western Railroad harvesting Christmas trees for the adornment of area homes as well as for rail shipment to more distant destinations. Working in the high country, a Shay is the ideal locomotive for negotiating sharp curves and steep grades, particularly in the challenging winter weather. The Shay is an early MTH Premier version, and that Lionel Burro Crane is an original from Tom's childhood layout built in the 1950s. Tom now lives in Florida, but his layout is located in a barn on his sister's farm located west of Richmond, Virginia. He says space is tight in his Florida home, so he has taken over with her blessing, of course, most of his sibling's barn.



# All Aboard on a Magical Journey

**Article by Dave Siburn with Ed Boyle**  
**Photographs by Dave Siburn, Ted Jones of Lionel, and Rich Melvin**

Wow! The Lionel Polar Express set is celebrating its 10th anniversary—10 years of running under thousands of Christmas trees (Photo 1). I remember all the hype waiting for the movie to come out, never mind the train set. I went to see the film with my wife, Judy, and was awestruck by the special effects. The story line was fantastic. I went to see it again with my son, Jack, who was only four at the time. It was even more enjoyable than the first viewing. In fact, we purchased *The Polar Express* DVD when it came out, and watching the movie every year is now a family tradition.

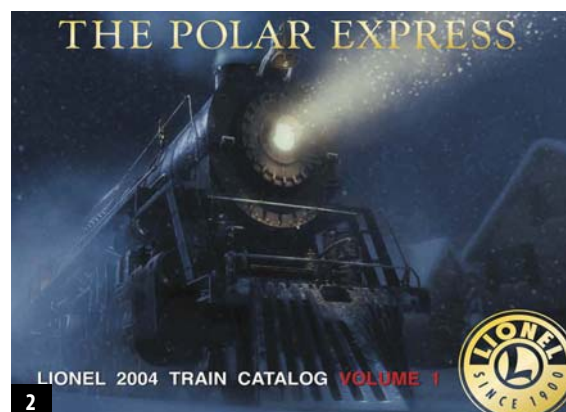
## Santa Delivers My Train Set

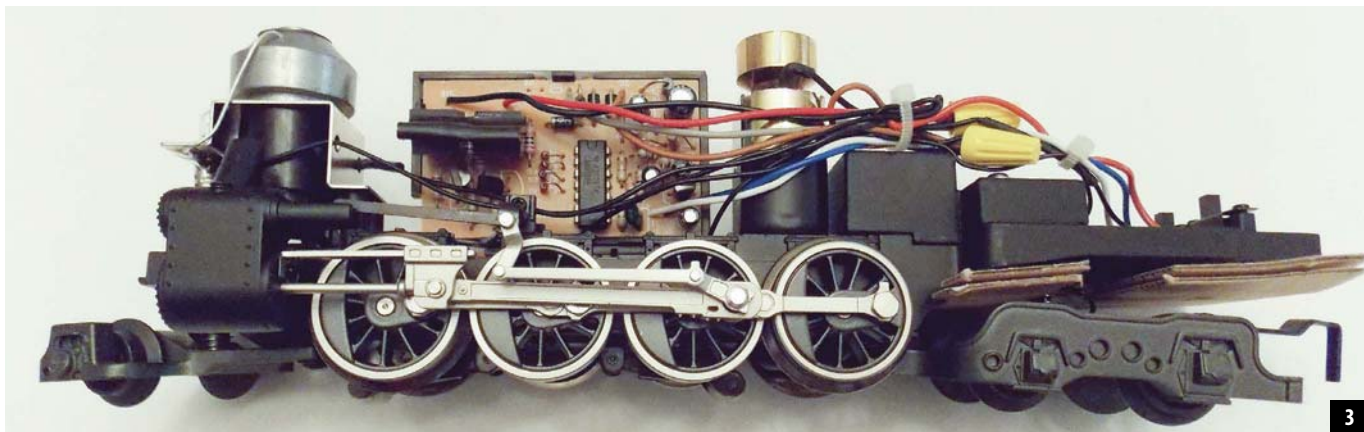
Quite a bit of drama surrounded the arrival of the first Polar Express sets from

Lionel. Thanks to the movie, awareness of the seasonal tale of adventure was high among O-gaugers and the general public. It seemed that all the hobbyists I knew had a copy of the Lionel 2004 Train Catalog Volume 1 (Photo 2). I was caught up in the magic of the set and story and wanted to run that train under my Christmas tree.

I searched for a set at all the usual places but came up empty—nothing, nada, zilch! I kept hearing “sold out” or “not delivered to the store yet.” A week or so passed and still nothing. I started to panic. Thanksgiving had come and gone,

and Christmas was fast approaching. Dealers I talked with said there was a shortage of sets, and a check of the popular auction sites confirmed this. People were paying \$200 over the list price just to get a





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Polar Express set before Christmas. Lionel did not anticipate the level of demand the movie's success had created. More Polar Express sets were on the way, but even though I was on several waiting lists, it was unlikely I would get one before the end of the year.

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**—nothing, nada, zilch!**  
**I kept hearing 'sold out' or 'not delivered to the store yet.'**

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Then came Christmas Eve 2004, and we were preparing to go to my brother's for dinner. It was starting to snow as a UPS truck pulled up and the driver hopped out holding a large shipping carton—the Polar Express! Santa truly exists, I happily concluded.

Christmas morning I got up early to get the Polar Express running under the tree, which began a tradition that has lasted a full decade.

## Beginning a Long and Happy Road

The first Polar Express set released in 2004 used Lionel's tried-and-true formula for its O27 passenger sets with a steam engine and three cars. This combination provided a solid base for the add-on cars to come.

The set consisted of a die-cast 2-8-4 Berkshire steam locomotive with extended pilot, just like in the movie, and a whistle tender displaying Polar Express in gold letters. The engine had a puffing smoke unit, and the tender housed a simple air whistle. The rear drive wheels had traction tires. Power was provided by a small can motor with a flywheel and a vertically mounted driver board, which was the configuration typical for most Lionel steam starter sets (Photo 3). The tender had a stamped metal frame and a plastic shell.

The three 12" heavyweight passenger cars included an observation car with the big rounded rear platform portrayed in the film. Clad in authentic colors with blue-gray sides, wide dark red stripes across the windows, black roofs, and Polar Express in gold lettering above the windows, these three cars

have remained essentially unchanged throughout the 10 years of production.

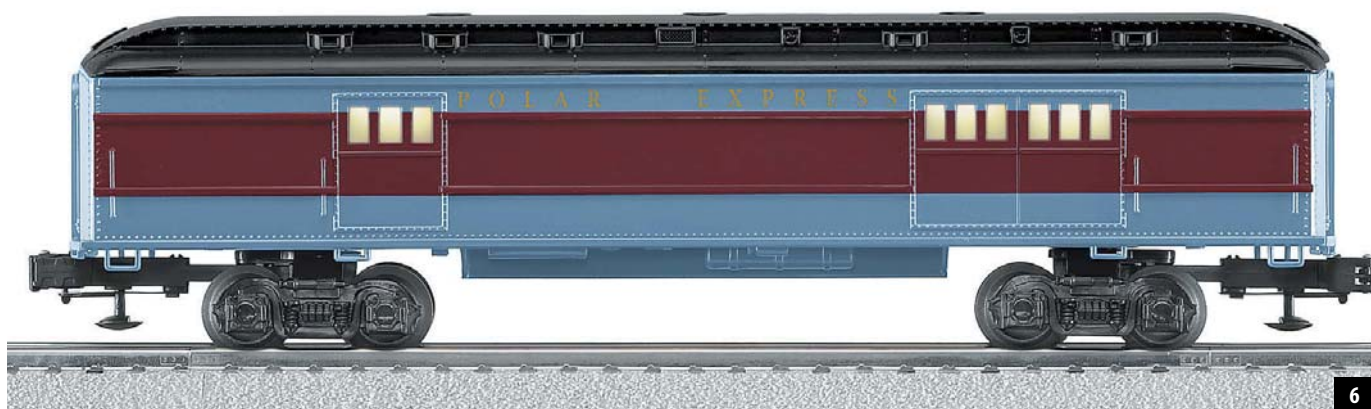
Three straight FasTrack sections, eight FasTrack O36 curves, one FasTrack straight terminal section, a CW-80 transformer, articulated movie characters, and smoke fluid were also packaged with the set. The Warner Brothers trademark message is stamped in gold on the bottom of the locomotive and rolling stock frames on all such items Lionel has produced for the Polar Express line (Photo 4).



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## 2005-2006: The Line Expands

The set remained the same the following two years, but two add-on cars were new. These separately cataloged cars were the Polar Express diner and baggage car (Photos 5 and 6).

The first genuine Polar Express collectible appeared in 2005. Sales had been so good that Lionel decided to commemorate that happy fact by producing a Toy Fair 2005 boxcar (Photo 7). This car has since gone as high as \$250 in the collector marketplace and still fetches prices in the \$175 range.

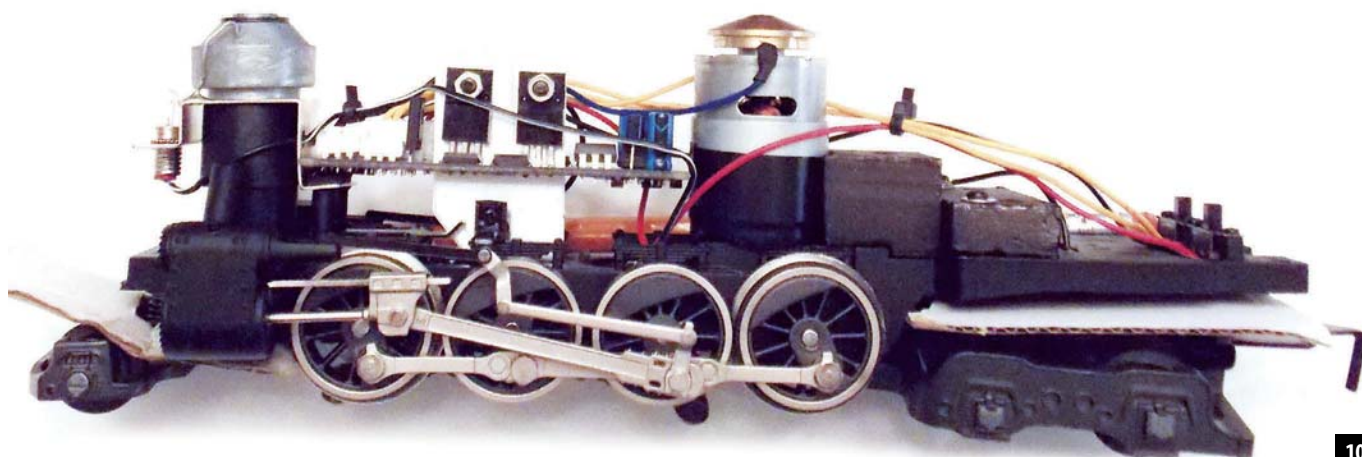
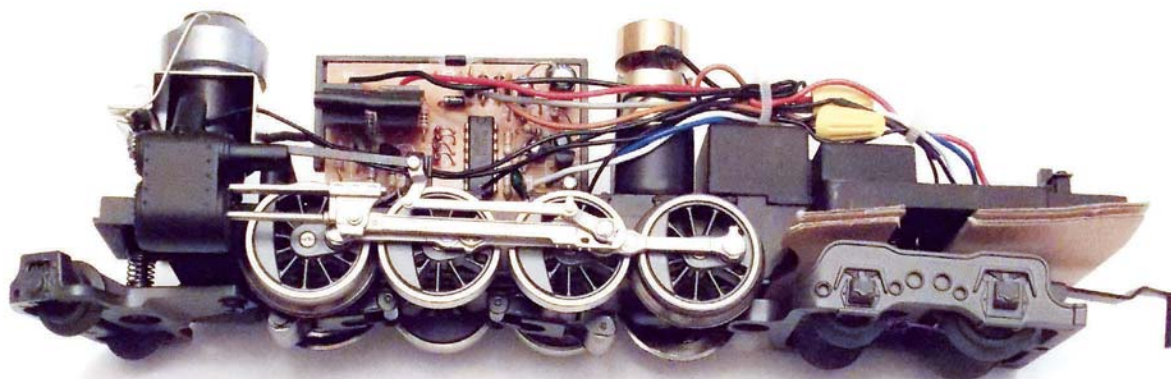
In 2006 the Polar Express was going strong for its third Christmas. This was also the year that Lionel introduced a Christmas catalog. The Polar Express was unchanged, but an add-on Hot Chocolate car joined the roster, complete with its own Polar Express ticket (Photo 8). Now there were seven cars for the Berkshire to pull around the track, which was a lot for the original 2004 engine to handle. A powered Elf handcar was also new.



## 2007-2012: Making a Good Thing Better

The new addition for 2007 was a separate-sale tender with TrainSounds. The tender looked the same on the outside, but there was a dramatic improvement in sound capability from the new electronics inside (Photo 9). The price of this tender was \$129.99, and it featured steam chuffing, whistle, bell, squealing brakes, operator-controlled crew dialog, and adjustable volume control. This desirable upgrade gave buyers the choice of whether or not to add digital sounds to their Polar Express sets.

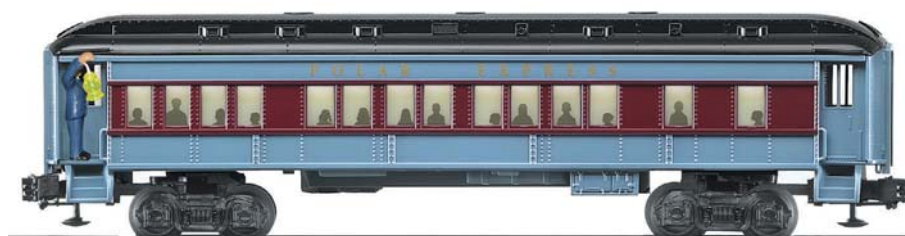




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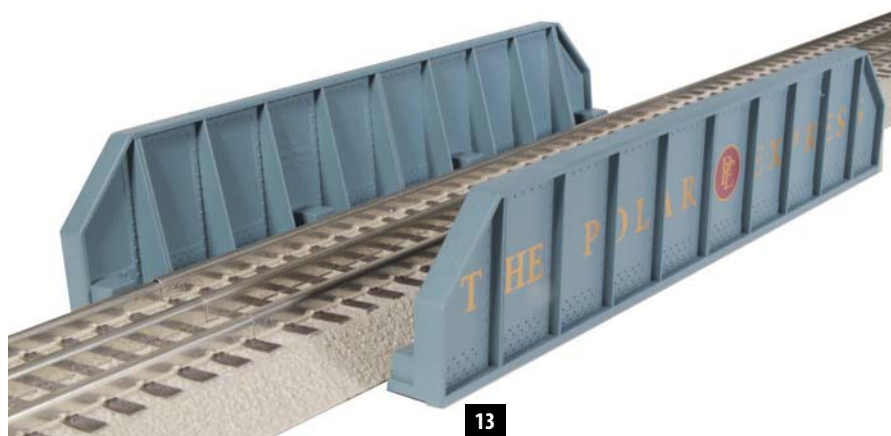
A more important change for operation was an upgrade to the locomotive's running gear. A modified frame held a larger and heavier can motor, and a new-style horizontally mounted driver board with increased current handling ability was installed. The old and new chassis and motors were different (Photo 10). The new one, pictured on the bottom, gave the Berkshire more pulling power without changing its distinctive outward appearance.

The Polar Express picked up two more add-on cars in 2008. The Disappearing Hobo car featured an operating hobo figure on the car roof (Photo 11). The catalog description read: "Flip the cut-out base tab to make hobo appear or disappear." The Polar Express Coach with Announcement had a transformer-controlled sound chip with announcements from the movie, and the conductor figure in the doorway held a lighted LED lantern (Photo 12). The set's larger motored Berkshire was easily able to pull the expanded nine-car consist.

The conventionally controlled Polar Express set and add-on car offerings remained essentially unchanged up to the end of 2012, with the exception of a new girder bridge (Photo 13).

In 2011 Lionel introduced a deluxe version of the traditional-size Polar Express 2-8-4 Berkshire. This new locomotive with Whistle Steam and RailSounds was a separate-sale item packaged in a distinctive box (Photo 14). It was the ultimate transformer-controlled Polar Express engine from Lionel. Die-cast metal replaced plastic for the tender shell that housed a RailSounds system inside with chuffing steam, whistle, bell, and user-activated crew dialog. The crew sounds were crisp but did not include any specific Polar Express announcements. The locomotive had puffing smoke from the stack, a smoking Whistle Steam, a powerful can motor with a momentum flywheel, traction tires, and engineer and fireman figures in the cab (Photo 15).

For the steam whistle effect, a separate minifan motor assembly attached to the boiler pulls smoke from the main smoke unit. When the whistle is blown, a stream of smoke comes out of the boiler where the ornamental whistle is mounted, producing a more realistic look than smoke from the stack alone.



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The separate-sale Polar Express locomotive with RailSounds and Whistle Steam was an attractive, traditional-size package for those wanting to supplement their earlier sets with a heavy die-cast engine and tender offering superior features and more pulling power. Partly due to its price of \$299.99, Lionel regarded this as a marketing experiment, and the last time it was cataloged was in the 2013 Christmas catalog. Other technological developments were overtaking transformer control for the Polar Express.

### LionChief Comes to the Polar Express

LionChief is a simplified wireless control system that Lionel has incorporated into the Polar Express and other starter sets. The LionChief control system breathed new excitement into an already popular and beloved set of trains. LionChief is really radio control for trains, as explained in the LionChief review in Run 271, the June/July 2014 issue. Because they have cast-in handrails, the LionChief Berkshire and tender are easy to tell apart from earlier versions.

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**The LionChief control system breathed new excitement into an already popular and beloved set of trains.**

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The hand-held controller is easy and intuitive to use, and the LionChief Polar Express comes with a 36-volt DC power supply that plugs into a wall outlet. It can also be powered by any AC or DC power source that outputs 18 volts, which includes most existing transformers.

Operating the LionChief Polar Express is a different experience. The engine runs smoother, and the customized Polar Express announcements add to the fun. Children seem to enjoy mimicking the voice of Tom Hanks when he proclaims, "This is the Polar Express" and "All Aboard!" Ease of use and the more powerful motor in the engine open new vistas to a wider audience of beginners and more

experienced O-gaugers. Hobbyists leery of command control because it seemed too complicated have discovered how much fun they can have with wireless remote control when it is as simple to use as LionChief.

### A 10th Anniversary Celebration Set

The 10th Anniversary LionChief Polar Express set is really special, starting with the packaging (Photo 16). The LionChief sign and 10th Anniversary logo are prominent on one side of the front of the box. Turn the box over, and the same information is seen rendered in French (Photo 17). This allows Lionel to use the same packaging for the U.S. and Canada

and adds bilingual exoticness for Polar Express buyers.

Both the 1225 locomotive and its tender have separately applied handrails, and the engine and each of the three passenger cars are emblazoned with the 10th Anniversary logo (Photos 18 and 19). The set also comes with the Polar Express girder bridge and other major components (Photo 20).


The official movie announcements built into this special set have been expanded to include "I am the king of the North Pole," "One thing about trains..." and "The first gift of Christmas"—all of which can be heard in the Run 274 digital edition that is available with an OGR On-Line Forum Premium Membership.



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## Looking Ahead

We have focused on development of the traditional-size O gauge Lionel Polar Express in chronicling its first 10 years. The franchise has continued to expand and now includes a diesel-powered 10th anniversary streamliner set and a Polar Express trolley. And, in full 1:48 O scale, there's a gleaming 10th Anniversary edition with a gold-painted Berkshire locomotive, coach, and observation car. A traditional-size 10th Anniversary boxcar is also available complete with a Warner Brothers trademark statement and the 10th Anniversary logo (Photo 21).

What's next on this remarkable journey to the North Pole? All we know for sure is that the Polar Express sets should continue to bring joy and smiles to those who see and run them. As to the future, all I can say is "All aboard! This is the Polar Express!" 



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## About the Author



Dave Siburn is knowledgeable about operating, collecting, and repairing O gauge trains. He and his family have a special feeling for both the story and the trains of The Polar Express, which is one of the reasons he shared memories and information commemorating the 10th anniversary of the Lionel Polar Express train set.

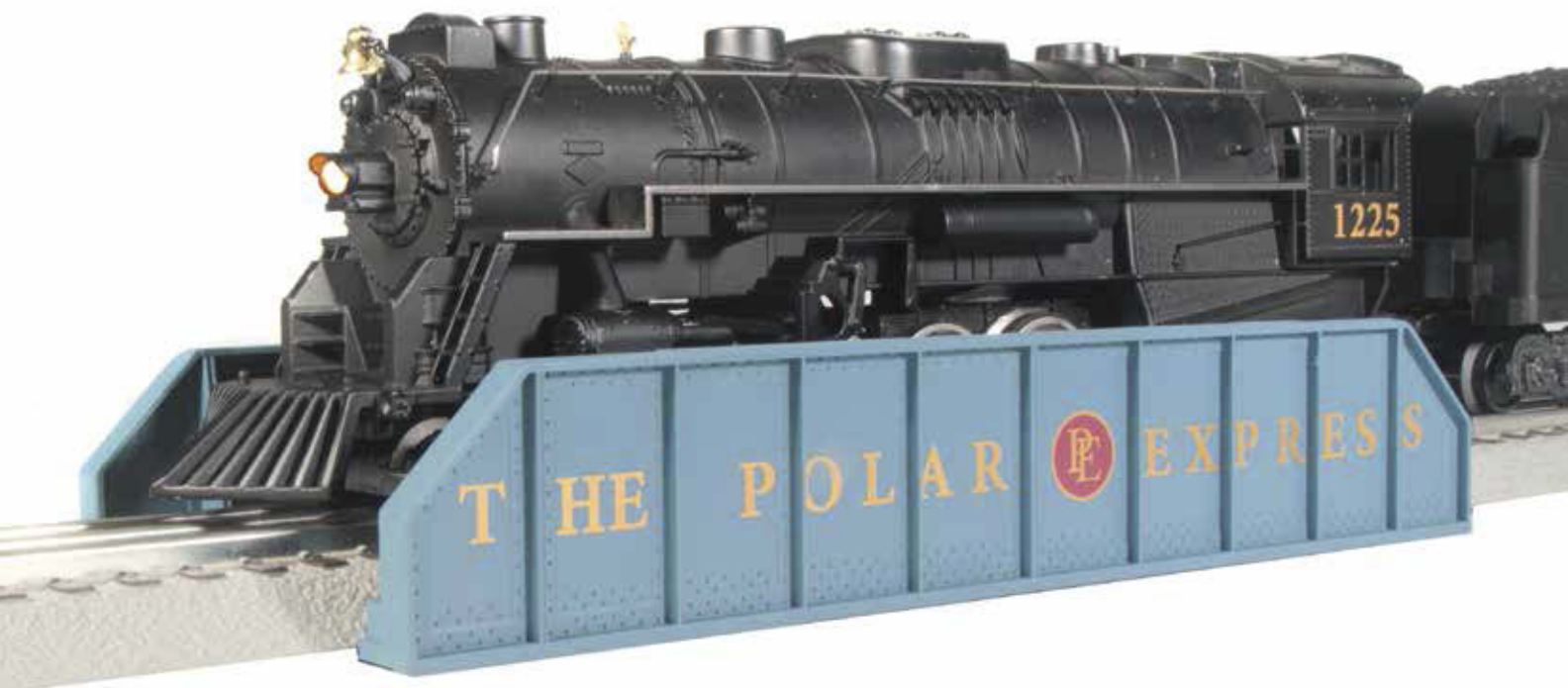
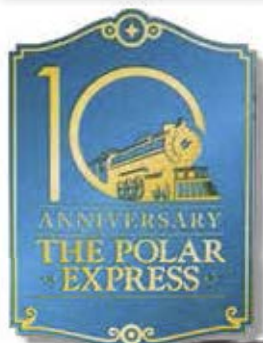


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## Original Polar Express Packaging Details



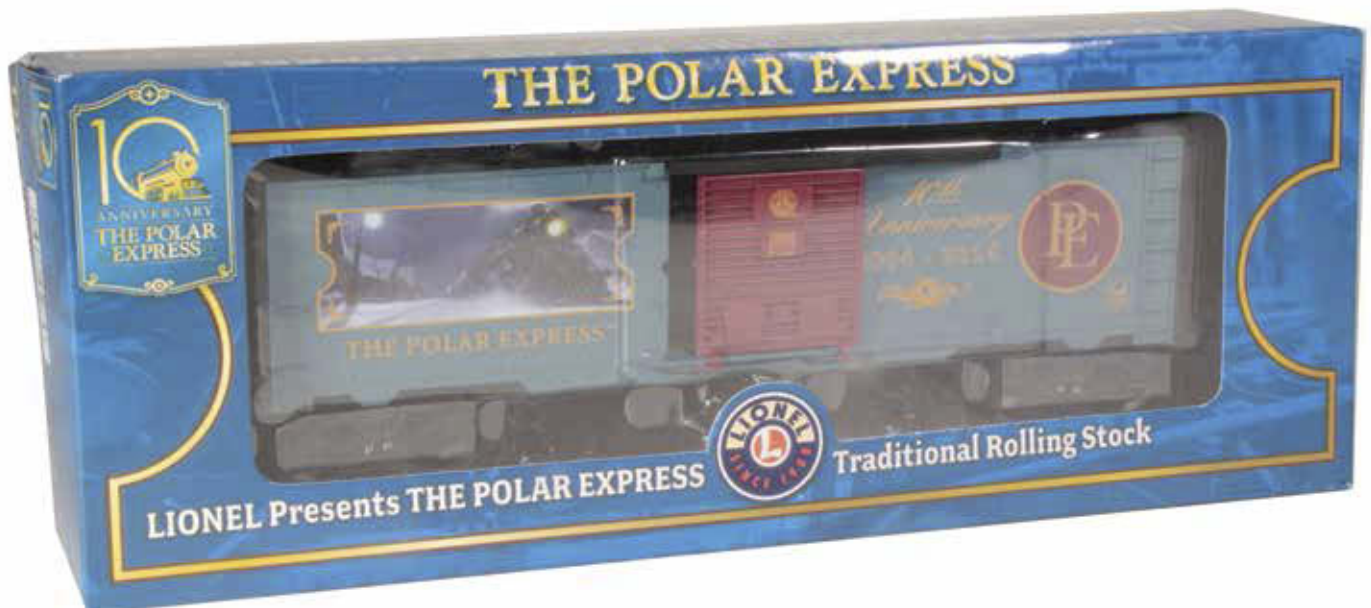
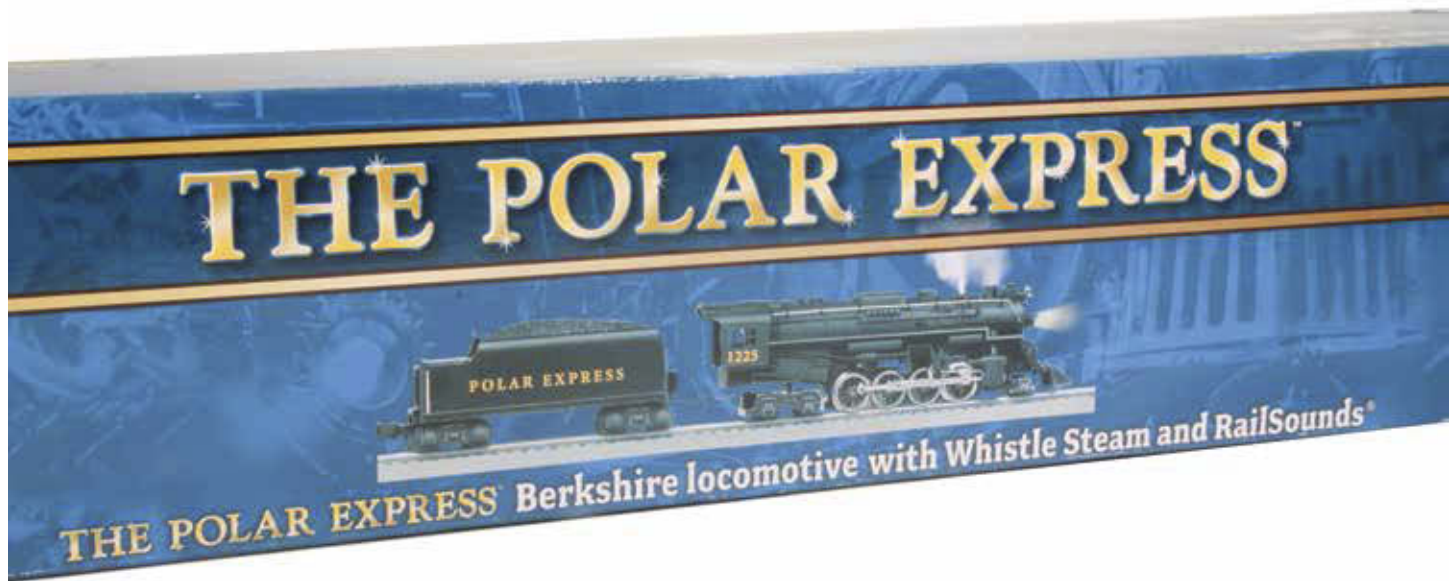


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## Original Polar Express Packaging Details





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## LionChief Polar Express Packaging Details



## Polar Express Passenger Consist

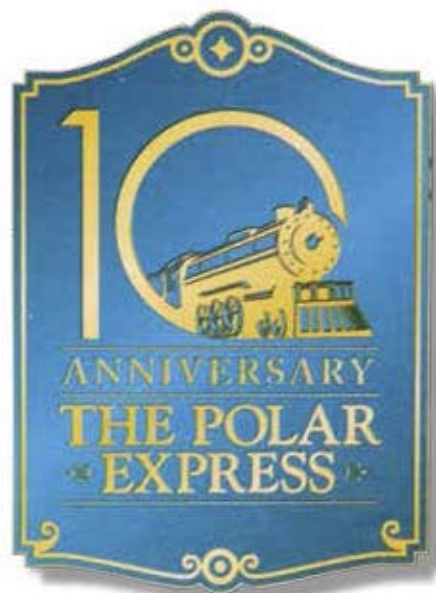




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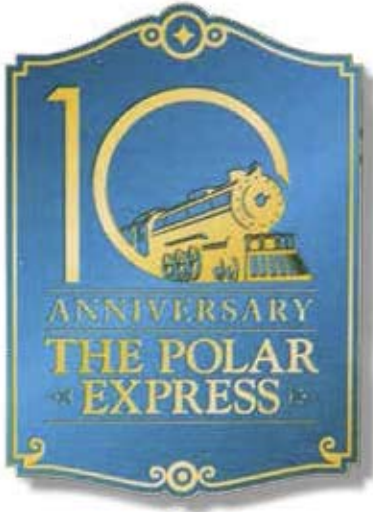




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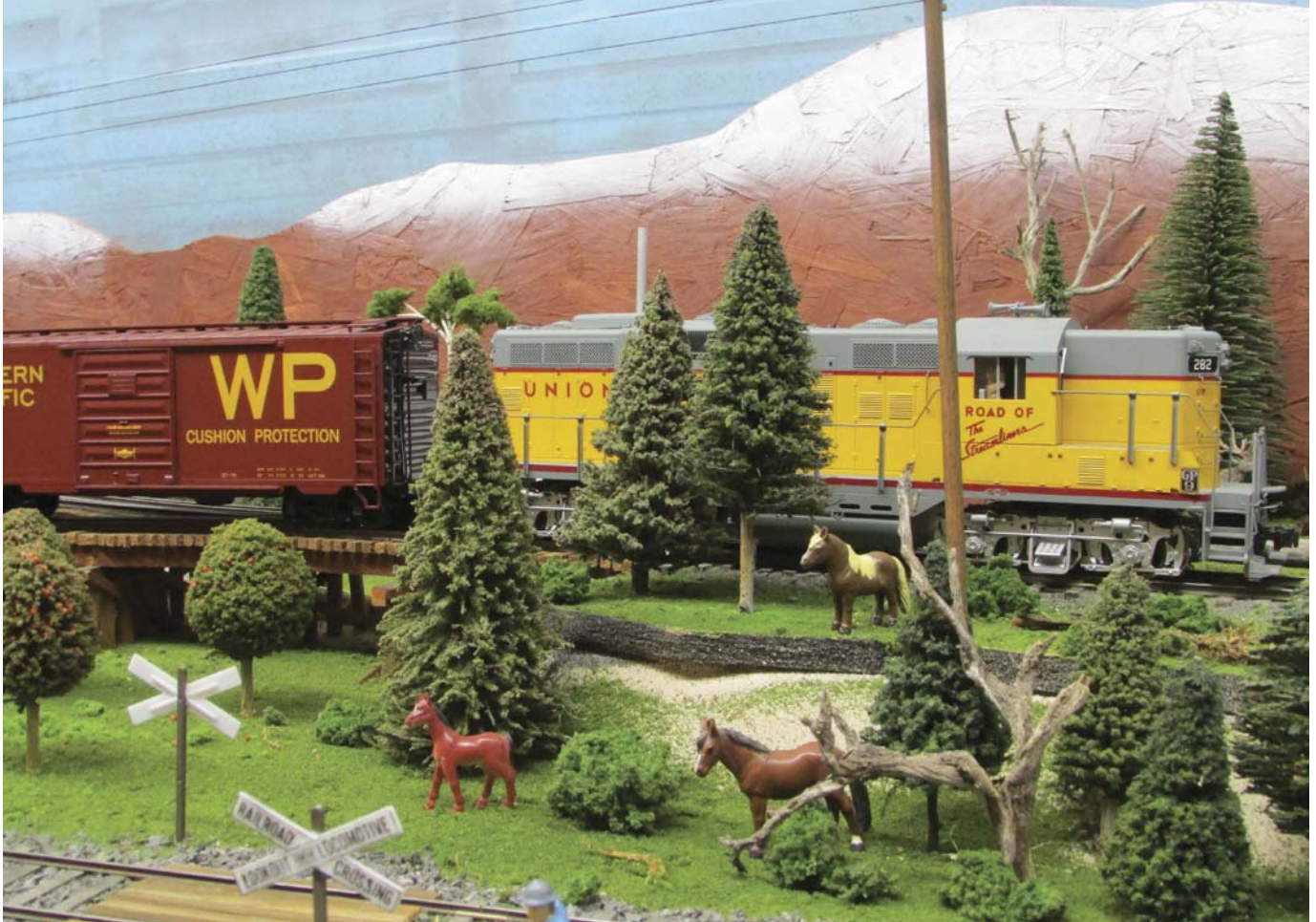
*More Polar Express  
10th Anniversary Pictures*

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**Here's a quick look at 3 of  
the most significant Polar  
Express Locomotives**

## Point-to-point switchback line in 2-rail O scale



The line's GP9 clanks onto the switchback.

# Northwestern Railway

Article and Photos by Randy Bynum

A switchback on a modern railroad in the United States is rare. One such line is the Mount Hood Railroad (MHRR), a 22-mile short-line railroad east of Portland, Oregon, which travels from Hood River, Oregon, to the base of Mt. Hood at Parkdale. As the line leaves the town of Hood River, it travels for three miles along the river and then reverses directions for the remainder of the trip due to a switchback. This railroad was the inspiration for my Northwestern Railway.

My original desire was to make a short-line layout that would represent and be reminiscent of the MHRR. This was both out of fascination with the MHRR as well as an accommodation to the limitations of space. My main goal was to impart the impression and ambiance of the Pacific Northwest in the 1950s and 1960s.

My wife, Kathy, who is very supportive of my hobby, and I set aside one wall of 17' for the layout in our garage. A width of 32" would provide me easy reach to all areas of the layout as well as enough room for the features I was planning. As I thought it over, prototype railroads don't generally travel in ovals or dog bones, so I planned a point-to-point layout like the MHRR. I was uncertain at first about how much fun and interest building and operating a switchback railroad would offer, but I was anxious to put the idea to the test.

To begin with, I painted the garage wall behind the layout with a mottled blue and gray spray paint. Not being much of an artist, that turned out okay, but not exactly fantastic.



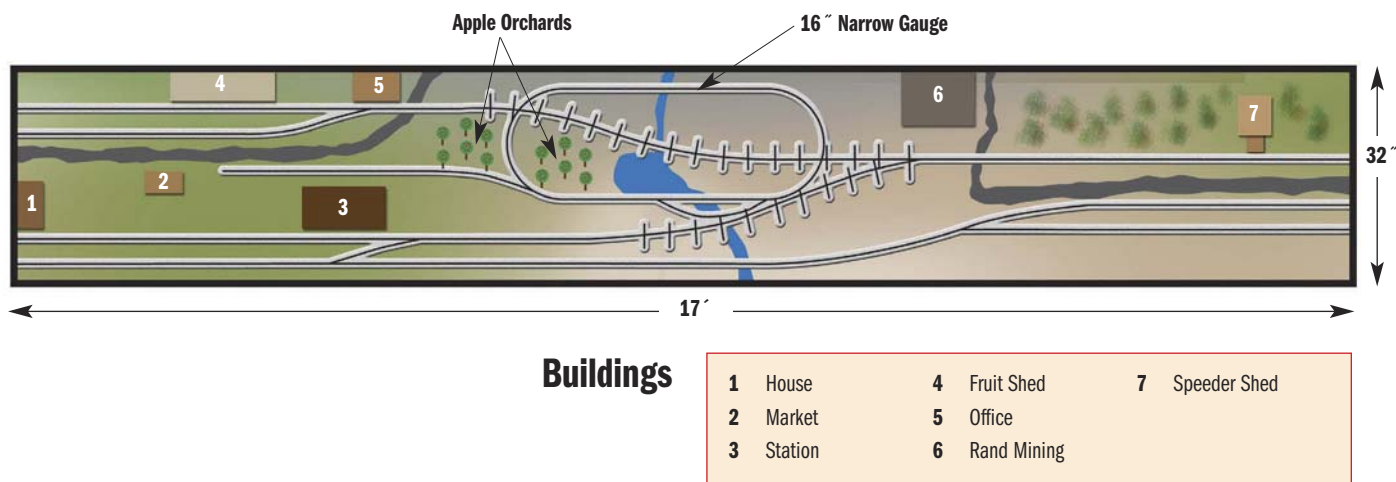
The SW9 approaches the switchback.

The next steps turned out much better. I made a base 42" high of recycled 2x4s and overlaid it with 7/16" roof sheeting for the table. I cut more sheeting with a scroll saw to represent mountains in the background, painted them a dark brown, and screwed them to the wall. White spray paint on the upper part was added to suggest snow-covered peaks.

At one end of the layout, I topped the base with a long plateau of a pine frame covered with sheeting that was about 2" high, 19" wide, and 62" long. This would provide a 3 percent grade up to the level



My control center is simple and reliable. The 16" excursion line is powered by this Bachmann Spectrum Magnum power pack, and the main and spur lines are powered by this Tech II Railmaster 2400.



**SW9 No. 1872 backs away after empties are delivered. A crate of fruit and a barrel of pickles await attention.**

of the switchback and allow enough distance on the switchback to accommodate trains up to 58" long. Depending on the type of equipment used, of course, this would mean trains of one engine plus 4 or 5 freight cars, which would be typical of a short-line railroad.

At the other end of the layout, I added a similar plateau, this time around 4" high, 13" wide, and 63" long, which would continue the 3 percent grade between the two plateaus and end on a level area for an industry.

Like the prototype, this railroad line begins on one end at base level with a combination passenger and freight station. The station is a Walther's ready-made structure to which I have added interior detail and lighting inside and out. Beyond the station, an older spur line stays at base level on the outside edge of the table

and runs to an agricultural area at the other end of the layout where grain can be loaded. In the process, the spur line passes over a small creek and past an apple orchard. This spur line is controlled by a dwarf signal from N.J. International.

Back at the station, the main line leaves it and immediately begins the climb up a trestle grade to the switchback. This line is controlled by full-size target signals. After the switchback, the main line continues up additional trestles at the same grade to end on the upper plateau where there is a fruit packing industry.

Many additional features have been added to the layout. As is typical of the Northwest, there are lots of trees and greenery, with typical regional industries of fruit, agriculture, and mining, all the while giving the impression of environmental sensitivity.



A family of deer rests at the edge of the forest near the speeder shed.



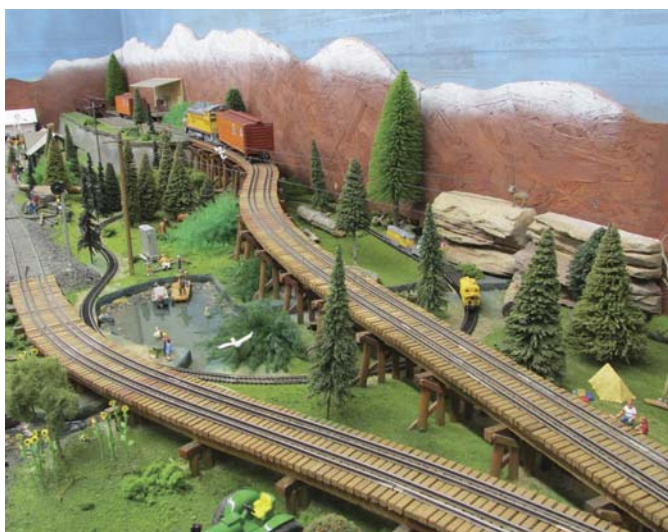
Passengers ride the 16" gauge excursion train as it passes under the mainline trestle.



The line's venerable F9 prepares to leave after dropping off a few empty grain hoppers. John Deere farm equipment highlights the agricultural area.



Track workers are replacing ties along the main line.



This view at the one end of the layout shows the 16" gauge excursion train to the right and the SW9 with PFE car in tow in the center.



The scene at the other end of the layout includes the switchback and the agricultural spur with a Plymouth switcher at work.



A lone elk tests the air at the forest's edge not far from the busy main line.



Today's mixed freight rolls onto the switchback.



Beside the 16" excursion line, an orchard worker sets his ladder to pick apples.

The station is surrounded by a lot of activity including a freight dock and an open-air fruit market.

Farm equipment is all 1:50 scale John Deere and includes a tractor, plow, and grain combine. The grain cars are loaded by a scratchbuilt model of a Brandt augur. There are also a couple of cars, a pickup, and a truck to represent the appropriate era.

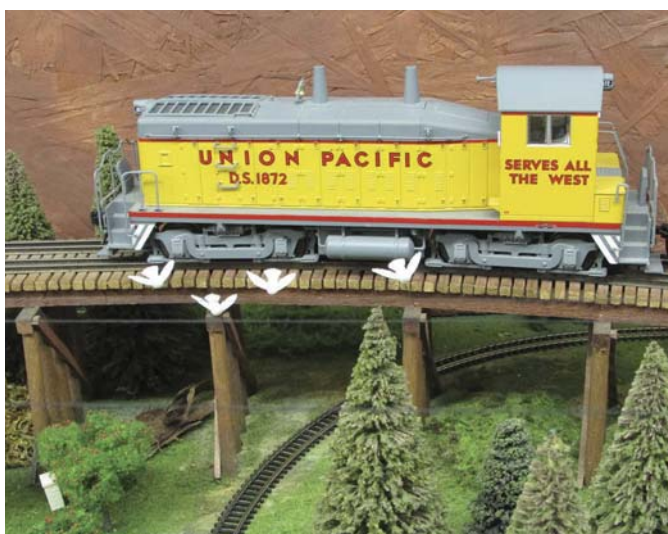
At one end of the layout is a speeder and speeder shed, also from Walthers. Nestled in the valley between the plateaus is the abandoned Rand Mining Co. silver mine. It was once serviced by a 16" narrow-gauge line, which is represented by an N scale line and now serves as an excursion operation for passengers.

Several scenes added to the layout include a small pond and stream with a boat dock and fishermen. A camping scene has railfans camped beside the train trestle to watch all the railroad action. An orchard with young apple trees, lots of birds and animals, and figures of people in various activities add interest to my layout.

All of the steel rail is from Right-O-Way and is hand-laid with Code .148 used for the main line and Code .100 laid for the agricultural spur. The five turnouts on the layout are all hand-laid as well, which offers a lot of realism for looks and operation. Both the loading dock for the freight station and the loading shed for the fruit packing company are scratchbuilt structures.



This hard-working GP9 passes the station with a short string of cars.



The rumbling SW9 scares a flock of doves from the trestle.

The locomotive roster includes seven Atlas engines, all in Union Pacific livery. The oldest is a Plymouth switcher that I have rebuilt with a Sagami can motor prime mover and Northwest Shortline wheelsets. It runs a lot better than it did originally, but it still growls some, perhaps much like might be expected of an old switcher of that vintage. There are three older Atlas F9 units that have been rebuilt with Pittman prime movers, dual flywheels, Northwest Shortline wheelsets, and added steel couplers. They run well compared to their original condition and give very satisfactory prototypical action. Rounding out the O gauge locomotive lineup is an SW9 that has given good performance, right out of the box, along with a newer GP9. As the newest addition to the roster, the 16" gauge excursion line sports an Atlas N gauge GP9.

Various O scale freight cars for all the industries on the line are primarily from Atlas and Weaver. I added steel wheelsets and couplers to several of them.

The layout is wired simply as a single block. Both the main and spur lines are powered by a Tech II Railmaster 2400, which provides plenty of power to run one or two locomotives at a time. Feeder wires soldered to the rail at various places have eliminated any dead spots. The 16" excursion line is powered by a Bachmann Spectrum Magnum power pack.

My layout is obviously different from more common configurations. However, it is nonetheless enjoyable. As far as running trains, there are many interesting combinations and switching possibilities. As to scenery, there is an abundance of detail to appreciate in each part of the layout.

I have been more than pleased with how everything has turned out. The Northwestern Railway shows that 2-rail O scale, taking advantage of a small space, can be both economical and enjoyable. 🚂



## About the Author

Randy Bynum spent much of his childhood growing up in central Wyoming where he lived close to the Union Pacific main line. He has fond memories of long freight trains rolling across the Wyoming desert behind gas turbines, F units, and GP9s. With a Ph.D. from the University of Manchester, in the U.K., Randy is lead pastor of a multicultural church and teaches part-time at Northwest Nazarene University, both in Nampa, Idaho. He and his wife, Kathy, just celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary by riding the Mount Hood RR dinner train in Hood River, Oregon. Randy and Kathy have three married children and four granddaughters.



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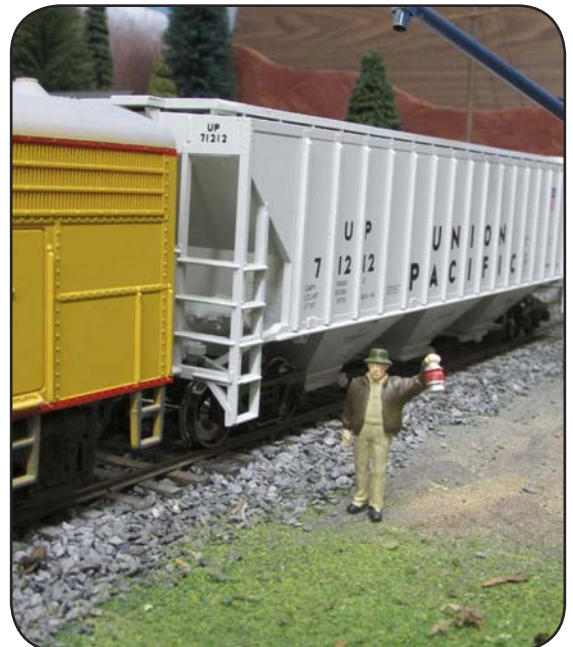


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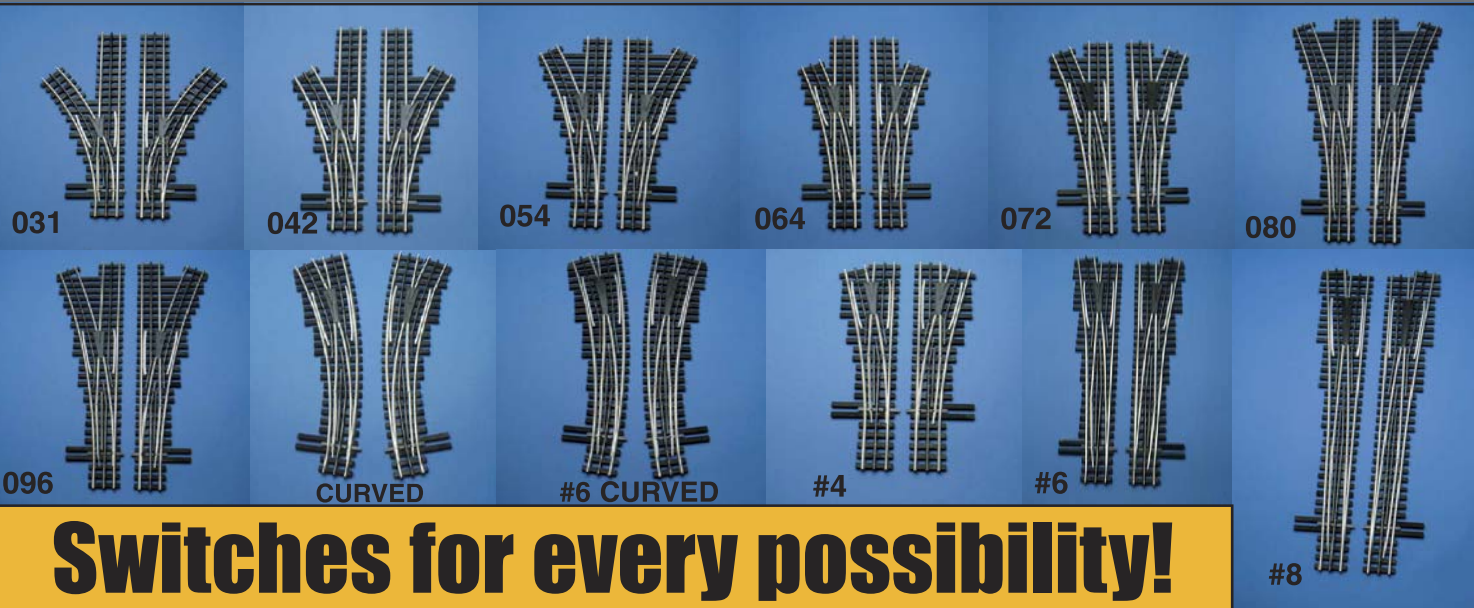
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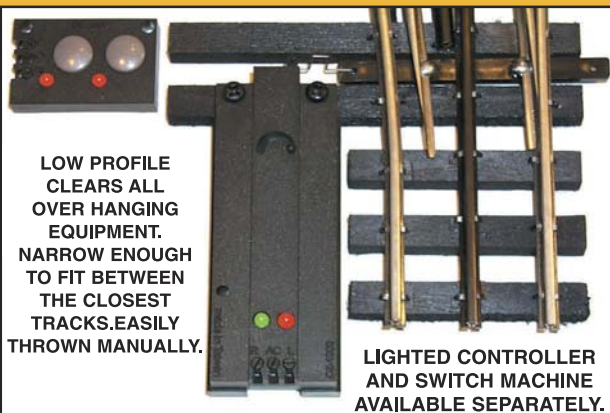
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## The Rarest Hell Gate Bridges

Photos courtesy of Tammy Condeelis and Lionel LLC

The rarest of the Hell Gate Bridges in the modern era resulted from a gesture of gratitude by the vendor that built the No. 305 Hell Gate Bridges for Lionel in 1999. Paul Condeelis, the engineer who had successfully shepherded the project through product development, was the recipient of five large boxes at the Lionel office in Michigan. These boxes contained five interesting and attractive surprises. Each box had a one-off, specially decorated No. 305 Hell Gate Bridge. As near as Paul can recall after a decade and a half, there was a gold-plated bridge, a silver one, what looked like a chrome-plated version, a shiny black one, and the flat black No. 305 seen here (Photo 1).

### The Only One Available for Photography

Over the years, the gold, silver, and shiny black versions disappeared. Searches in the Michigan and New York offices before they were closed and the contents sent to the new North Carolina location did turn up the chrome version, but it was in no shape to be photographed without extensive cleaning and refurbishment.

That left the flat black bridge that I began calling the “stealth” Hell Gate Bridge because it tended to blend into the background of wherever it was placed. However, in its all-black finish it looked more purposeful and much more drab and realistically industrial than the regular production cream and green No. 305 (Photos 2 and 3). The illuminated gold-colored tower inserts are a welcome touch of color, which Paul tells me were common to all five special Hell Gate Bridges.

The black bridge is fully usable, as Lionel demonstrated by placing two sets of O gauge tubular tracks on the bridge decking in the slots provided for them. This image of the bridge with a 765 Berkshire and a Santa Fe Dash-8 diesel locomotive occupying the tracks amply demonstrates that the additional length, width, and height of the 1999 version of the Hell Gate Bridge, compared to the 1928 original, provides plenty of room for the two O gauge engines to cross the bridge (Photo 4). As with the regular production No. 305, about the only rolling stock items that won't clear the bridge structure are loaded double stacks.

The special black bridge is adorned with a full complement of



identifying plates. “Bridge No. 305” is located on one tower along with “Made by Lionel” on the other tower (Photos 5 and 6). The central arch of the bridge has the prominent “Lionel Lines” oval (Photo 7). Another shot of the front of the black Hell Gate Bridge taken under different lighting conditions shows the effect of 15 years of indoor exposure on a flat black finish (Photo 8).

Obviously, owning the flat black No. 305 is out of the question, but there are two Hell Gate Bridge items that are within our reach.





### The Hell Gate Bridge Boxcars

The 6-29294 Hell Gate Bridge “1900-2000” boxcar was made to celebrate the production of the green and cream 6-32904 No. 305 Hell Gate Bridge (Photo 9). One boxcar was produced for every Hell Gate Bridge, and the original idea was to match bridges with boxcars for potential buyers. It did not work out that way. Dealers who sold Hell Gate Bridges did not get the boxcars, and others got quantities of them. The result was that speculators initially had a field day. In the collector-centric world of Lionel trains in 2000, the price quickly went from around \$40 to \$175 and more. The Hell Gate Bridge boxcar fever has long past, and now it is not hard to get one for between \$35 to \$40 and even less—*sic transit collecturum* in very loosely constructed Latin.

For a modestly priced piece of rolling stock with a small amount of potential collector value, the Hell Gate Bridge boxcar is a good-looking car. It has a pale green roof and ends and light yellow sides that complement the No. 305 green and cream colors. It is equipped with moving orange doors, black metal door guides, a brake wheel, and die-cast sprung trucks. The yellow sides are decorated with “Lionel” in orange-brown on the left side. Below is “Bridging the



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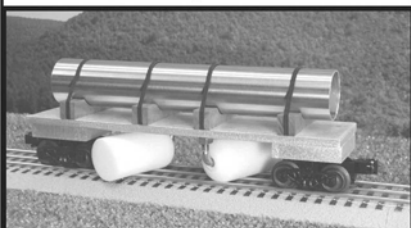
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Centuries” in black with “1900-2000” in orange underneath (Photo 10). The right side has a drawing of the Hell Gate Bridge in silver and black.

A similar boxcar, 6-39200, was made to commemorate the availability of the 6-32999, the ivory and red version of the No. 305 Hell Gate Bridge (Photo 11). You can also get this one for around \$35.

We have gone from the rare and unobtainable to the “ho-hum, I will get

them if I really want them....” in this column. It is a broad spectrum for a bridge design that continues to fascinate collectors in the 87 years since the original No. 300 was produced in 1928 and the 15 years since the modern No. 305 became available in 1999. A new 21st-century model designed for FasTrack would probably continue to interest the current generation of collectors and operators. 



9



10



11

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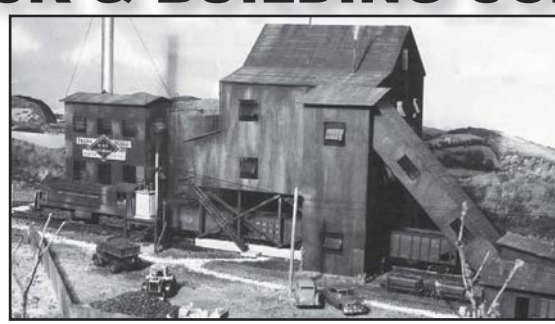
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## Railfans at 115 North Main

Article and Photos by Tom Densel




It's a typical summer afternoon at 115 North Main Street. Mary Weatherspoon is sweeping the front porch as Cuddles rests at the bottom of the steps. Lucky, the cat, surveys its domain from the porch railing. Suddenly, a westbound Penn Central freight train rumbles across the nearby—very nearby—North Main crossing. Apparently, this is a perfectly normal occurrence because Mary, Cuddles, and Lucky carry on with their normal routines, totally nonplussed by the noise created by a boisterous, hulking GP40.

Later during the early evening hours, Mary's husband, Bill, sits on the porch steps chatting with neighbor Bob Barbarro. A short freight, led by a Penn Central GP9, passes by. The men nearly have to yell at each other to be heard above the din created by the roaring freight unit.

Shortly after the freight train passes, a couple of Bill's friends, railfans no less, drop by to chat with Bill and Bob. This is their

lucky day! The eastbound Broadway Limited bursts across the railroad crossing. It is headed by an E8, still in Pennsylvania Railroad colors, which is an increasingly rare sight in 1970. All conversation comes to an abrupt halt as the men pause to admire the locomotive and its consist.

Dusk falls, and the stillness of night quickly envelopes 115 North Main Street. The last local of the day is just leaving town en route back to the yard. The conductor glances down the nearly deserted street as his transfer caboose clears the crossing.

If houses could talk, think of the stories 115 North Main could tell. The occupants of this otherwise rather ordinary abode have enjoyed a front row seat to what any railfan would consider one of the greatest shows. Think of the countless trains that have passed by this spot over the years. Imagine the variety of locomotives, both steam and diesel, that 115 North Main has come to know. What a rail tale it could tell! 



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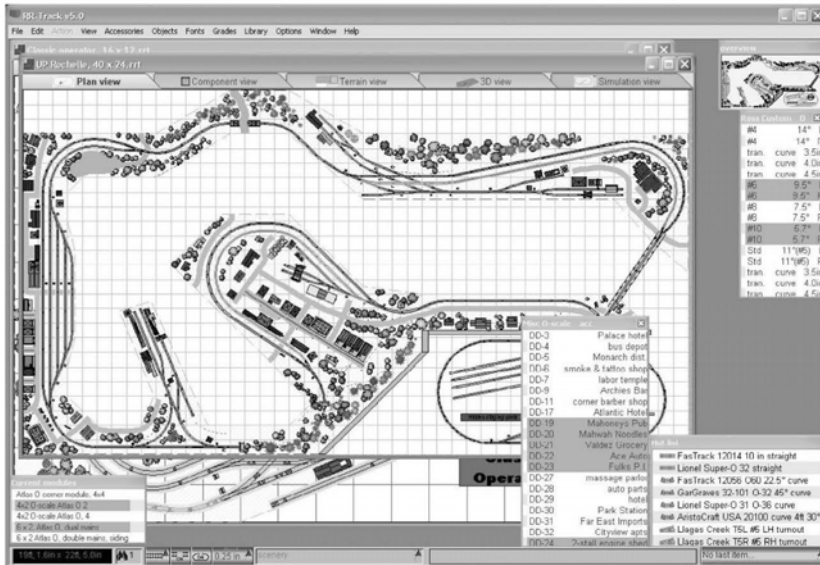


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## Building a Layout: Uses for Foam Core Board

Foam core board or foam board is a sheet stock material that can be used for all sorts of things on your layout. It consists of an interior material of semifirm sponge foam that is laminated between sheets of cardstock. The construction method of laminating layers is good because it keeps warping to a minimum. Photo 1 shows the edge of a sheet of 3/16" thick foam board.

These boards come primarily in either black or white. Other colors are available in art stores, but these are the two most readily available. It is important to note that black foam core board comes with black surfaces and either black or white interior cores. Always get the sheets that are black throughout because the edges of the board are often visible in our applications as well as the surfaces.

Thicknesses range from 1/8" to much larger, but for our purposes the most common thickness is 3/16". The foam board shown was 32"x 40", but a little digging on the Internet shows sizes up to 4'x 8' and thicknesses up to 1".

Foam core board is available from art, hobby, and office supply stores as well as on-line if there are no stores handy to you. Just run a Google search for the product, and you will get a quick education. Sheets up to 3/16" thick will cut freely and cleanly with a sharp knife. Foam board can be glued face-to-face, allowing you to build up thickness for scenery purposes. I use 3M Super 77 spray glue, which is a form of rubber cement, or Elmer's white glue for gluing edges. The one glue to not use on foam board is CA glue. The process of spraying the fixing agent on the CA glue sometimes causes the CA to heat up, delaminating the paperboard surfaces from the core.



Photos 2 and 3 show one great use for foam core board, which is an exact template I covered in Run 273. The template shown was easily made by taping smaller pieces of foam board together. In this case, I used some chair backs to hold the foam core board at the right height as I worked.

You can draw right on the surface of foam core board with a pencil, even if you are using the black foam core board. The pencil lead shows up as a gray line on the black paperboard surface of the foam board. I used a beam compass of a pencil and a center point mounted to a yardstick for large arcs to score a radius on the foam core board. The foam board is then cut using a knife to make a template for drawing arcs on plywood. That is the way I made running boards for track that will be mounted at different elevations.

On my former layout I had places where hinged scenery panels would allow access to hidden places actually inside the layout scenery—a place where I could store things I needed to get to easily and frequently. In Photo 4 the cardboard lattice scenery panel hinges up to show a small caddy of handy materials frequently needed for the layout (Photo 5). The caddy is made from custom-cut white foam core board glued on the edge with Elmer's glue. The caddy is rugged and doubles as a backing for the hinged scenery panel.

Using that idea, I also made some large removable sections of scenery to provide access to trains that ran under the hill behind the scenery (Photos 6 and 7). Once again, all I had were foam core board baffles, a foam core board floor, and end panels glued together. Those pieces were covered with my cardboard lattice piece method of scenery construction and then covered with plaster cloth to create the surfaces. The cardboard strips were glued with hot glue to the foam board edges and then interwoven by applying a spot of hot glue at the crossings.

Perhaps the best use for foam core board is for making lightweight, firm scenery layers for such things as building up gravel parking lots, rail yard grounds, and other applications. In Photo 8 I have a relatively small area to build a freight yard in. The pencil lines on the table surface indicate future track centerlines. Photo 9 shows the cork roadbed for the tracks being installed along the pencil lines. These sidings will go over one of my hinged scenery panels covered in Run 271. These hinged panels need to be as light as possible, so using foam core board to build up these surfaces instead of just adding lots of gravel will keep down the weight of the hinged panel.

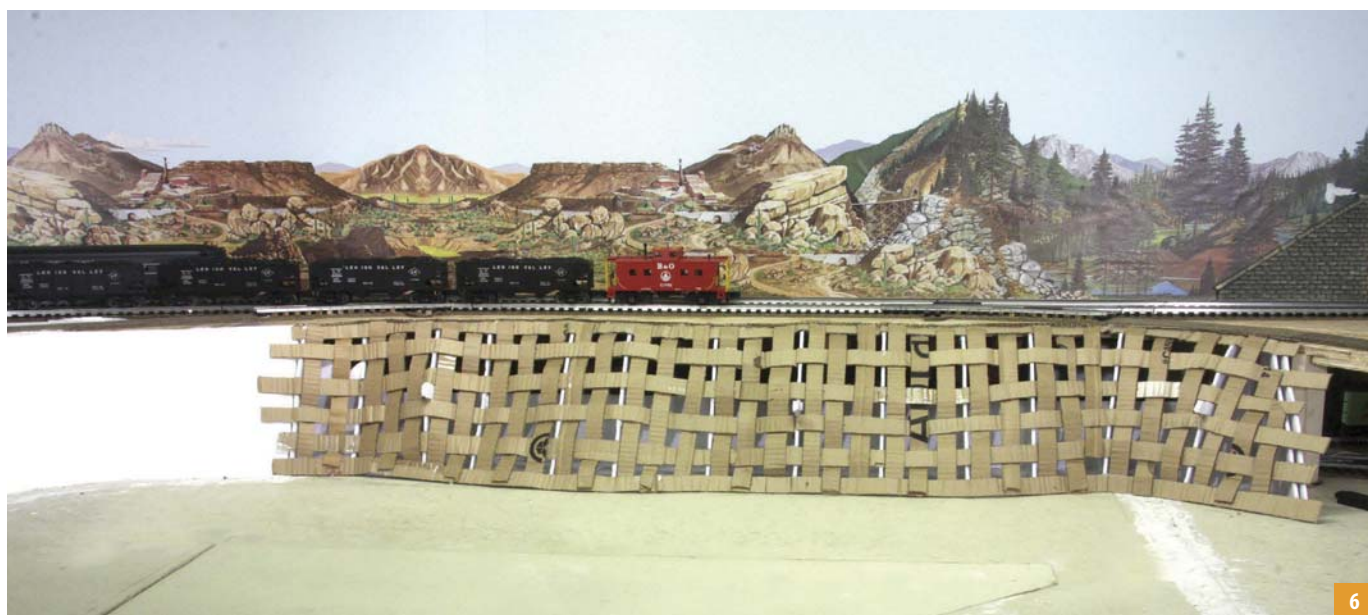
In Photo 10 I've laid out trackside operating accessories and other trackside structures to determine what might be the best



4



5



6



location for each. Most Lionel trackside operating accessories work using either a vibrating mechanism or a motor mechanism. Once their locations have been determined, I create vibration dams out of strips of cork roadbed, dampening out the vibrations to the tabletop (Photo 11). This trick makes the accessory work much better as well as much quieter.

The nice thing about the cork roadbed and foam core board is they are both the same thickness of  $3/16"$ . That allows for the use of the foam core board to fill in perfectly beside the cork. Additional foam core board can then be used on top to build up the surface scenery. Photo 12 shows the additional layers of foam core board that allow the parking lot for the truck to put the truck bed at just the right height for the dock of the forklift accessory.

In Photo 13 I've used two layers of foam core board: one  $3/16"$  and one  $1/4"$  to get the surface up so it will be just short of the base of the milk car platform. The addition of some gravel to the top of this surface will make it just about right. That layer of gravel will go right over to the edge of the outside rails of the yard track, which is often seen in real rail yards. A final  $3/16"$  layer of foam core board for the road will let me place gravel for the yard right up to the road's edge. The surface of the road can then be painted to complete the black-topped surface of the road.

If the edge of the road pavement is too close to the top of the rail for the track, another great quality of foam core board is you can press down the edge of the board to get it to fall just at or below the edge of the rail. Once the foam core board is depressed using the edge of a putty knife for example, it will stay at that height. That will let wheels sit firmly on the metal of the track.

Photo 14 shows another way to use the depressible quality of foam core board. Using just your fingertips, you can create tire wear tracks in the pavement by simply pressing down where the wheels have caused the natural depressions in the pavement. They will show up even if a light gravel surface is added to the top of the foam core board.

Making grade crossings is also very easy (Photo 15). On many secondary paved roads used in rail yards, such a crossing usually amounted to nothing more than additional blacktop material being packed in between the rails with a slot cut out for the wheel flanges. If you use operating cars, such as a log dump car, simply depress the ends of the blacktop filler strips you place in between



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11



12

the rails to keep the sliding shoe from picking the ends of the filler blacktop. Be sure that the foam core board material being used to represent blacktop

between the rails also permits the pickup rollers to sit firmly on the top of the center rail. If they don't, depress the foam core board inserts to make sure

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13



14

they stay below the center rail. Pickup rollers are often worn in the middle, right where they have rolled along the rail. That means the center rail must

stick up just slightly higher than the roadway surface to keep the pickup roller from lifting off the rail as it rolls over a grade crossing.

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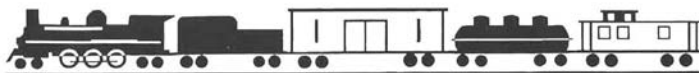
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There are many other creative uses for foam core board. It can be used to make interior floors and roofs for track-side buildings. It can also be used as a backing for printed building flats, which will be added to backdrops (Photo 16). Laminating the printed building onto the foam core board and then carefully cutting along the edges of the building will add depth and dimension to the building.

As my layout progresses, I'll show you even more ways to make use of foam core board in building a layout. For now, go have fun! 



15



16

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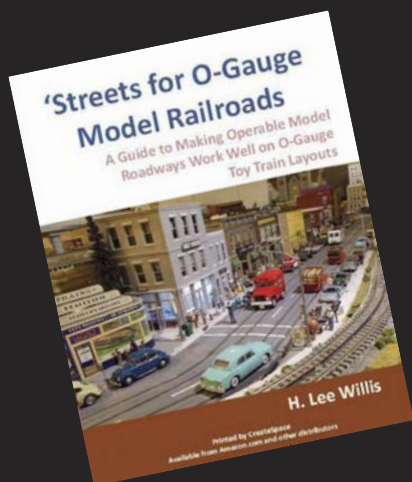
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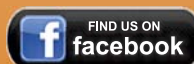
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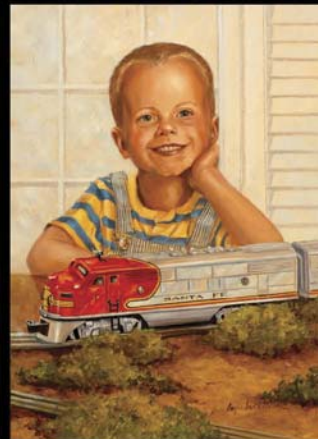
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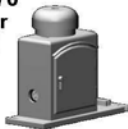


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## Backwoods Trains



Old wooden rolling stock and especially wooden passenger cars in both 1:1 and 1:48 scales have fascinated me for years. Not surprisingly, this is the dominant type of rolling stock offered by manufacturers for On30 railroading—cars that frequently model prototypes built in the late 1800s or early 1900s. The real narrow-gauge railcars frequently hauled raw commodities such as minerals, aggregates, or even logs out of remote locales that were frequently hostile to construction of standard gauge railroads. In addition, narrow-gauge passenger and baggage cars transported people, consumer goods, and even mail into and out of areas that took pack mules to reach before the narrow-gauge railroads were built. These locales included mining towns of the American West, logging camps of the Pacific Northwest or Maritime Northeast, or simply backwoods settlements in just about any region of North America. Other venues for narrow-gauge trains are tourist lines winding their way through sparsely populated prairies, mountains, forests, and the like.

The scale 34' convertible coach/observation car and the same-length baggage car from the Bachmann Spectrum line of On30 trains are prime examples of narrow-gauge passenger equipment that I find charming. Both of these molded plastic cars are illuminated, ride on die-cast trucks, and have realistically flush windows of clear molded plastic. In the roof of both cars are molded translucent green clerestory windows. Handrails on the end platforms as well as the truss rods underneath each car are molded plastic.

The trucks, which ride on HO gauge rails, are free rolling, which is putting it mildly. One of the cars decided to create a little excitement in my evening by rolling off the end table where I had them on display. I managed to catch the car en route to the floor with its truss rods and handrails receiving some rather indelicate

handling in the process. I immediately thought I had damaged these pieces, but much to my surprise and pleasure, they survived my carelessness and their momentary trauma intact.

On the #26202 convertible car, the olive and black paint with the red and gold pinstripe trim is downright striking, at least to me. Although I noticed the model's trim in the illustration on the Bachmann website and in the "Smoke Signal" section of Run 273, I didn't appreciate the full effect of the precise decoration until the car was in front of me. The car is also available in burgundy and black with the same gold and red pinstripe trim as on the olive paint

scheme. Both color schemes are ready for whatever lettering the car's owner may want to apply. I'd likely go with a minimalist approach and apply only the car's road number, in gold of course. Oh, either version of the car retails from Bachmann dealers or directly from Bachmann for \$69.00.

Inside the coach, a single line of seats is on each side of the center aisle while the floor has simulated wooden planks. One end of the car has a heating stove on one side and a lavatory on the other side. The panel-style door to the lavatory has the obligatory doorknob molded into it. As to the interior of the lavatory, it is not detailed.






A gold-painted simulated cast railing and two side gates are included with the coach/observation car to convert either end to an observation platform, which proved to be an easy process. I simply unsnapped the selected platform end beam with its handrails still attached and snapped the optional beam with the preassembled observation railing into place. A gate for the car's steps snapped onto each end of the railing. As a side note, I recommend gluing these gates to the end railing using a small drop of CA cement on the upper and lower hinges.

The burgundy and black finish on the #26498 two-door baggage car is attractively plain and ready for application of whatever lettering and road name its owner may want. Personally, I'd like the car without much lettering, again perhaps with just a road number that is something a narrow-gauge line running on a financial shoestring might do. Opening the sliding baggage doors reveals a wooden plank floor inside. The retail price of the coach/observation is \$73.00.

The recently acquired baggage car and coach went into service on my virtual On30 tourist railroad, which I dubbed the Big Thicket Cabinet Line. The loop of 18" radius Bachmann E-Z Track lay on the floor in front of the multiple tall and thick cabinets that display my locomotive collection. To pull the cars, I enlisted the service of the new Bachmann #29204 Whitcomb 50-ton center-cab diesel decorated in my line's livery of red with yellow trim. These colors celebrate the red dirt and yellow pines of the East Texas Big Thicket country, which is the prototype locale for my tourist line. To further promulgate this On30 fantasy, the Whitcomb was acquired because the tourist line's iron horse was getting long in the tooth, although it hadn't gone lame yet. With



the summer vacation season still in full swing at this writing, the line's curator didn't want to disappoint its riders with a possible breakdown of the steamer.

Okay, to return to the real world of On30 railroading, the baggage car and coach tracked the HO rails without a fault and actually looked prototypically plausible behind the Whitcomb diesel. Bachmann E-Z Mate couplers do what their name implies—they mate easily. Behind a period-correct steamer, both cars were realistic and nostalgic as either a short passenger train or with two or three freight cars in a mixed-consist backwoods train. 



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## November 8, 2014

**COLUMBIA, MO** – Central Missouri Chapter Ozark Division TCA Show & Swap Meet, Columbia Senior Center, 1121 Business Loop 70 East. 9a-10a TCA members, 10a-3p public, Adm: \$3, under 12 free. Info: Richard Malon, (573) 445-2446.

## November 9, 2014

**WALLINGFORD, CT** – Classic Shows, LLC Train & Toy Show, Zandri's Stillwood Inn, 1074 South Colony Rd., Exit 13 off I-91. 9a-2p, Adm: \$6, under 12 free with adult. Info: (203) 926-1327, [www.ClassicShowsLLC.com](http://www.ClassicShowsLLC.com).

## November 15, 2014

**ST. CLOUD, MN** – Granite City Train Show & Sale, National Guard Armory, 1710 Veteran's Dr. 10a-3p, Adm: \$6, 10 and under free. Buy or sell, displays, children's play area, food and refreshments. Info: (320) 255-0033, or [edwardolson@cloudnet.com](mailto:edwardolson@cloudnet.com).

## November 23, 2014

**KIRTLAND, OH** – Christmas Train & Toy Show, Lakeland Community College, AFC main gym, 7700 Clocktower Dr., I 90 and Rt. 306. 10a-3:30p, Adm: \$6, 6 to 12 years \$3, family \$12. Info: (440) 256-8141, [www.cleveshows.com](http://www.cleveshows.com).

## November 30, 2014

**KITTANNING, PA** – Train Show, Kittanning Township Volunteer Fire Hall, Rte. 422 east of Kittanning. 10a-4p, Adm: \$3, 12 and under free. Info: David Campbell, 734 Freeport Rd., Butler, PA 16002, (724) 352-1113.

## December 6, 2014

**VENICE, FL** – Holiday Toy Train Show & Swap Meet, 50th anniversary of First Christian Church, 1100 Center Rd. 9a-3p, Adm: \$5, 12 and under free. Dealers, operating displays, train drag races, bell choir. Info: Tim Evert, (941) 475-5278.

**GERMANTOWN, MD** – Toy Train Show Fundraiser, Mother Seton Parish Center, 19951 Father Hurley Blvd. Over 50 dealer tables available, \$20. 9a-3p, Adm: \$5, under 14 free. Info: [Navyben@verizon.net](mailto:Navyben@verizon.net).

## December 6-7, 2014

**TURLOCK, CA** – San Joaquin Valley Toy Train Operators Annual Train & Toy Show, Stanislaus Fairgrounds, 900 N. Broadway. Venders, operating layouts, free parking, and Whistle Stop Cafe. Doors open at 9a, Adm-\$5, under 12 free. Info: Ed Cathcart, (209) 479-4432.

## December 13, 2014

**NASHVILLE, TN** – Music City Chapter Dixie Division TCA 21st Annual Christmas Toy Train Show, State Fairgrounds, Agricultural Bldg. 9a-4p, Adm: \$7, 12 and under free. Info: Vic Petrone, 7600 Indian Spring Dr., Nashville, TN 37221, (615) 646-2232, or [www.dixiedivisiontca.com](http://www.dixiedivisiontca.com).

**COLUMBUS, OH** – 56th Buckeye Model Train & Railroad Artifacts Show, Ohio Expo Center, Lausche Bldg. 9a-4p, Adm: \$6, under 12 free. Info: Gordon Hartranft, 58 Creed Circle, Campbell, OH 44405, (330) 755-1914, [nlion02@aol.com](mailto:nlion02@aol.com), or [www.gserr.com](http://www.gserr.com).

## December 13-14, 2014

**PALM BEACH GARDENS, FL** – 6th Annual Toy & Train Show, Saint Marks school gym, 3395 Burns Rd. Sat. 9a-3p, Sun. 11a-3p, Adm: \$7, under 12 free. Info: Will Wagner, (561) 373-9603, [wwainc@comcast.net](mailto:wwainc@comcast.net), or [www.derrickwagnerfoundation.com](http://www.derrickwagnerfoundation.com).

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**MASSILLON, OH** – C J Trains Winter Train & Toy Show, Knights of Columbus Hall, 988 Cherry Rd. NW. 10a-3p, Adm: \$5, 12 and under free. Tables, 148 at 8' \$20 each. Info: Jon Ulbright, (330) 262-7488 after 6p EST, [cathijon@sssnet.com](mailto:cathijon@sssnet.com), or [www.cjtrains.com](http://www.cjtrains.com).

## December 20-21, 2014

**TAMPA, FL** – 12th Tampa Model Train Show, Florida State Fairgrounds, Special Events Center. 20th 9a-5p, 21st 10a-4p, Adm: \$8, under 12 free. Info: Charles Miller, 3106 N. Rochester St., Arlington, VA 22213, [rrshows@aol.com](mailto:rrshows@aol.com), or [www.gserr.com](http://www.gserr.com).

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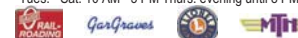
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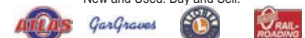
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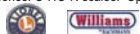
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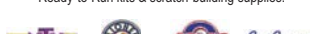
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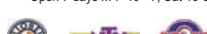
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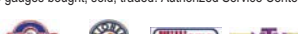
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- Extreme scenery makeover by Jim Policastro
- Tom Yorke guides us step by step through “staining” plastic models
- Joey Ricard describes how he uses chalk to realistically weather models
- Your editor takes a look back at O gauge in 2014

***You'll find all this and much more in Run 275, our January 2015 issue.***

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