

August, 2007

Issue 8

Volume 20

BANTRAK

Newsletter



N-Scale – Realism in Miniature



Roundhouse View

by John Darlington

Don't Forget!
N-Scale Show
Bedford, PA
August 24 to
26

A Traveling Club

While sitting here at my computer trying to figure out what to write about while “recovering” from our land/cruise vacation, the thought struck me that we are very fortunate as a Club to have so many active members that travel to Conventions and worldwide locations and share their railroad experiences with the rest of us. With digital cameras now in common use we can bring back descriptions and photos of sights and adventures that others may never experience. For instance, I am aware of at least half of the membership either having just returned or have just embarked on a trip to a vacation spot or convention site

For instance, a number of Club members are attending the N-Scale Collector’s Convention and The National N-Scale Convention in Hartford, CT from August 6th through the 12th. Under the tutelage of Skip Hayes, the Club is operating a small modular layout for the enjoyment of the conventioners. I have volunteered Al DelGaudio (although he does not know it yet) to write an article for next months Newsletter and share his experiences. Phil Peters has just returned from the NMRA Convention in Detroit and I have asked him to contribute an article on that as well.

As for myself, Elaine has always wanted to go to Alaska so I thought our 30th wedding anniversary was a good time to go. We combined our Alaskan Cruise with a preliminary trip across the far west to see Yellowstone National Park, the Grand Teton Mountains and other sites. I did not expect to see many if any trains, but we did see a lot of Union Pacific and short line equipment rumbling by ever so often. We happened to visit the town of Wallace, Idaho which has a significant railroad history going back to 1887 involving the UP and the NP. The town has a beautifully restored NP Station that was originally built in 1901 which now functions as a Railroad Museum.

My most enjoyable train related activity occurred when we reached Skagway and we took a three hour ride on the White Pass & Yukon Railway up through the mountains to the Canadian border. This is a narrow gauge railway using both steam and diesel locomotives. I believe that I have some great photos and I will be including them in my article in the next Newsletter.

In a few weeks, another group of BANTRAK’ers will be venturing forth to take part in the N-Scale Show in Bedford, PA If the photographs of the leisure activities of a number of the participants is any indication of future events, then the story and photos of this years event should be quite interesting

John Darlington (subbing for Mark Bandy)

Our Next Meeting

Our next BANTRAK Club meeting will be held on Sunday, August 26th at the N-Scale Train Show in Bedford, PA.

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RIP TRACK

The Hidden DT400R

By Phil Peters

Digitrax's DT400R throttle is an extraordinarily complete controller. Not only does it combine two independent, but cooperating, throttles in one hand-held unit, but it allows the user to control an incredibly large number of operations from that same small device. This is both a blessing and a curse. It can do so much that the accompanying manual contains such an extensive amount of information that some operations get buried in the mass of detail.

NOT ONLY DOES IT COMBINE TWO INDEPENDENT, BUT CO-OPERATING, THROTTLES IN ONE HAND-HELD UNIT, BUT IT ALLOWS THE USER TO CONTROL AN INCREDIBLY LARGE NUMBER OF OPERATIONS FROM THAT SAME SMALL DEVICE

This came to light the other week at the picnic when Ted called attention to the possibility of changing the intensity of the LCD display to make it easier to read. I decided to reread the manual to see if there were any other little tidbits that might be useful and that we overlook. Here are a few reminders that, while not new, may be useful.

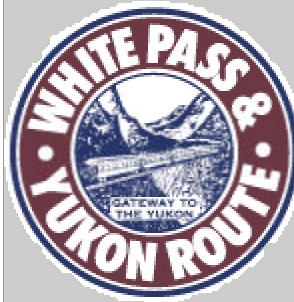
The POWER (PWR) button on the lower left side is ostensibly to turn on the power. Press it and you are prompted to push another button to turn on or turn off the power to the track. But it is also a flashlight. Press it and hold it down and that small light on the top of the unit lights up and provides a

very intense and useful flashlight for as long as you hold the button down. It is intended to be used by operators during night time operating sessions to read their train orders. However I have found it very useful when the power fails during an op session. It will help you find your way out of the layout room safely. One more reason to keep you battery fresh!

There is also a RECALL feature to make picking up a recently used loco that has been dispatched from your throttle. Push down and hold the R or L throttle knob. The display will read RECALL. Release the knob and turn it. You will see the letters "re" in the mode part of the display (lower center) and the most recently used loco addresses will come up in the display for that throttle. You can adjust the throttle to show the 4, 8 or 16 most recently used locos. More about this in a bit. When you come to the address of the loco you want to run, press the LOCO key to select it.

Changing the depth of the loco recall stack and the answer to Ted's inquiry are at the end of the manual where the customizing of the DR400R is covered. This involves changing the throttle options defaults to make the display do what you want it to. They both involve changing Throttle Option Set #3 (page 78-80 in my book) The throttle comes with the back light set for LOW INTENSITY and a stack depth of 4. Consult the table on pages 79-80 to find the setting you want. Keep the Clock format 12 hours and the Tetherless release No unless you use the fast clock and want to change these settings too. Pick the choice you want. Notice the Option Values are in hexadecimal format. These can not be changed to decimal values. To change the throttle, press the OPTN key. Press ENTER to accept the Option #1 settings – you don't want to change these. Option #2 will appear in the screen. Use the R or L throttle knob to change the setting. For instance,

if you want high intensity back lighting with a stack depth of the last 16 loco addresses, you will dial until the display shows a value for Option #3 of x23. This keeps the fast clock setting at 12 hour format and tetherless release at No. When you have the value in you display, press ENTER to accept the value. Keep pressing ENTER to step through the remaining Options OP#4, OP#F, OP #6 and exit the menus. You now have a display that should be brighter. Note that to save battery, when you are not plugged into the Loconet the display drops back one notch in intensity. So to operate on the battery the highest intensity you can have is MEDIUM.



Coming Next Month!

Photo Essay on the **WP&YR**, a narrow gauge railway which was built from Skagway to the Yukon Region during the 1898 Klondike Gold Rush

REVIEWS OF



The N-Scale Collector's Convention in Hartford, CT

By Al DelGaudio



The National Model Railroad Convention in Detroit, MI

By Phil Peters

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How to Ballast N Scale Track the Easy Way(s)

By Ralph Grutzmacher and Skip Hayes



For those who were unable to attend the July meeting, and for those who do not want to take notes during that meeting, Skip and Ralph have provided this summary. Note that everyone has different techniques and different tools and that there is no single right way to do nearly everything. The following information is what works for us and it might also work for you. Both techniques are based on cork roadbed, Woodland Scenics ballast, and latex based scenery techniques.

You will need your own small collection of plastic containers and tools or learn to completely clean the ones you borrow from the kitchen. You will need one small container to apply ballast material to the track and other containers to mix various colors. For supplies, you will need appropriate colors of ballast in fine textures, white glue mixed with water, \$1 spray cans of flat black, rust (primer), and gray, masking tape, and latex paint in a ballast color. For tools, you will need sandpaper, a Bright Boy, a paint brush that fits between the rails, a smaller paint brush for painting the outboard edges of the roadbed, a misting water bottle with “wet” water, and a small glue bottle or an eye dropper for applying the diluted glue.

The first step is to prepare the track and roadbed. Sand the shoulders or edges of the cork to remove the edge where it was joined to the other side. Next, mask the points of any turnouts to make sure that paint and materials do not get between the moveable points and the rails. Skip paints the track, ties and roadbed with a reddish mud color paint. Ralph randomly sprays the rust, gray, and black paint in short spurts to take the shine off of the rail and ties, using various angles to mix up the spray pattern. This paint will dry very quickly.

We apply the ballast in two steps. It sounds more complicated to do it this way, but it is easier to apply and clean up. You can divide these steps by any amount of time you choose as long as the first step is dry before you begin the second step.

Step One.

Skip's method. Apply a bead of full strength glue to the area where the roadbed meets the table top and another bead of glue to the area on top of the roadbed and the ends of the ties. Using either a small paintbrush or the glue bottle, blend the two beads of glue together. You can work as much area as you are comfortable with as long as the glue stays wet. Sprinkle or pour ballast material on the surfaces with glue. Only the parts that have glue will adhere to the ballast, so there is no need to be careful with amount of ballast use.

Ralph's method. Apply the latex paint to the top and sides of the outboard portions of the roadbed being careful to not get any paint on the ties. Paint only the areas you want ballasted. While the paint is still wet, sprinkle or pour ballast material on the painted area. Keep a fresh wet edge of paint and keep going. I find that about 12 to 18 inches is the right amount of roadbed to paint at any one time.

The beauty of this step is that you can stop at any time (get a drink, answer the phone, speak to family members) and pick up where you left off. The ballast, having achieved a state of Zen, will be one with the glue or paint and the roadbed once dry. When dry, vacuum or brush the extra, unadhered ballast and reclaim it for further use. Both methods allow the ballast material on the sides of the roadbed to serve as a dam or buffer for the diluted glue in Step Two.

Step Two.

The second step is actually two steps – the dry step and the wet step. Use a one inch paint brush or small vacuum to clean up loose ballast from Step One. Although you will be putting it right back, do not be tempted to skip this step. The next step requires some focus and uninterrupted time – best done when you are by yourself or everyone else is asleep. It will also take a little practice to get used to a way that works for you. Spread dry ballast material between the rails. It is easier to add more than to fool with too much. Be careful around turnouts to keep the level of ballast material below the tops of the ties and away from the moving parts of the turnout. If you make a mis-step here, it is easier to fix before you add glue. Remember the paint brush that fits between the rails (the N Brush?) This brush never gets wet. It is never used in Step One. Some people prefer a soft, full artists' brush and others prefer a sponge brush that is cut to fit. Either works, but stiff brushes tend to flick loose ballast around. Use the brush of your choice to spread and level the material between the rails. When you are happy with the effect, shake and brush additional ballast outboard of the rails to fill the spaces between the ties and to dress up bare spots from Step One. Mist the ballasted areas with wet water. (Wet water is tap water to which a teaspoon of alcohol or detergent has been added. This wetting agent will saturate the dry ballast material without causing it to ball up or float the ballast material that you so carefully brushed into place. The white glue mixture also needs a few drops of wetting agent for the same reason.) The right amount is damp, but not running with water. Too much water will dilute the water and glue mix. Use a small bottle or the eyedropper to add the 50-50 glue between the rails. If this is working correctly, the 50-50 mixture of glue and water will saturate the ballasted area, flowing under the rails to bind everything together. Additional glue mixture needs to be applied to the areas outboard of the rails to bind the loose ballast added in Step Two to the ballast already “glued” to the latex paint from Step One. No matter what this mess looks like after you have applied the glue, DO NOT try to fix anything until after it has dried. It will look a lot better when dry and it will be easier to correct small problems with dry materials later.

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued from page 3)

Quality Control.

One of the most common problems is ballast covering the ties. In real life this does not happen on mainline track. If you are going for representing a branch line with weeds, the ties will disappear under that mixture of materials. Some people use real dirt for this look, but you need to use a magnet to remove all of the motor-clogging iron from the dirt. To remove excess ballast, use a Bright Boy or other rigid eraser to rub the excess away. Use a dental pick or small scraping tool to clear up the areas around turnouts. The last step in cleaning up is to use a combination of very fine sandpaper or emery cloth and a Bright Boy to clean off the spray paint, latex paint and glue to re-establish the electrical conductivity of the tops of the tracks. Pay particular attention to the conducting frogs on turnouts and make sure that the points still conduct power. Also make sure that the ballasting material does not cause a short between the rails. Test the conductivity with an Ohm meter. It should read "open" or "infinity." If the meter shows a value for resistance, there is a problem that must be corrected before continuing. Emery cloth works well on cleaning points. Run a locomotive over the newly ballasted area and declare victory when appropriate.

Good luck and good ballasting. Skip and Ralph

COMING EVENTS

1. **BEDFORD Show, Bedford, PA 8/24 thru 8/26.**
2. **BANTRAK Club Meeting 9/16/07 Site TBA**
3. **Scale Show @ Timonium, 10/13 & 14 Setup @ 3pm 10/12/07**

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