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BANTRAK

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Newsletter



N-Scale – Realism in Miniature



The Engineer's Cab

by Mark Bandy, President

IMPORTANT!

**BANTRAK
Work Session**

March 24/25

**Show Module
Conversions**

Table of Contents

The Engineer's Cab	1
Tunnel Expansion Part II	2
The Modular Module	3
B&O T-TRAK Display	5
What's The Big Deal?	5

I would have to say that the February train show layout was a lot of fun to run on. I had some skepticism in the beginning with Martin's and Ken's track plan during setup, but after I ran my trains I marveled over the idea and the amount of planning possibilities we can build on at other shows. The layout was basically two loops together forming a number "8". In the middle were the transitional "wyes" that allow the blue line to feed into three tracks at the middle of the "8" and then bridge across to the other transition "wye". In that bridge section we could interchange with the upper "8" blue and/or yellow line, loop around and bridge back to the larger loop. Yes, like other shows in the morning we removed the bugs and gremlins from the layout. After that, it was smooth tracking. Also the February scale train show was the last time that Cinch Jones connectors will be used. Surprised, you shouldn't be. At the January meeting there was a unanimous vote to go with N-Trak's new electrical standard. Also at that meeting we discussed electrical issues about the Christmas show; we spoke for 20 minutes or so on that matter. Power poles should help eliminate electrical problems in the future. Everyone in the club should have received or reviewed the electrical manual from N-Trak.

The next train show, (April 13-15th) the requirement to participate with your module will be to have, power poles and new drop lines from your track to the power pole wires. At the February meeting over Jack's house, Martin demonstrated how the electrical power pole requirements should work for each module you own or nurse. I hope this doesn't discourage anyone from participating. We will have two work sessions at Skip's house and one at Eric's house for doing what Martin discussed at the meeting. (See below for dates and times). We moved up the club meeting at Skip's house on Sunday, since most of us will be at Skips' house working on the electrical power poles anyway.

A tie under the track has come lose during our February meeting; this one involves our N-Trak newsletter subscription. Some members are contacting the director of the N-Trak newsletter about content issues. We should decide on what advantages or disadvantages the Newsletter brings to us.

Lastly, I am announcing the guidelines for the next model contest. I know that most of our members have a variety of N-scale modeling talent. I hope that you will all participate.

1. anything goes, N-scale, no larger than 8 x 8 inch.
2. all models must be indigenous to this metropolitan area or at one time in the past.

(For example;

- The Pennsylvania GG-1 locomotive ran through Penn Station in Baltimore, this

(Continued on page 3)



RIP TRACK

Tunnel Expansion. Part II

By Phil Peters

Here are the photos that illustrate last month's article on how to expand a tunnel portal to fit a three-track line. The first photo shows the original two-track tunnel portal. The second shows the broken portal. Mine was pre-broken during shipping, so I didn't have to do it myself. If I had done it myself, I would have cut the portal at the mid-point of the arch. The third and fourth photos show the portal sections on and in the template I made to hold them in the proper alignment and to create the smooth curvature of the arch. As you can see, the template is made from scrap pieces of styrene that I had in the workshop. It only has to hold the pieces firmly. If you look closely, you can see two steel wires linking the two portal sections. These were sunk in predrilled holes that held the sections in line and at the proper distance apart. The purpose was really to offer a reinforcement to the plaster that was being poured in. With the sections in the mold, I mixed up a firm batch of molding plaster and applied it with an artist's spatula. After poking it with a large dissecting needle to get out any air bubbles, I smoothed the plaster and formed it to match the rest of the portal. On removing it from the mold, I smoothed it with an emery board. Naturally, it broke at one side of the new mend. Letting it dry, I rejoined with glue. It is now ready to place on the layout. To give it a bit more strength, I will cut a styrene backing and apply it with a mixture of glue and plaster. Now to see what other messes to get myself into.



Original Portal



Portal Separation



Preparing to fit into template



Preparing to fill the gap



Before and after

(Continued from page 1)

would be accepted.

- Mt. Royal Station which was built in Baltimore. But, since it is larger than 8 x 8 inches, it would be disqualified. You got the idea?

3. starting of the model should be after the release of this newsletter. I can sniff out old paint.
4. judging will be on closeness to prototype, so bring your photographs for back-up.
5. for those folks who are funny, no Santa's on his sleigh.
6. the due date will be at our BANTRAK cook out.

There will be a grand prize, second and third place.

Have fun. And Keep on N-Trak'en.

Mark



The versatility of the modular module!

By Al DeGaudio

This past February Scale show saw the introduction of a new version of my Liberty City module. No city, no theater. Instead, a more relaxed and bucolic scene replaced the hustle and bustle of the downtown multi-story building diorama. The intention was always there to have different scenery selections to go on top of my module base with its proven track and electrical connections.

The city is fabricated on a 2" high platform, which was braced in place on the 2 x 4 module by two spacer blocks. These make a friction fit which is further secured by a couple of screws. The city platform is easily removed from my basement layout to go on the 2' x 4' module. However, unlike rugged zed city modules [i.e., Bob Mohr's], mine was never intended for the rigors of multiple shows.

The combination of concern about my home module diorama getting beat up, wanting a module that would flow with more of the other club modules and to make it easier for my wife and I to load the thing in my car finally broke through my "why rock the boat" mentality after our January meeting. As I flew out to California that Monday, I decided it was time to rebuild the module as soon as I got back-hopefully in time for the Scale show. On the flight I tallied up the assets in place. Time was marginally there albeit only if I kept to a rigorous schedule [lots of 11 PM-2 AM and 6:30-8 AM sessions]. I decided to make use of a 2'x 4' x 1/2" Gatorfoam piece to form the new diorama base [s]. I had most of the buildings needed; track and turnouts were there, so I only had to get a couple more built-ups. First, I extended the blind blue line spur that dead-ended at a faux tunnel under the city to continue on a dago-

(Continued on page 4)

Our Next Meeting

Our next BANTRAK Club meeting will be held on Sunday, March 25th at Skip Hayes' house. This meeting is part of the Two-day work session

Map Enclosed



BANTRAK Organization

- | | | |
|-------------------|------------|----------------|
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(Continued from page 3)



nal to the right rear corner. Another turnout was added to make 2 spurs. Four pairs of electric drops were soldered to ensure reliable operation around the turnouts. It is my intention that the shorter spur will be a siding for locomotive servicing. I'll add a small coaling tower, water tank and a diesel/sanding rack to this spur. The other spur has a freight house alongside. Here, I used the Walthers freight house, which is a beautifully detailed piece. At \$23 from one of our favorite LHS, you couldn't build one for the same price even if you paid yourself only 10 cents per hour. I also picked up the Walthers interlocking tower with; shed, outhouse and crossing gates.

On either side of the spur are Gatorfoam bases. Gatorfoam is like Foamcore except it uses 2 thin sheets of coated wood veneer [not cardboard] for sandwiching the foam. Thus, it is more durable, not easily compromised by water, can be glued with yellow or white glue. It's also quite rigid and very light in weight.

You can cut it with an Xacto knife or utility knife and if you have a long enough knife blade, you can separate the wood sheets from the foam. Using a 6" bread knife, I was able to separate the Gatorfoam top wood sheet from the internal [sandwiched] foam, and then sanded the exposed internal foam to create gentle hills. By cutting the removed wood sheets into a curving road and gluing them back into place, secured overnight with several clamps and wood blocks, the result is a gently winding, rising and falling road with about 1/2" [6-scale feet] of elevation change at 3 places on the module—all without a lot of hydrocal. This saved drying time and weight. Next I glued some foam hills sculpted with a hot wire and draped them with plaster sheets and a light coating of hydrocal. That afternoon I had to go to Harper Ferry and was inspired to try to create the feeling of rocks, grass and trees all along the drive when I returned. Liberal use of Woodland Scenics rock paints, ground foam and several different tree types [Klein's plastic pines, Faller pines, Heki pines, Woodland deciduous, Photo Quality Trees] and nature's scenery was there! After soaking it in matte medium the night before I was bummed to find it is squishy damp in the morning. Clamping a small fan to a ladder and aiming at the 2 Gatorfoam based dioramas worked well. Despite my basement imitating a cave, they dried in a few hours. Back on schedule!



Aside from the RR structures mentioned, I wanted to keep the other buildings to a minimum but suggest civilization. The combination of numerous trips driving around in Ohio from Columbus to Toledo and the local Ellicott City to Catonsville jaunts on Frederick Rd. sort of gave me the sense of what I wanted. On top of the left hill is F.E. Pferd's Tavern and Inn [needs the sign], which is a Kibri kit I built 3 years ago. With an enclosed dining area in the front, a patio on the side and a commanding view of both the four track main and sidings, it is the 3/8" tall rail fan's delight. Along the road in front of the hill are a couple of homes [Bachmann and Model Power built ups]. I wanted to add the Atlas Kate's Colonial but it seemed to make for too much congestion. On the

right side we have an old Kestrel Design town shop structure featuring a coffee shop—a favorite spot for the local constabulary. A bit more work needs to take place; it needs people, signage, more trees and shrubbery. Given the tight time constraint, I had passed on some of the shrubbery I wanted to use since I was concerned I didn't have time to rescue a probable botched rush job. I do have the time now. Oh yes, did I mention it needs a few more trees?

Best of all, the 2 Gatorfoam dioramas are screwed to the Skip Hayes module base and are rigid enough that they can be easily removed so as to recreate the cityscape diorama. Now that there is a real siding and I have another 2 x 4, the city will not quite be the

Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Museum T-TRAK Layout Display

Visitors to the Festival of Trains at the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Museum in December were introduced to the T-TRAK modular system as a part of the BANTRAK layout display. Located along the exterior of the roundhouse wall adjacent to the raffle layout, a basic oval of two ends and four straight sections allowed the younger visitors, under the watchful eyes of their adult companions, to operate one or two short trains at any speed they wished. It also served a secondary purpose of keeping children occupied while their parents bought raffle tickets.

The T-TRAK layout was built by Ralph Grutzmacher to test the concept and means for teaching to youth introductory classes on N Scale model railroading skills. The basic layout includes two 32' by 14" end units, one 24" straight "finished" unit that includes a small house and church and two 12" straight units to show the evolution of completing the basic unit. The two end units were chosen instead of four corner units to simplify construction, transportation, and assembly. One end unit has mountain scenery to act as a view blocker. The other is awaiting inspired suggestions for scenery. A free-standing view block system that uses a blue skyboard and additional "earthboards" was based on an elegant design by Paul Mussleman of greater Cincinnati. Paul has been a tremendous help in addition to being an innovator in the T-TRAK world.

The construction of a basic layout will help focus BANTRAK's outreach efforts for young people at public shows to stimulate the next generation of model railroaders. Bob Winterbottom's civic association and recreation council (which, by the way, has an outstanding physical facility in Laurel operated by the Prince George's Parks Department) already has expressed interest in sponsoring a set of classes as a part of its youth recreation program. There is also a very active Cub Scout Pack sponsored by the West Laurel Civic Association. When the weather warms up a bit Ralph will be refining the scenery to bring it up to BANTRAK's standards of appearance. It is expected that the layout will reappear at the April Scale Show with literature to generate interest in future N Scale model railroading classes.



Comment- What's The Big Deal?

By John Darlington, Editor

I continue to be mystified by what is fast becoming a "Cause Celeb" in N-TRAK circles over the "invention" of the T-TRAK concept. I say "invention" since certain self important individuals among the N-TRAK hierarchy seem to think that they have come up with a unique idea. Additionally, this is being offered as a basic training vehicle for youngsters who have shown an interest in model railroading and in N-Scale particularly. I hate to burst bubbles, here but this idea is neither unique or an especially good teaching method.

First of all, this T-TRAK scheme is trying to re-invent the wheel since the construction of 1' and 2' modules has been an ongoing practice since the 80's. Our various Club layout configurations regularly incorporate many such non-standard or "short" modules, many with abundant scenery and detail. Secondly, why is a "short" module any better in demonstrating basic concepts than the standard 4' configuration? The only benefit that I can see is that the small size makes it easier to transport. As I understand it, the original concept that was started in Japan, was developed for that express purpose since a lot of Japanese citizens must use public transportation. To me this is where any benefit vis a' vis standard modules disappears. In fact, the size of T-TRAK modules could hamper rather than enhance the level of learning which is supposedly the focus of the T-TRAK idea. The size of these modules inhibit the amount of demonstration surface that will be necessary to provide the beginner with the various skills necessary to move forward in N-TRAK. If the idea is to teach such skills as track laying, ballasting, scenery construction then any piece of plywood would do. If, on the other hand, the goal is to show newcomers how to build a module from scratch then wasting your time on modules that will have no general purpose is self-defeating. I have seen a number of good small layouts made with two standard modules (2' X 4') and two 180 degree corners (Bob Mohr's?) that operate well and demonstrate basic as well as advance techniques of model railroading.

I think the idea of getting more youngsters involved in model railroading is a laudatory effort. Looking around our hobby a person is struck by the fact that most of us have quite a bit of mileage on us. We do need an infusion of youth into our hobby, but we do not need to invest time and effort in furthering a concept whose idea was plagiarized from others in order to provide some illusionary self gratification. Let's teach the kids the right way so that their efforts can be translated into skills that will aid them to become quality model railroaders.

SPIKES AND SLEEPERS

Modeling Tip?

I have always been somewhat perplexed with the lack of adhesiveness Model Flex and Polly Scale paints have when trying to paint engine railings. While the paint seems to go on well, the paint molecules do not seem to attach to the slick railing surface and after a while, the paint chips off. While in search of an answer I have come up with two possible solutions:

The first one comes directly from Cory Rothlisberger, Product Development, Atlas Model Railroad Co. Cory suggests that you coat the railing with a silver colored *Sharpie pen* and after that dries, paint over it with your railing color. (Skip uses this technique, but he just uses the Sharpie color alone)

I stumbled across the second solution while fooling around at my work bench. I took "*White Out*" correction fluid and used it directly on the railing.

There is no telling just how long either of these "solutions" will last so I am doing a field test on two of my locomotives so see how durable either one is.

In the mean time, if anyone else has a different solution to this vexing problem let me know.

[John Darlington](#), Editor

COMING EVENTS

- ⇒ **BANTRAK Work Sessions March 24 & 25 @ Skip Hayes' house Noon to 5PM**
- ⇒ **Scale Show @ Timonium, April 14& 15 Set Up 3PM Friday April 13th**
- ⇒ **BANTRAK Meeting—Sunday April 22nd Site TBA**

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