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BANTRAK

Newsletter



N-Scale – Realism in Miniature



NOTICE!
Annual
Dues
Invoice
Enclosed

Table of Contents

Club Feedback	1
Operations Primer	2
Product Review	3
Model	5
Photography	
Meeting Highlights	7

The Engineer's Cab

by Alan DelGaudio, President

Club Feedback

Some of the things I tried to do in the past month plus was to get a sense of what the club wants to do and where it's been. So I asked the previous presidents for the past 10 years, current officers and then the membership. Last month's column was based on some of the comments I've had from the club officers and members. Here's what we have from the questionnaire based on 27 responses. Not every question was answered.

Interest in being:

- ⇒ Part of a show improvement committee? 8Y, 5N, 5Maybe
- ⇒ Raffle layout team? 15Y, 5N, 2M
- ⇒ A team to move club cars? 8Y, 12N
- ⇒ Part of a DCC set up team for shows? 18Y, 3N 1M
- ⇒ A show coordinator? 9Y, 11N, 1M
- ⇒ A field trip committee member? 13Y, 6N
- ⇒ Part of an "action team"? 15Y, 1N, 3M

"Action team" was intentionally loosely defined, but some possibilities are; a group to fix [club] modules, help a member that needs work on their module, be available to do urgent repairs at a show, help with repacking the trailer. Some of these may take minutes to an hour; some may be take several sessions.

Would you like to see more seminars, work sessions, how-tos? 19Y, 2N

What kind?

- ⇒ DCC, Decoder installation 6
- ⇒ Weathering 4
- ⇒ Tune locomotives 3

Our Next Meeting

Our next BANTRAK Club meeting will be held at Alan DelGaudio's home on Sunday, February 15th beginning at **1:30 PM**
Map Enclosed

(Continued on page 8)



RIP TRACK

Operations Primer

By Phil Peters

The most recent issue of *Scale Rails* has a great article on a modular layout that will be at this year's Hartford NMRA convention. It has been planned and built exclusively to give modelers a chance to experience real-time railroad operations following a timetable-train order system. All this in a public setting.

As interests are constantly shifting in our modeling environment, I am noticing more articles and, hopefully, more interest in recreating realistic operations on our layouts. For many modelers the first few times they operate on a layout can be very intimidating. It is easy to get overwhelmed by the operating rules and the numerous maneuvers needed to shift cars around in a town. The car cards/waybills become a big blur. Frustration is not far behind. Here are some suggestions on how to keep your cool when you first start to operate using a car-card system.

For starters, operating layouts usually have a dispatcher or a written set of rules of the road. No train moves without the proper authority. The layout owner will help you get familiar with how the setup works. If you are not sure whether you should be on a stretch of track, call the dispatcher, get permission.

The real fun starts when your train gets to the town to be switched.

KNOW THE CARS IN YOUR TRAIN. Organize your car cards in the order of the cars in your train. Look at the waybills to see to which industry each car is going.

FAMILIARIZE YOURSELF WITH THE TOWN. Look over the town to see where each industry or set out track is. Many layouts have a schematic to help you. Now you can see where the cars in your consist are to end up.

LEARN WHICH CARS ARE TO BE PULLED FROM THE INDUSTRIES. Read the waybills in the car card boxes to see which cars stay in the town and which ones are leaving; these are the ones whose waybills show a different consignee or different town.

PLAN YOUR MOVES. Decide where you are going to start, where you will put outbound cars, and what order you can move in your setouts. If the yardmaster blocked your train, you're in luck. If not, you may want to start with that.

PULL THE DEPARTING CARS FIRST. You can't work without clear track. While there will be some instances where this rule should be ignored, it is a good starting point. Make sure you have a small yard or get permission to use the main to set over these cars while you do your work. At one time or another most of us have realized too late that we have fouled the main and have caused an accident (Heaven forbid!) or have a very angry dispatcher yelling in our headset. Remember to set aside these car cards/waybills; they will go back with you to the yard.

SET OUT THE INCOMING CARS. Moving out the departures has familiarized you with the track arrangement. Notice that you may have 3 cars for an industry but only one or two spots for the inbound. Decide where you will set over the extra car(s). Also, you may be able to move only one car in at a time due to short siding. Or an idler car may be needed on a wooden coal dock. If a blue flag needs to be moved, get permission from the dispatcher.

PUT YOUR TRAIN TOGETHER. This usually means reversing the caboose and loco so you can return to the yard since most trains don't operate in a circle. This is an obvious rule, but it is sometimes forgotten. Don't ask how I know. Organize your car cards in train order. Make sure the cars in your train are supposed to go back; once in a while that car in the middle of train was meant to stay at the industry, oh joy! If the railroad has limits on how many cars your locos can pull, make sure you don't exceed them.

CALL FOR PERMISSION TO RETURN. When you get back to the yard and turn your train over to the yardmaster, give him the car cards and report that your run has been completed.

If you haven't operated on a layout before, I hope these suggestions will make your first time a fun experience.

BANTRAK Organization

Mark Bandy	President	(410) 750-2262
Tim Nixon	Treasurer	(410) 757-5045
Al Palewicz	Membership	(410) 426-0339



Product Review—Radical Flats Buildings by



A week or so before Christmas, one of our members (I believe it was Martin Myers), tipped the membership off to a new product that creates background buildings for layouts. The product is called “Radical Flats Buildings” and they are manufactured by King Mill Enterprises, LLC. Since I had been searching for easy to produce background buildings for my home layout I was naturally attracted by this. I accessed their web site (www.kingmill.com) and after reviewing the material and looking at the photographs, I decided to purchase a set. I was very pleased with what I received.

These buildings come printed on heavy stock paper and they represent scale photographs of actual commercial structures. They come in two formats; buildings that are designed to be placed directly on skyboards and others that I call “foreground” buildings that set out in front of these skyboards to add depth. I have included a number of photographs that illustrate these two types.

Creating these buildings is relatively simple requiring just a few common tools and your choice of mounting material.

1) First the tools:

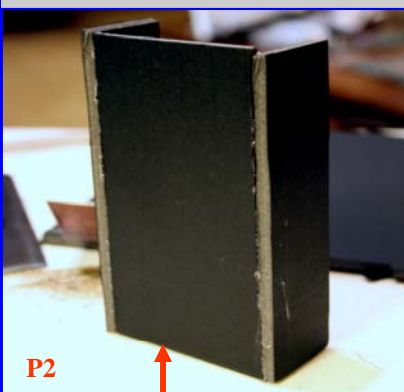
Small scissors, metal straight edge, a razor knife with a few additional blades, a sharp pencil, a cutting mat, rubber cement with a “throw away” brush, and craft glue (I use Beacon’s 3 in 1 Craft Glue, but any clear drying craft glue will work)

2) **Secondly, the mounting material.** This is really a personal choice since any number of solutions are available. The instructions mention black foam board, self-adhesive foam board, wood, styrene, etc. I initially used the black foam board and cardboard stock since it was easy to cut and worked well with both rubber cement and craft glue.

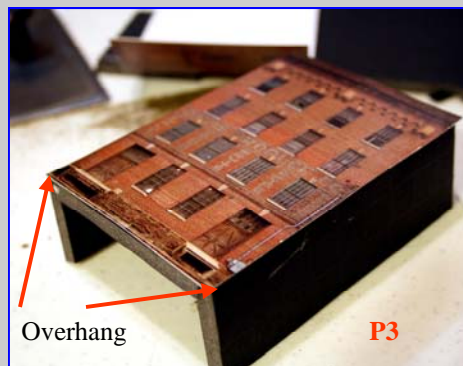
Construction Steps and Hints

FLAT BUILDINGS—First, cut out your initial building using your metal straight edge and razor knife. I started with the buildings designed to go flush against the skyboard. If you stop there you have a fine background building in a couple of minutes. (I deviated from the instructions by applying black foam board to these “flat” buildings to give them a little depth) Next I took a little Polly S paint (Tuscan) and lightly painted the edge of the cutout in order to blend it in with the brick building color. You would be amazed how an unpainted white edge stands out, and I have included some examples in the accompanying photos. (**Hint: Do the edge painting before you mount the cutout otherwise you may get paint on the building face**). These photos are so good that if you are careful you can mix and match them rather than keep them together as they originally come.

FOREGROUND BUILDINGS—The foreground buildings are designed to “stick out” and have ends making them three-sided buildings. Building these is a little trickier since you have to allow for the “overhang” on the building corners. Some of the buildings come with fold over corners while others require you to cut them out separately. The latter example is illustrated in **P3**. Regardless, you still have to allow for the overhang. After the



Initial Frame made of foam board



Overhang

P3

rubber cement is dry, you can add a few details to these foreground buildings to make them look more realistic, such as, roofs and roof details, loading docks, additional signs, etc. (**Hint: if you are going to add a roof be sure to cut your building frame (see P2) a little short at the top to allow for the thickness of the roof material. You may also consider adding a base to your building for more stability**)

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued from page 3)

Finally, you may decide to permanently affix your “flat” buildings to your skyboard, or (I have not tried this yet) you may affix a very small piece of Velcro to the skyboard and building so that you can shift them around as your scenery and taste change.

In conclusion, I believe that this product provides realistic backdrop buildings that will enhance any city/industrial setting and is well worth the money. I am so pleased with this product that I purchased an additional set which will enable me to mix and match these buildings in additional configurations.



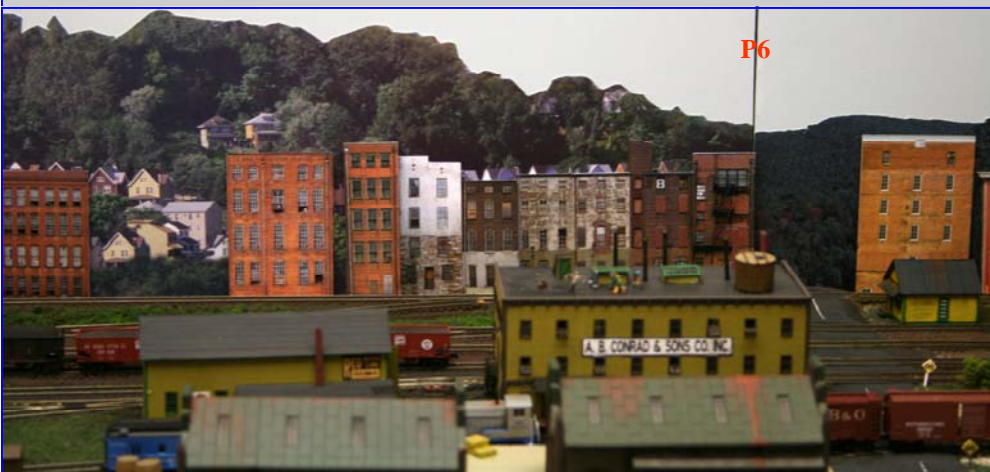
P4

A foreground building with folding sides



P5

Here is a series of “flat” buildings that I have backed with foam board for depth



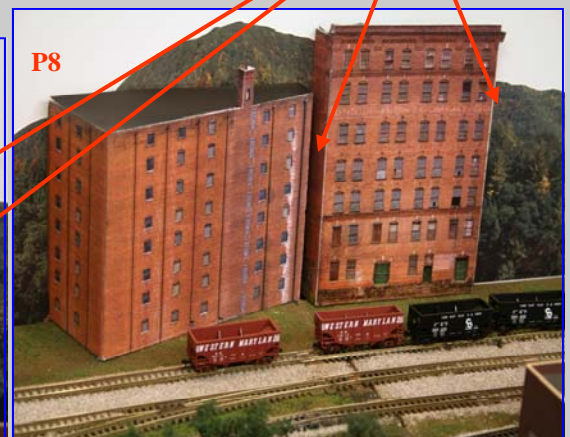
P6

Another view

The buildings in **P7** and **P8** show what happens when you do not color the edges of the cutout. See how the white sticks out!



P7



P8

Just as an aside, the buildings in these photos are leaning up against the skyboards and have not as yet been permanently affixed so they look a little crooked



Model Photography for the Masses

By Ed Kapuscinski

I've done a bunch of model photography over the years. Some of it has been quite basic and turned out poorly, other shots have come out beautifully. A lot of it depends on the subject material, but these techniques should yield you some decent results, or at least a place to get started. For these photos, I'm using my wife's (and she wondered why I was all for getting her a new one for Christmas) camera. It's a Canon Powershot A520, and I paid less than \$200 for it.

The first thing to do is setup the tripod. This is a luxury that I sometimes provide myself. If I don't have a tripod handy, I often just use the modules themselves. This is one nice thing about NTRAK modules, that 8" wide swath of track. I try to set the tripod up as close as possible to the layout, and lower the thing down so the barrel of the lens gets as low to the scenery as possible. This is one of the most important steps. Next I boot the camera and move to Aperture priority mode. Open the settings menus and set the ISO as low as possible. I lucked out, this puppy does 50. No grain for me! This is also where I set the camera "drive mode" to a timed exposure.

This lets me get my hands off the camera before the shutter pops, keeping camera "shake" to a minimum. My old camera only supported a ten second delay, which was a pain in the butt, but the new one does 2 seconds, which I've found to be pretty ideal. Don't forget to turn the flash off too. Single point P&S camera flashes are not suited for decent photography. Real studio lighting would be a real luxury, but let's face it, even if I did spend the

This photo was taken on Philadelphia NTRAK's Morrisville Yard modules, which are one of my favorites for shooting NTRAK photos on. This was taken in TERRIBLE lighting, and was a nice long exposure from a tripod set off the front of the layout. Notice how the long exposure gave the photo a good depth of field, with both the locomotive and caboose in focus.



money for it, hauling it to a train show would be a real pain. I've worked on photo shoots before, and the amount of work in simply transporting and setting the equipment up is not "fun". Set the Camera's aperture as small as possible (that means as large of a number as possible). The Canon goes to F8.0, I wish it could go higher (smaller), but that's all I get. It actually gives me decent results, so I won't complain too much. Also check the camera's ISO

This photo was taken at the Chantilly NTRAK convention, and while it's somewhat blurry, it again demonstrates the benefits of a long exposure



equivalent setting. If possible, turn the ISO as low as possible. This will help reduce the amount of



Conrail GP40-2 leans into a curve on my "door" layout.

(Continued on page 6)

(Continued from page 5)

"grain" or color noise in the final photograph.

Then I turn on the Macro Focus mode, this performs some internal software trickery to allow the camera to focus closer than it normally would. This is imperative for keeping foreground items in some semblance of focus. I start framing the shot, making sure that



This photograph was taken on BANTRAK's yard modules. Yards are a great location to shoot photos in NTRAK layouts, since the open expanse of track will often yield a great place to set your camera while it takes a nice long exposure.

everything is on the track & coupled up don't miss the obvious!!) and letting the camera figure out how long the exposure should be. I expose a shot and look at the image noting the shutter speed. This exposure is really simply for metering, and figuring out where to go next, once the camera is set on "manual". In manual mode, I have full control over the camera's aperture, exposure length, ISO, etc. This allows me to adjust the brightness of the photograph by adjusting the exposure. This varies greatly depending on the ambient light where you are shooting. Start by setting the exposure to the same time as the one the camera decided on above.

This is generally where you will start getting decent images, so you're going to want to be mindful of the focus. I usually shoot things in auto focus, which many people will claim is a big mistake, however with the, essentially, point and shoot digitals that I've used, the tools available to focus the camera won't permit you to do a better job than the camera itself can do.

The trick here is getting the camera to focus on the same plane as the subject of the photograph. There are two camera features that are invaluable here. The first is the "focus" boxes in the display. On my Canon, these are green boxes that appear on the LCD display showing me where the camera is focusing. I want these boxes to be on front of the subject. The camera is surprisingly good at figuring out what I'm shooting at, but occasionally I need to give it a little help. This can be done in a number of ways, including sticking your finger into the shot when you're pressing the shutter button down half way (and remembering to hold it down until you've taken the photo), panning the camera until it finds something at the same distance that you're shooting for, and then panning it back (keeping that shutter button half way down). My Fuji likes to only focus on the center of the viewfinder. That's fine for me, since I simply aim the center of the viewfinder at the point I'd like the focus, depress the shutter button halfway, and recompose the shot. Again, a finger in the frame at the same distance from the camera is also useful here.

The second useful feature of the camera when it comes to focusing, and this is one way in which film photography cannot come close to competing with digital photography, is the ability to immediately preview and zoom in on your images. All of my cameras allow me to review an image as soon as its been captured, and, more importantly, let me zoom in on the photograph. While things may look fine when seeing the whole image on the LCD display, good focus can only really be ascertained by zooming in on the image to check it. I have often been lazy about checking images this way, only to be disappointed when I went to edit them and found out that they were too blurry to use. Don't be lazy here.

Once I've gotten focusing figured out, I move on to bracketing exposures. I base my initial exposure on the "automatic" one which the camera had previously taken (remember that, all those paragraphs ago?). If this exposure is too light, then I shorten the exposure length, and if it was too dark, I lengthen the exposure. One thing I have learned is that my camera's LCD display frequently makes images appear brighter than they are. Storage space is cheap, shoot a wide range of images, and if you think you have one that's perfect, shoot a few more. While a borderline image can sometimes be saved in Photoshop, the end image quality will be better the less you have to do to it, and you will be nothing but angry if you come away without an image that could've been perfect if you had bracketed it with one more shot.

You should now have some images ready to be downloaded onto a computer. I use an Apple PowerBooks (the 1.5 year old equivalent of a Mac Book Pro) for my image editing and archiving. I'm a big fan of my Apple, but I'm not going to go into the reasons why. Suffice to say it makes moving photos around from camera to archive to Photoshop to web very easy. The important thing is to use a decent image manipulation program. I'm personally a big fan of Photoshop (although not necessarily of Adobe) for this type of

(Continued on page 7)



(Continued from page 6)

work. It's available for both PCs and Macs, but is a large investment if you're only going to be using it for hobby work. There is a free alternative called "The Gimp" that is available. I've never used it (although I keep meaning to try it), but I've heard good things about it.

The things I frequently have to do with Photoshop are to adjust image levels, brightness, contrast, and resize the images to display here, on forums, or wherever. I also keep the original large version that comes from the camera in case I ever want to print them. You're able to do lots of things to an image in Photoshop (make sure to see Phil Brooks's article about adding smoke), but those should really be the subject of another article.

I hope this has helped take some of the mystery out of model photography. I've almost gotten it down to a system now, and I'm very happy that I'm usually able to get pleasing results whenever I pull the camera out. The real secret to that though is practice, which I strongly suggest you do, since digital film is, well, free.

A Local Freight
creeps along the
edge of the farm.



Meeting Highlights

Sunday, January 1/18/09



Al Delgaudio convened the meeting and provided opening remarks concerning the responses to his survey of Club members conducted by e-mail. Of all of the questions asked, the one that received the most positive response was the one that suggested having seminars on modeling during our meetings. Having back up teams with knowledge in DCC ops set up, and providing articles for the newsletter (+14 respondents) drew the second and third most favorable responses. The question about participating in more or less shows was split 50/50.

Al also commented on the need to repair and refurbish our Club modules. Some are in need of new track while most have dings and scrapes that need to be repaired. Just about all of them are in need of a good cleaning. (this includes some of our personal modules as well). The backs of the skyboards and the nodule framing could use a good coat of black paint, too. In line with this, Al suggested that we concentrate on repairing the Yard struts and legs at the February meeting. Additionally, the Yard Fronts are looking shabby and should be refurbished (this is a "at home" project) as well as designing a few new ones to complete the overall design when all four sections are in use.

Our Treasurer, Tim Nixon, directed that the Annual Dues Invoices be mailed out with the February Newsletter. (*see attachment to the covering e-mail*)

Eric Payne gave a short critique on the December B&O Show. The consensus of opinion of the attending members was that absent a few glitches at the beginning, the layout operation was generally flawless. The setup crew and especially the Day Captains were singled out for commendation. As part of the critique, it was suggested that we start using the head sets again to communicate within the layout area so as to avoid a considerable amount of shouting during crisis times. It was mentioned that we received a \$150 honorarium for our Thursday "night running" along with a nice Certificate of Appreciation from the B&O Museum. Finally, Eric has again volunteered to be the lead coordinator for the 2009 B&O Show (assuming we are asked back) and he will be assisted by Dave Clyde.

The coordinators for the April Scale Show were designated. They are John Darlington, Al Potter and Bob Winterbottom. Participation in this show will be discussed at the upcoming meeting in February

Finally, there was a healthy discussion on the old, but never resolved, question of Running Procedures at various shows. Suggestions were made and discarded. Will this matter ever be settled?

(Continued from page 1)

- ⇒ Tune rolling stock 3
- ⇒ Scenery 3
- ⇒ Track work/building model RR 3

Are you interested in BANTRAK doing more shows? 10Y, 9N

What kind? 5 smaller, 2 said Greenberg

Field trips were suggested: Cass, Western Maryland Rwy, Harrisburg, Rockville Bridge, Strasbourg, Layout tours, Rail fanning, and Tour operations. We have an opportunity in the show this weekend, and the meeting 2 weeks later to talk among ourselves as far as field trips. Maybe we can get a couple of groups together to look into trips great and small [Cass being on the big scale, layout tours perhaps easier and closer to home]

For show improvements, the comments were;

- ⇒ Everyone should help set up and tear down, get modules in on time
- ⇒ Do a better job of setting up the lift bridge
- ⇒ Run multiple trains and operations on blue line, try opposite directions
- ⇒ Fix and clean modules, trainsets before the show
- ⇒ Stricter adherence to run policy
- ⇒ Have a module with speed indicators

Find a way to make this more interesting for children, maybe a section they could run on.

In talking with a number of you at the B&O show and trips to local hobby shops, a few had suggested a new yard as a long-term club project. It would be great to form a team to look into this. Several factors need to be considered; size, ease of transport, DCC/DC friendly, build and test it in stages, etc. Here's an idea, which is only thrown out as a "starter"; maybe we rebuild the throats and modify the yard so that the 5 blue lines become red/orange and we could use what are the two lines presently at the back to become "orange" for One track.-essentially flipping the yard.

Speaking of the yard, at our last meeting we formed action teams to rebuild the yard fronts. It had been suggested that we keep a common "look". This has worked well on the 1-Track scenery and for our skyboards. A comment was made to have a lower profile of scenery on the yard fronts to make it easier to set up trains and for the crowd to see the action.

As an action item, I was asked to dig out the section from the 1T guidelines as far as scenery is concerned, so here it is:

- Era – The default era is present day. Scenery should be "era neutral" if possible, with signs and billboards appropriate to a wide timeframe and vehicles being removable, to allow maximum flexibility in layout design and

COMING EVENTS

- ⇒ **Bantrak Meeting @ Al DelGaudio's in Ellicott City— February 15th**
- ⇒ **Bantrak Meeting @ Bob Mohr's in Perry Hall—March 15th**
- ⇒ **April Scale Show @ Timonium— April 4th and 5th (Setup Noon 4/3)**

The BANTRAK Newsletter is the official publication of the Baltimore Area N-Trak Club.

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BANTRAK Newsletter

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operation.

- Scenery Colors – Foliage and ground cover colors should reflect a "late summer" (August/September) timeframe, featuring colors like light green, yellow grass, burnt grass (Woodland Scenics), and late summer (Scenic Express). Dark and bright green should be avoided, except in specialized areas. Snow is prohibited. The majority of trees should still be green, but a smaller percentage may have changed to fall colors (yellow, red, orange, or brown) to simulate "stressed" trees or early changers.

We can discuss this at Timonium and the February meeting, but the goal is to have the yard fronts ready for the April 4 show.

Next to last thought - please consider persons that we can recognize for their contributions throughout all of 2008.

The next meeting is Sunday Feb 15 at my house. Doors open at 1:30, the meeting will start at 2. I do not have to catch a flight to California, so I expect a more relaxed pace to the schedule. I do hope to work with a few members so we can have a club DCC seminar/how to session.