Garden Railroading News

August 2025 thru May 2026 • 2026 #1 • www.GRNews.org



MOW Toolbox Box Car

Club Corner: Club-Operated Public Permanent Displays

David Peerbolte's Dutch Valley Railway

A Family Heritage Railroad

A free digital magazine produced by garden railroaders for garden railroaders

Garden Railroading News

August 2025 thru May 2026 • 2026 #1 • GRNews.org

The last issue for this editor; Stay tuned to GRNews social media for more to come.

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Cover Photo: An Accucraft coal-burning K-27 takes a curve on raised track through a garden. • Proprietor Jeff Campbell/Photographer Carla Brand Breitner



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Seen On the Tracks



Photo by Carla Brand Breitner

Above: *Bobby & Rochelle Hahn's Rocky Point Railroad is set in Gold Rush days in California. Mining activities dot the rocky hillside. Succulents and regularly pruned jade plants join boxwood trees to create a miniature drought-resistant landscape.* • Ventura, California

Below: *A fisherman hopes he can reel in his catch before a nearby bear turns and notices. Next step will be getting off the train bridge before the next freight comes by on the Hahn's Rocky Point Railroad.* • Ventura, California



Photo by Carla Brand Breitner



MAY WE SUGGEST...
Something New

A Note from Your Editor about the last Five Years

It has been a great adventure assembling the magazine, *Garden Railroading News*, as a replacement for the deeply missed *Garden Railways* magazine. Since fall of 2020, I have enjoyed sharing the knowledge and activities of an ever-expanding group of garden railroaders. However, I have reached a point where my days seem shorter and I do not have the hours to continue editing a magazine. This issue will be my last, but *GR News* will remain on the internet.

The GRNews.org website will continue with archive access to all past editions of the magazine, notice of upcoming events under the new "Events" tab, the club directory, and vendor listing. Thanks to Bill Derville's work, there will be an index to all past articles coming soon to help you find specific helpful information quickly. Social media channels on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube remain active thanks to the work of Mick Spilsbury. Please send him video and photos of your railroads at Marketing@GRNews.org.

Ken Brody is working out a simpler newsletter format to share articles sourced from club newsletters. Please keep sending your club's newsletter to Editor@GRNews.org, so *GR News* can continue to feature your club's articles and stories in its new revised format.

My thanks to Bill and Mick for their hard work, to Ken Brody and Gary Woolard for great proofreading, to all the club newsletter editors who shared their members stories, and to those of you who sent in a stream of original articles about your garden railroading. Special thanks go out to our advertisers who made the finances of website and social media production possible, and thanks to our treasurer Steve Cogswell for making sure the bills got paid.

Garden railroads have been a passion for me ever since Gary and I visited our first Train Show at the Queen Mary. I have enjoyed the opportunity to photograph garden railroads since my sister bought a train set at San-Val and we discovered the Southern California Garden Railway Society and Santa Clarita Garden Railroad Club. I look forward to getting away from the computer and back in the field with a camera.

I hope you have enjoyed *GR News*, the magazine, and will continue to enjoy garden railroading in the future.

Accucraft Offers an Australian Baldwin Locomotive and Prepares to Ship Live Steam "Consolidations"







Live steam "Puffing Billy" 2-6-2T locomotives are now available from Accucraft. In 1898, a pair of 2'6" gauge 2-6-2 Baldwins found their way to Victoria in Australia to serve the remote farming and forestry communities. By 1915 seventeen were in service. They were classified as the 'NA' class, meaning Narrow Gauge A class. Six of the NA class have survived and are preserved on the 'Puffing Billy Railway' east of Melbourne.

Accucraft is now shipping the 1:20.3 D&RGW C-18 "Consolidation" locomotive powered by live steam, coal-fired live steam, or an electric version with Blunami control and sound. The Baldwin C-18 class were built starting in the 1890s. Of the C-18s made by Baldwin, D&RGW #315 and #318 are only ones to survive to today. Both were originally built for the Florence & Cripple Creek Railroad in 1895 as #3 and 1896 as #8. #315 was retired in 1949, restored in 2007, and has operated on both the Durango and Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad and the Cumbres and Toltec Scenic Railroad. The D&RGW #318 operated under steam until 1982 and is now on static display at the Colorado Railroad Museum.



D&RGW C-18 2-8-0,
Coal Fired Live Steam

D&RGW C-18 2-8-0,
Electric w/ Blunami Sound





FLorence & Cripple Creek #3
2-8-0, Live Steam

ET&WNC #4
2-8-0, Live Steam



Accucraft's live steam Florence & Cripple Creek #3 "Elkton" and East Tennessee & West North Carolina #4, based on drawings by David Fletcher, are expected to ship in June of 2026. Coal-fired live steam "Elkton" or #4 will be available by special order.

Further information at: livesteamstation.com

LGB Offers a Powered Railcar from the German State Railroad Era between 1949 and 1989.

This railcar has been restored to run occasional specials on the Harz Narrow Gauge Railways (HSB). It was one of three four-axle diesel-powered rail cars ordered from Wismar Powered Rail Car and Car Builder, Inc. by the Nordhausen-Wernigerode Railroad Company (NWE), a narrow-gauge railroad serving the Harz mountains of Germany. The first unit, ordered in 1932 to add to NWE passenger service, had a 400-horsepower MAN diesel motor and was placed into service as T1 with a red paint scheme. The NWE ordered two more powered rail cars of this type that were added to their route network in 1935 as road numbers T2 and T3. These new additions had a somewhat different superstructure of a baggage area in place of a passenger area and were equipped with a 520-horsepower motor to haul heavier loads.



L26391 DR Class VT 137 Powered Railcar

After the founding of the GDR in 1949, the NWE was integrated in the newly established German State Railroad (DR). The powered railcars were reclassified in the numbering plan valid on the DR and were repainted in beige/red, which was the paint scheme valid for diesel powered rail cars on the German State Railroad. The LGB model reproduces the former NWE T3 that continued on the DR as VT 137 566. This powered rail car was used on the DR as a route maintenance vehicle as well as a freight hauling powered rail car.

This finely detailed model features four wheelsets driven by two powerful motors. The locomotive has an mfx/DCC decoder with many light and sound functions, including cab and interior lighting. Buffer capacitor to prevent light flickering and sound dropout from dirty track sections included.

More information at: LGB.com or
email customerservice@marklin.com

Large Scale Train Shows & Events

Make plans to attend a train show, view layout tours and visit railroads of all scales on display. Check out the new "Events" tab on the Garden Railroading News website for future notifications. GRNews.org/events

The **Great Lakes Large Scale Train Expo** (formerly the North East Ohio Large Scale Train Show) will be in **Girard, Ohio** on **May 15 and 16, 2026**; info at: www.greatlakestrainexpo.com

2026 Northern Colorado Garden Railroaders Garden Railroad Tours showcases six layouts **between Fort Collins and Boulder** on **June 6, 2026**. Information at: ncgr.net

2026 MO-KAN Garden Railroaders Layout Tours offer five layouts to the **west of Kansas City** on **June 6** and five layouts to the **east** on **June 7, 2026**. Information at: mokangardenrailroaders.org

2026 Miami Valley Garden Railway Society Layout Tours offer four layouts to the **Springfield, Ohio** on **June 6** and **June 7, 2026**. Information at: grnews.org/events

2026 Rose City Garden Railroad Society Garden Railroad Tours offer thirteen layouts around **Portland, Oregon** on **Saturday, June 20, 2026**. Information at: rcgrs.com

The **2026 Big Train Operator Club Convention** will be held **July 19 through 24, 2026** in **Wilkes Barre/Scranton, Pennsylvania**. Details at: bigtrainoperator.com

The **2026 National Steamup Symposium**, a gathering of live steamers, will be held **October 7 through 11, 2026** in **Lodi, California**. Details at: www.steam-events.org

The Nashville Garden Railroaders have set dates for the **2027 National Garden Railway Convention**. Plans are being made for activities from **Memorial Day, May 31 to June 5, 2027**. More details to come under Upcoming Events at: nashvillegardenrailroaders.com

Go to **TrainShow.com** for information on all-scale train shows coming to your area throughout the year.

Great Train Show
8/22 &23 Belleville IL
10/3 & 4 Del Mar CA
10/10 & 11 Shakopee MN
10/24 & 25 Waterford MI

Greenberg's Train & Toy Show
7/18 & 19 Oaks PA
7/25 & 26 Monroeville PA
8/8 & 9 Edison NJ
10/17 & 18 Fredericksburg VA

Great Midwest Train Show
6/7 Wheaton IL
8/2 Wheaton IL
9/13 Wheaton IL
10/4 Wheaton IL

Minimizing Maintenance Tip #3 by Mick Spilsbury

Sunscreen for Structures & Train Cars

Strong sunlight is bad for buildings and cars. Colors fade. Worse still, painted surfaces crack and deteriorate.

If you like a weathered look, fading colors and cracked paint, the sun is your friend. If you don't, buildings and cars need to be restored every couple of years. I don't like the weathered look, so restoring buildings and cars was an every winter task, until I gave them a sunscreen in the summer.

Sunscreen for buildings is shade cloth with strips of wood at top and bottom. (above right) Sunscreen for cars are 'tent tunnels' that fit over cars on the tracks. (below right)

Both are easy to put on and take off.





Split Jaw Products Improves Durability on Insulated Rail Clamps and Expansion Track Sections

Split Jaw Products upgraded their Code 332 Insulating Rail Clamps with a better, higher strength insulating material, solid ASA polymer. ASA (Acrylonitrile Styrene Acrylate) is a high-performance 3D printing filament, often considered a superior, UV-resistant alternative to ABS. It is ideal for durable outdoor applications, offering high temperature resistance, excellent weatherability, and high strength. Split Jaw offers them in brass or stainless steel to join LGB, Aristo-Craft, USA Trains, PIKO, Split Jaw, or Accucraft track. Upon demand, Split Jaw will also make an insulated rail clamp for Code 250 rail using stainless steel or brass. Please contact them for more information.

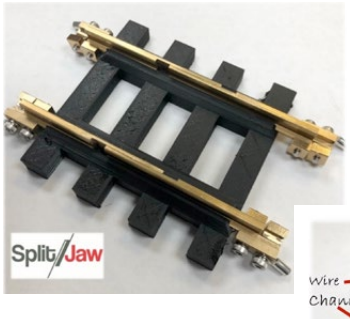


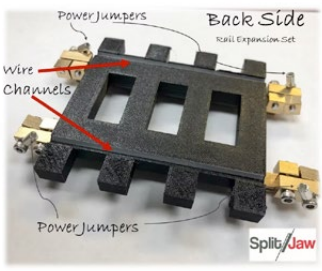


Split Jaw Insulating Clamps attach directly to the rail, providing the best physical connection to electrically isolate a track section. The design adds extra material to insure the rail is electrically isolated. The long jaw is machined ASA polymer and the two short jaws are metal, providing a better grip than an all-plastic clamp.

To power an isolated siding, simply connect a jumper wire between the two screws. You can join different brands of track without the loss of gripping force. These clamps can be used to join modular rail sections. Washers protect the long piece from excess torque.

Rail expansion sets also now use the same more durable ASA polymer, rated for outdoor use. Expansion sets are available in Code 332 Brass, Code 332 Stainless and Code 250 Nickel Silver. Each expansion set comes with a 4" tie section with expandable, sliding rails spanning 5–5½". Set includes 4 Split Jaw connectors and free crimp connectors for track-powered layouts.





More information at: splitjawproducts.com or railclamp.com

The Bay Area Garden Railway Society has lost two exceptional garden railroaders this year. They will both be greatly missed.

Rob Lenicheck 1951–2026

Rob Lenicheck, a master modeler and 1:20.3 live steam enthusiast, passed away on May 7, 2026, due to injuries suffered when he was hit by a car while cycling. Rob scratch built multiple live steam engines, including the coal-powered Uintah Mallet featured as Loco of the Edition in the 2023 #1 issue of *Garden Railroading News*. His passion for live steam started over twenty years ago. Through the years, he has taught numerous observers the joys of live steam, surprised watchers as he fed his locomotives tiny lumps of Welsh coal, and inspired new live steamers wherever he ran his trains.



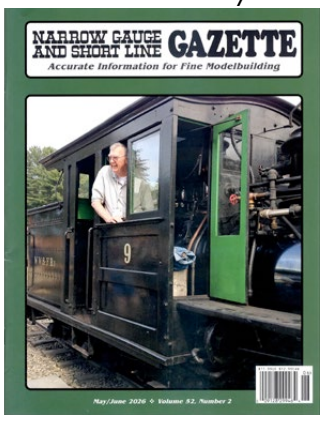
Rob was the Live Steam Coordinator for the Bay Area Garden Railway Society, a winner of the Ron Brown Memorial Award for live steam enthusiasm at the National Steamup Symposium, and an inspiration to all in the live steam community.



Rob was also a talented musician and a friend to many. Our condolences go out to his wife, Lucinda, and son Peter... and to all the railroading and music friends he leaves behind.

Robert (Bob) W. Brown 1933–2026

Bob Brown, creator and editor of the *Narrow Gauge and Shortline Gazette*, passed away January 31st, just a few weeks past his 93d birthday. The *Gazette* focuses mainly on modelling unusual prototypes in the smaller scales, but has often run articles on "G" and "F" scale modelling as well. Robert (Bob) W. Brown discovered model railroading in the 1940s. He began to concentrate on finescale narrow gauge railroad modeling, starting *Finelines*, a magazine about ¼" narrow gauge models, in 1964 and publishing the first issue of *Narrow Gauge and Short Line Gazette* in 1975. Bob continued to edit *NG&SLG* after it was acquired by White River Productions in 2017 and had planned to pass the wheel to the new editor, Chris Lane, with the May/June 2026 issue.



Bob's exquisitely detailed 0n30 layout, the Tuolumne Forks Logging and Mining Railroad, was well documented and enjoyed by visitors to his open houses. What isn't as well known is that Bob enjoyed garden railroading as well, and had a layout in his side yard. He began that layout as a generic "G Scale", but decided later to focus on 7/8's modelling. His legacy will live on in *Narrow Gauge and Short Line Gazette*.



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Available for Order Soon: White River Productions' Garden Trains Annual for 2026

The 2026 Garden Trains Annual for 2026 is in final production at White River Productions. The listing will soon be up for pre-order. This 116-page 6th Annual is full of informative layout tours, how-tos, tips, and more. Just a few articles are listed below:

- Build an Outdoor Electronically-Controlled Turntable
- Next Gen Control: LCC Wi-Fi Decoders
- Design Your Layout Using AI
- Coal Loads for Better RC Performance
- Dead Rail Install in Piko Loco
- WM No. 4 build from a Bachmann Shay

& Much, Much More!

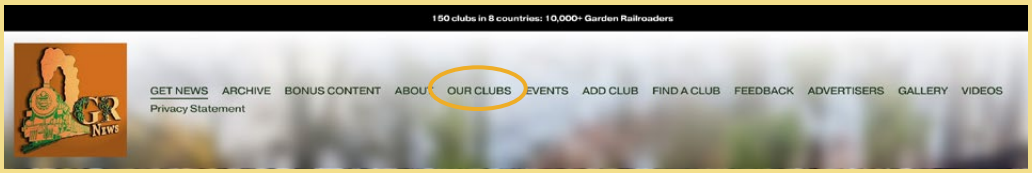
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150 Garden Railway/G-Scale Clubs are *Garden Railroading News* affiliates.
GR News can help you find a club to join or check to see your club on the list.
Go to www.GRNews.org and click on the tab "OUR CLUBS."



There you will find our affiliated clubs organized by country/state with main city location.

On a Newsletter Format for *GR News*

GR News is planning a simpler newsletter format to share how-to and layout articles sourced from club newsletters. It will be useful for hobbyists designing their layouts, building their equipment, and upgrading their trains. Ken Brody will be taking over the responsibility of putting together these quarterly *GRNews* newsletters.

Please keep sending your club's newsletter to Editor@GRNews.org, so *GR News* can continue to feature your club's articles and stories in its new revised format.

Clubs are a mainstay of garden railroading and provide opportunities to share ideas and run trains with other entusiasts.

Since we do not plan to include regular advertising going forward, it's time for a special thank you to our advertisers for their support that enabled us to continue to publish a magazine for five years, build and maintain the website GRNews.org, participate in national conventions in their vendor halls, and promote garden railroading. We were pleased we could inform readers about their products and services, which was one of the reasons we started this magazine. Without our vendors, this hobby would eventually die out.

GR News continues to support garden railroading on our social media. Look for the revised newsletter coming soon.

Updating our North American Regional Advisors

To help us get perspectives across the USA & Canada, GR News recruited volunteers to be Regional Advisors for six time-zone-oriented regions. Regional Advisors gather and share events and feedback from the clubs in their regions. The map below shows the 5 North American regions. Overseas clubs are our 6th region. Our thanks for their work. We welcome Bill Derville of Rose City GRS and Chip Danneker of Florida GRS and would like to thank past advisors Ted Yarbrough and Sue Elliott for their helpful ideas.

If you wish to contact your region's Regional Advisor, marketing@GRNews.org or editor@GRNews.org will put you in touch.



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BACHMANN QUALITY SINCE 1833

Dutch Valley Railway

By David Peerbolte
Warrensburg, Missouri
Photos by David Peerbolte
unless otherwise noted

Destiny

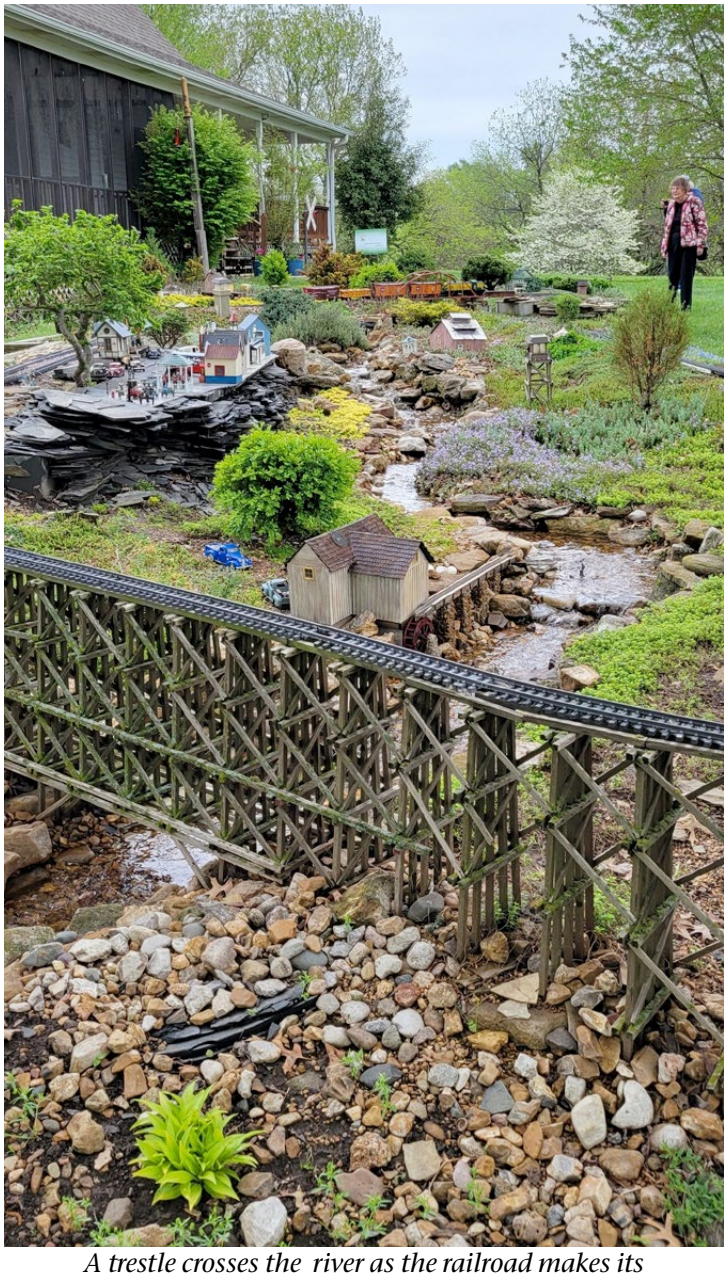
In 1971, while working a summer job delivering milk house to house, a customer inquired if I was related to Peter Peerbolte and if I had seen the latest issue of *Model Railroader Magazine*. He was holding the August edition, which featured a one-page illustration of a vibrant wood-sheathed Peerbolte onion reefer. I responded, "That's my grandfather." My father had often shared stories about how, in the 1920s, they loaded and shipped onion sets from South Holland, Illinois, to cities across the nation. The seed was planted in my mind as I realized the need to create a railroad model of my family's hometown.

As a young boy, I often spent Sunday afternoons setting up and operating my older brother's Lionel train set on the bedroom floor. This bedroom was located in the far southern suburbs of Chicago, where the Illinois Central, Grand Trunk, Chicago & Eastern Illinois, and numerous other railroads entered the city from the south. I frequently observed the Illinois Central trains on their elevated tracks from the backyard, or watched the Chicago & Eastern Illinois from the family car along Illinois Route 1, where diesel locomotives and a few steam engines seemed to race us south to Grandfather's farm in Kankakee. Trains were an integral part of life, with intersecting tracks and roads creating long waits in the family car, or, for me, exciting opportunities to watch the parade of trains and count the rolling stock.

The demands of college and a transient lifestyle limited me to collecting Peerbolte reefers in both HO and N scales. Eventually, I constructed a small N scale layout on a hollow core door. Two decades later, while visiting a friend out of state, he presented me with a G-Scale Peerbolte reefer and inquired about any connection between the car, the name, and myself.

On the journey home, my wife suggested that I should model a train of that size. Given my love for the outdoors, gardening, and trains, along with the influence of my family, her words sparked the beginning of my planning.

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A trestle crosses the river as the railroad makes its way to the town on a retaining wall cliff .



Both steam and diesel locomotives pull Peerbolte Onion freight cars to market.



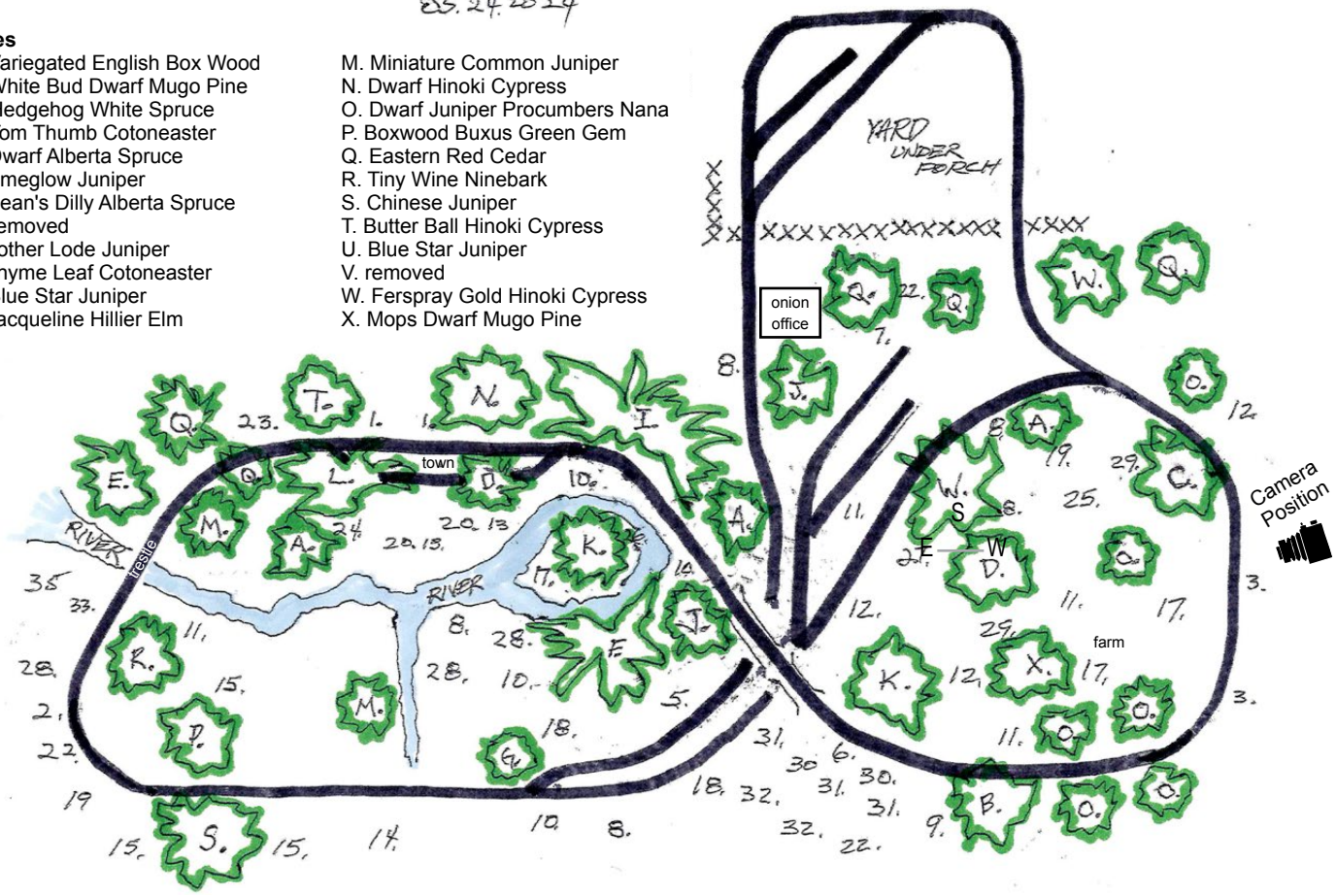
The Dutch Valley Railroad during an April 2025 open house. Plantings can be tracked in diagram below.

Plants

1. Two-row Stonecrop
2. removed
3. Speedwell
4. Angelina sedum
5. Rupturewort
6. Hens and chicks
7. Archer's gold
8. Goldmoss stonecrop
9. Jenny's Stonecrop
10. Tricolor sedum
11. Wooly thyme
12. Elfin thyme
13. Goldilocks – Creeping Jenny
14. Snow in the summer
15. Transparent yellow
16. Cathfly
17. Thyme
18. Pacific Sedum
19. Silver mound
20. Fuldaglut Stonecrop Sedum
21. Grace ward lithodora
22. Gold lemon thyme
23. Ginko craig hosta
24. Ajuga
25. Paprika Yarrow
26. removed
27. Minus Thyme
28. Red Creeping Thyme
29. Golden Stonecrop Sedum
30. Sunsparkler Lime Twister Stonecrop Sedum
31. Coral Carpet Sedum
32. Aurea Golden Stonecrop Sedum
33. Munchkin Fire Hosta
34. removed
35. Blue Mouse Ears Hosta

Trees

A. Variegated English Box Wood
B. White Bud Dwarf Mugo Pine
C. Hedgehog White Spruce
D. Tom Thumb Cotoneaster
E. Dwarf Alberta Spruce
F. Limeglow Juniper
G. Jean's Dilly Alberta Spruce
H. removed
I. Mother Lode Juniper
J. Thyme Leaf Cotoneaster
K. Blue Star Juniper
L. Jacqueline Hillier Elm
M. Miniature Common Juniper
N. Dwarf Hinoki Cypress
O. Dwarf Juniper Procumbers Nana
P. Boxwood Buxus Green Gem
Q. Eastern Red Cedar
R. Tiny Wine Ninebark
S. Chinese Juniper
T. Butter Ball Hinoki Cypress
U. Blue Star Juniper
V. removed
W. Ferspray Gold Hinoki Cypress
X. Mops Dwarf Mugo Pine



I started exploring potential sites around our house, focusing on objectives such as storing trains under the porch out of the elements and a continuous loop.

After settling on a name and theme, I crafted the history of the Dutch Valley Railway. This served as an invaluable planning tool, helping me identify industries, buildings, landscapes, and the towns and locations the railway would need to connect with. Essential features included an icing platform, a Peerbolte office (from a family photo), a town with a station, a farm, a theatre, and the under-the-porch storage yard. I loosely focused on the 1920s to 1950s for trains, vehicles, and structures, while also gathering a stockpile of clear heart redwood scraps to begin modeling. Throughout the winter, I dedicated time to sketching, drafting, reading, researching, and collecting Peerbolte and other Midwest-themed reefers, all while employing creative logic with the goals of reducing maintenance, minimizing grade changes, ensuring continuous operation, creating an eight-car siding, maintaining a practical garden size, providing excellent viewing, and most importantly, ensuring fun.

It was crucial for me to incorporate early diesels alongside some steam engines. I have a particular fondness for the appearance of road switchers, round-nosed locomotives, and yard switchers. Years ago, when I was railroading indoors in smaller scales, I modeled trains from photographs, research, and Chicago and Eastern Illinois manifests. My goal then was to create historically accurate models. While I prioritized accuracy, I wanted some flexibility when it came to motive power. An all-steam layout was not the aesthetic I desired, so I included early diesels and road switchers. This blend of steam and diesel allowed me the creative license to pursue my vision without total accuracy. The diverse mix of motive power resulted in a visually varied appearance for trains composed of colorful refrigerated box cars.

The same 1920–50 era transitioned outdoors, but with a significant shift in priorities. Absolute accuracy, once the top priority, was no longer the sole focus. Personal preferences, selective accuracy, and a more flexible time frame were embraced, leading to greater freedom and enhanced enjoyment. As the saying goes, "It's my railroad."

continued on next page



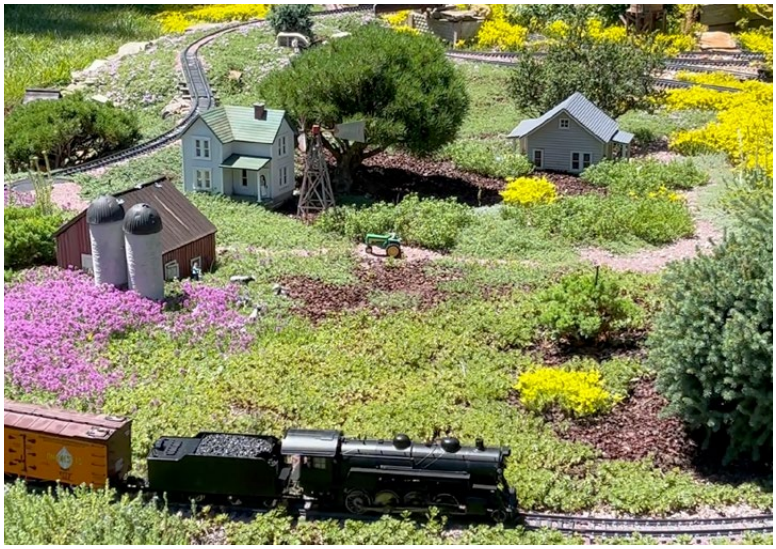
Dutch Valley Growers modeled on a Peerbolte family photo below right from the 1920s.



Buildings flank track to under-porch storage.



1920s Co-Operative Onion Set Growers Association Building.



A coal-powered steam engine passes by the farm.



Onion Set Reefers pulled by an early diesel locomotive pass by town.



Photo by Mick Spilsbury

The appropriately named town of Black Rock sits on a stacked rock cliff above the river.

Originally, the idea was to build a railroad outdoors in pleasant weather and continue with the smaller-scale model indoors during inclement months. However, this plan never materialized. I soon discovered that there is immense enjoyment and the potential for large-scale projects that can be accomplished even in cold, rainy, and scorching hot days. As a result, I am now proud to identify as a garden railroader operating the railway through all four Midwest seasons and to share the experience with friends and grandchildren.

The Fun Begins

That first Spring, I moved outside and began track work under the porch for the storage yard, establishing a crucial track elevation. All other tracks were connected to a modified ladder system, which included conduit runs for track power, accessories, and strategically placed 110-volt outlets throughout the garden for convenience prior to ordering backfill.

Next, a 30-inch-tall wooden retaining wall was constructed (seen supporting the town in photo on page 13), and soil was brought in. On days when the weather did not permit outdoor work, I assembled scratch-built structures and bents in the shop.

continued on next page



Structures around the railroad may start with kits that are then modified, or may be scratchbuilt.



Photo by Mick Spilsbury



Photo by Mick Spilsbury



Photo by Darryl Miller





Photo by Darryl Miller

A girder bridge and a truss bridge cross over lower tracks at the center of the railroad layout.



Photo by Darryl Miller

A hotel and a diner are just across the street from Black Rock Station.





Photo by Darryl Miller

Buildings of all shapes and sizes can be found around the layout.

My experience modeling in small scale and during my theatre career proved invaluable in designing scenery, which is an aspect of the train hobby that I truly enjoy. I created unique scratch-built structures while also purchasing more conventional building types in kit form. All of the Aristo-Craft and PIKO structures I purchased were repainted or modified with additions using Plastruct and Evergreen plastic products; solar lights were added to most. The solar lights create a realistic natural effect as dusk falls, with each light illuminating both inside and outside the various structures at different times.

While the kits are good purchases—sturdy, easy to modify, and providing instant gratification—I find that plastic has an unnatural appearance. I opted to use acrylic theatre paint (used for backdrops and sets), which covers well, adheres to most surfaces, is made of pure pigment, can be blended, and dries quickly. Familiar with this medium and having some on hand, I decided to give it a try. It has proven durable over the years, looks fantastic, and dries to a flat finish.

Although progress was slow, I learned a crucial lesson from my experiences with smaller scale railroads: careful track work is essential for ensuring smooth train operation. A significant

continued on next page

amount of soil was brought in, and I collaborated with a local rock yard to clean up their old site, collecting all the stones they had discarded during their move to a new location. I transported five or six pickup loads of rocks to my new garden. That second spring, I was taken aback by the amount of settling that occurred over the winter as the landscape compacted and settled due to freezing and thawing. Additional soil, along with rocks from my stockpile, was needed in order to bring the soil up to the level of the ladder system. That meant more track ballast, but things were starting to look good.

Rough Water

I envisioned a water feature as a key element to enhance the Midwestern theme of the valley. I designed a scaled river flanked by two shallow lakes, one at each end. It looked okay, but for two years, I struggled with sediment issues and design flaws before hiring a professional to install a pondless system. Today, a large upstream waterfall and a branching stream flow into a meandering river, complete with multiple cascades, before disappearing into a bed of rocks beneath a redwood trestle. This pondless system has been in place for twelve years, requiring zero maintenance, and has become a favorite spot for birds on a hot sunny day.

The river serves as an ideal backdrop for campers, trout fishing, and the nearby Carleton Mill and Grocery. The soothing sound of running water creates a relaxing atmosphere, allowing me to spend time refining structures and scale retaining walls while enjoying the centerpiece of my backyard.

Time and Maintenance

Planting has been a delightful journey. It began with a few ground covers, such as thymes, sedums, and Alberta Spruce, all generously spaced and mulched. Over the years, these ground covers, thymes, and sedums filled in, making them easy to separate and replant repeatedly. I am now tending to the "right of way," trimming trees, and discovering which plants flourish best in my location. Some of them spread naturally, while others, if they found the wrong spot, were moved or discarded. The scale of the plants is crucial, as they should appear natural and proportionate to the surrounding scene. It is enjoyable to create with texture, color, shape, and size using plants and natural materials. Many of the sedums change color with the seasons, some send up shoots, and even thymes of the same variety have slight color and texture differences.

continued on next page



Photo by Mick Spilsbury

Ballast of chicken grit and small rocks hide a ladder system supporting train tracks.



A meandering river wanders down one lobe of the layout to disappear into rocks below a redwood trestle .









Multiple ground covers blanket the landscape.



Miniature quilts created by Toni Peerbolte hang to dry outside the farmhouse next to a Mugo Pine.

Trees have been an absolute joy to learn about. As the original species I planted overgrew for my taste, I removed them and replaced them with different varieties. I'm not afraid to prune and shape the trees as I see fit, keeping detailed records of what works well and what doesn't. Time and maturity have brought numerous benefits to the Dutch Valley Railway.

Twice a growing season, it is necessary to remove thymes and sedums from the right of way in order to run. So, the five-gallon bucket comes out and vegetation is removed and shared with fellow gardeners. One more benefit of garden railroading.

Coco hull mulch has been chosen for its appealing color and scale; it performs well, emits a pleasant aroma for a few days, and effectively suppresses weeds. Chicken and turkey grit, available in various sizes and colors, serves as ballast and gravel for rural roads. Additionally, it is combined with concrete vinyl patch material and spread over Styrofoam and treated plywood to create the road surface in the town of Black Rock.

Originally, the track was powered and controlled using the Aristo-Craft Train Engineer system, which functioned effectively. However, my primary concern was the ongoing task of cleaning the track and the significant amount of time it consumed. Among all the activities in this hobby, track cleaning felt like a chore. It became clear that transitioning to battery power would be an excellent choice for the Dutch Valley. The process began with steam engines, and over the course of a few years, the entire fleet was upgraded with AirWire and Phoenix modules. The enjoyment and operational efficiency increased tenfold with the installation of batteries in the motive power. Each engine now produced a unique sound and had its own address, allowing for multiple train operations at varying speeds on the same track, which was now both feasible and practical. Most importantly, trains could now be running in the garden within minutes, easily completing the garden picture and creating a backdrop to enjoy the Dutch Valley and railroading.

What a fantastic hobby it is—whatever you want it to be. Early on, it was gardening, modeling, and railroading. But soon, the soothing sounds of water cascading over rocks, the purr of diesels and chug of steam joined the mix. Viewing spots with comfortable furniture and a patio for both operation and contemplation were added, followed by a cozy fire pit. The enjoyment seems to have no end.

I often contemplate expanding my track, but I have come to appreciate that my current garden size is ideal for my needs. It fulfills all my desires for this hobby, aligns with my goals, and still offers new adventures on the horizon. Ultimately, the greatest reward from all my efforts is the opportunity to share my passion with fellow garden railroaders, visitors, and friends.

Referenced article about Peerbolte Onion Set reefers was published in Model Railroader Magazine in August, 1971.

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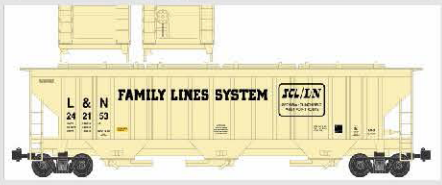
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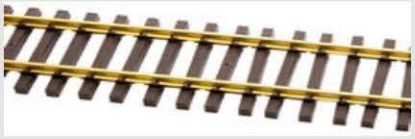






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Club Corner

Curated by Bill Derville, Past President
Rose City Garden Railway Society • Portland, Oregon
Photos by Carla Brand Breitner unless otherwise noted

In my final Club Corner column, I will conclude the topic of clubs building layouts with a discussion of permanent club-owned/managed layouts. I surveyed some permanent club layouts in the second issue of 2023. I discussed building temporary displays such as Christmas displays in garden centers In the last issue of 2023. In the second issue of 2025, I discussed building temporary displays at public venues such as train shows and county fairs. In the third issue of 2025, I discussed building club modular layouts.

Permanent club-operated layouts are normally large, impressive railroads. Most are open to the public and help to promote the hobby. They also provide a layout where members can run the equipment they own when they don't have their own layout. These large layouts are often operated in conjunction with railroad museums, historical depots, city parks, fairgrounds, and botanical gardens. Some I am aware of include the Fairplex Garden Railroad in Pomona California *[GR News 2024-#2]*, the G-Scale railroad in Balboa Park supported by the San Diego Garden Railway Society, the garden railroad at Albuquerque BioPark *[GR News 2021-#6]*, and the G-Scale railroad display in the Colorado Railway Museum *[GR News 2021-#5]*. A few are privately owned, but clubs jump in to help build and run them; the recently dismantled EnterTrainment Junction in the Cincinnati area was an example *[GR News 2023-#4]*.

Another type of G-Scale club-owned layout is situated in retirement communities where residents own and operate a layout, such as the Red Poppy Community Railroad in Sun City Texas *[GR News 2024-#4]* and the Emerald Heights Garden Railroad in Redmond Washington *[GR News 2022-#6]*.

continued



Photos by Denver GRS members



Denver Garden Railway Society installed and operates a crowd-pleasing layout inside the grounds of the Colorado Railroad Museum.



The garden railroad at Albuquerque BioPark is operated by a dedicated park employee and supported by members of the New Mexico Garden Railroaders.



Emerald Heights' Garden Railroad is a project of a club of retirement community residents.

Back issues of Garden Railroading News are available for free to everyone on our website: www.GRNews.org/archive.

Some of these are built and maintained by volunteers that are not actually part of a formal G-Scale club, such as the Fairplex layout, which is owned and operated by the fairground's Programming Department.

Clubs wishing to build a club layout must find a permanent location that is either owned by the club, or in a public facility where the owners will grant them space with the expectation that the club will maintain the layout and periodically operate it when the facility is open to the public.

Once a club determines they want to build a permanent layout, planning requires designing and deciding on the track plan, and sometimes a theme or era of the layout.

Financing is another issue to be worked out. If the club is a large, established club such as the Denver Garden Railway Society, they can build the layout using club funds. Other clubs will need to establish a buy-in or receive money from the host organization. To save money, track can be purchased from estate sales or members closing down their layout. Initially, club members can provide the engines and rolling stock. That is how the Denver club started out, but they ended up owning enough engines and cars to fully stock the layout on run days. Of course member equipment is welcome as well.

Security is sometimes necessary when the venue is open, but the layout is not staffed. That is why the Denver Garden Railway Society constructed a fence and locked gate around their layout. If there is a problem when no member is present, there needs to be a contact person who the host organization can call.

Staffing is sometimes a problem; therefore how often the layout will be open and running should be agreed on before building. The Fairplex layout in Pomona California has sixty men and women members who volunteer twice a week to keep this football-field size layout running. The Denver club requires all members to undergo training, pass a test, and commit to working a minimum of eight hours every year on the club layout.

continued



The Fairplex Garden Railroad has been operating on the Los Angeles County Fairgrounds since 1924. A dedicated group of volunteers maintains the layout and runs for the public during the LA County Fair and the second Sunday of each month.

Below: *The Fairplex GRR volunteers meet inside their storage/display/repair/meeting building to review operating plans for the day.*





Photo by Dave Rowland

The Red Poppy Community Railroad outside the Community Center in Georgetown TX at Sun City was built and is maintained by the Sun City TX Radio Control Modelers Club. The layout illustrates historical sites from the Williamson County's past and present.

Regular maintenance needs to be done to ensure the layout will operate without problems. Regularly cleaning the track is a daily chore, which can be a big commitment on a large layout. The ABQ Bio Park layout runs five days a week except for some holidays. The 1,400 feet of track is manually cleaned by staff of the park at the start of each day. They don't use track cleaning equipment that buffs the rail in order to avoid wear. The New Mexico Garden Railroads club sometime helps with track cleaning. Don't forget the garden needs to be weeded and water features maintained.

Secure storage must be provided for all club-owned engines, cars, power supplies, and electrical equipment used to run the layout. A work area for doing maintenance on engines and cars is needed, so that equipment rarely needs to be removed from the layout location.

Liability is another issue to consider. Insurance should be purchased and maintained to protect the club and its members from being sued in case someone is injured on the property. The Denver club requires all members to sign a waiver of liability when they join the club. The New Mexico club does a background check on all members before allowing them to work on the layout and equipment. A club-owned layout might also need to consider property taxes.

Club-owned/managed layouts are a great way to promote the hobby and attract new members while providing a service to the community. They provide members with the opportunity to share their train collections with others and often illustrate local history. But club layouts come with the challenges of staffing, financing, finding a suitable location, security, and liability, which all must be considered before undertaking a club-owned layout.

Whether your club undertakes a permanent layout or a temporary display, offer to share our trains with the public. Consider neighborhood parks, county fairs, historical museums, and holiday events to promote your club with a public train display.

Email me at: bill@dervilled4.com.



Photo by Jack Hutchinson

Gibsonville Garden Railroad Volunteers run trains regularly in downtown Gibsonville NC.



Photo by Tina Pollockt

North Texas Garden Railway Club maintains the garden railroad at the Texas Discovery Gardens at Fair Park in Dallas TX.



Photo by Mike Walls

Florida GRS members built and run the outdoor railroad at Bushnell Station & Gulf Coast & Central Florida Railroad Museum in Sumter County FL.



Photo by Don Landers

Mendocino Coast Model Railroad is inside the old Carpenter's Barn at the Fort Bragg CA terminus of the Skunk Train.

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— **By Richard Murray**

BOTANICAL NAME: *Picea abies* 'Pumila'

COMMON NAME: Dwarf Norway spruce

USDA HARDINESS ZONE: 3 (down to -40°F)

Growth Habit

Picea abies 'Pumila' is a slow growing dwarf cultivar of Norway spruce. Lower branches typically spread outward, but upper branches spread upward. It tends to grow significantly more outward than up. It typically grows as a dense flattened globe with green needles. After 10 years of growth, a mature specimen can measure about 1.5' high and 4' wide. It has an annual growth rate of about 4 inches per year. In the photo, my plant has been sculpted lightly over the last dozen years to show off a number of pads. lt has grown much more slowly than what is listed as average. It has also grown more vertically than horizontally, just the opposite of what the books say. However, it does exhibit the same dense light green needles that the books describe.

Cultivation

P.a. 'Pumila' is best grown in average, acidic, evenly moist, well-drained soils in full sun. It performs well in rich sandy soils. It prefers cool summer climates, and often grows poorly south of USDA Zone 7. My plant is certainly south of Zone 7. Plants will struggle in hot humid climates. Established plants have some tolerance for dryish soils. Pruning is not normally needed. Maintenance of the plant is low. It tolerates air pollution and is usually described as resistant to deer.

Origins

The mother of *P.a.* 'Pumila' is native to the mountains of northern and central Europe east to the Urals, where it can occasionally grow to 200 feet. It has been widely planted in cool and temperate regions of North America where it typically matures to a much shorter 40 to 60 feet tall. *P.a.* 'Pumila' is just one of many cultivars. In excess of 150 cultivars, mostly dwarf, have been named over the years. Cultivars can be very difficult to distinguish. *Picea abies* 'Pumila' is an old standby in the nursery trade, seen in cultivation since the mid 1800s. R. Smith of the United Kingdom first described it in botanical literature in 1874.

Nomenclature

The genus name is reportedly derived from the Latin word *pix* meaning pitch in reference to the sticky resin typically found in spruce bark.

Most spruces have sharp pointed needles. The exceptions are the spruces with the name "*abies*," which refers to their soft needle similarity to the genus *Abies* (fir).

Uses

P.a. 'Pumila' can be used as a small specimen, for rock gardens, borders, foundations, or, of course, in garden railroads.

A Tribute to Life

Most who have garden railroads appreciate the calm and beauty of the garden. The following is a poem written by an artist from my bonsai group who was successful in photography, painting, poetry, writing short stories, and ceramics. Her poem sums up the beauty of the environment and life.

Find the beauty of the world and observe it.
Feel the sun and wind in your face.
Feel the texture of wood, leaves, pebbles.
Smell the aroma of earth and grass.
Sketch it, photograph it, describe it.
Create, as gratitude for the beauty and joy of life.
Repeat as often as necessary.

Freight Car of the Edition

Maintenance of Way (MOW) Toolbox Car by Richard Perrelli

Good trackwork is key to a smooth-running railroad. G-Scale track, while reliable when mounted on a stable foundation, still needs to be removed for occasional repair or realignment. Ballasted tracks could need to be re-leveled if the ballast is shifted by heavy rain.

There are places on my Oyster Creek Railroad that don't offer a convenient place to put a standard size toolbox without it sliding down a hill or crushing small trackside plants. Prototypical railroads bring tools and equipment to the site by work train. So, I asked my back shop to make a work car specifically for track maintenance. They chose to modify an inexpensive Bachmann box car to minimize losses if the project didn't work.



Toolbox on Wheels:

The toolbox car is convenient. It brings everything needed for routine track maintenance to the work site. Tools are used directly from the top tray. When the tray is removed to access parts stored below, it is narrow enough to easily be placed on a nearby section of track.

Everything needed for routine track maintenance is in this car. The top tray contains Allen keys, screw drivers, and track levels. They are used primarily for re-leveling ballasted track or to remove rail joiners for track section replacement or repair.

continued on next page



Fits where tool boxes don't



Maintenance of Way Toolbox Car Continued

Below the tray, an assortment of rail joiners, rail clamps, and associated screws, as well as wheel stops and miscellaneous small parts, are neatly stored in recycled baby food containers. These part bins have covers which keep the bits in their place when the car is moving.



Parts bins were baby food containers.



Toolbox Construction:

A brace was attached across the door opening to support the top tray. A notch was cut into the side of the car to fit the knuckle of a large hinge. The knuckle faced outward and was set flush with the top edge of the car. One central hinge was used because it was easier to hide it behind the sliding door track. The other leaf of the hinge was mounted to the roof. A thick clear plastic spacer was placed between the roof and the hinge to raise the roof, so it cleared the knuckle when opening.



A tool tray from an old plastic toolbox was cut down to fit inside the top of the boxcar. A smoke jack added opposite the hinge (top photo previous page) acts as the handle to lift the roof/lid.





Windows left over from PIKO building kits, as well as conventional step-in doors and steps fabricated from styrene strip, were added to create a work car appearance.

Conclusion: Even if you don't have access problems, you still may find a working tool boxcar a convenient way to store and organize the tools and parts required for track maintenance. Also, tools that have a specific home are much less likely to be misplaced when the work is done. Maybe it's time you put your work train to work!

For video of the toolbox car, view www.youtube.com/watch?v=j2ZuhdN_poc&t=13s

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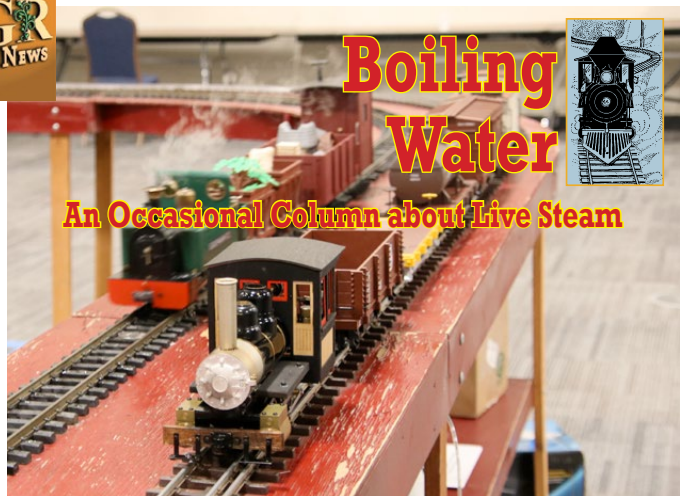
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Your First Live Steamer

By **Gary Woolard**

Photos by Carla Brand Breitner unless otherwise noted

Purchasing your first live steamer can be a fairly daunting proposition. One of the major barricades to entering "G-scale" live steam is the cost of the locomotives compared to the popular electric models available. A small and simple live steamer will probably cost you more than an equivalent 'steam outline' sparky. Nobody wants to buy the 'wrong' live steam engine, so there have been a lot of recommendations for the 'right' one.

A dozen years ago, it seemed like different 'entry level' locomotive models were being introduced every year, and the hobby literature happily recommended several. The first chapter of "Starting in Steam" by Scott McDonald (now available as a free downloadable PDF; see info box below) is titled "Choosing your first locomotive." Scott made several excellent recommendations, but in the dozen years since the book was published, many of the recommended locos are no longer being built, and the prices for those that are have increased dramatically. George Riley, in the *2020 Garden Trains Annual*, recommended Accucraft's Emma, an easy runner and a very popular entry way to 7/8ths scale at about $1,100, but even that is no longer in production. More recently Timothy Boles, in Part 1 of his YouTube series Getting into Live Steam, recommends the Accucraft Ruby, a stalwart that Accucraft has produced for the last quarter century. A decade ago you could get a basic Ruby for about $500. Today they list for just under $700.

It's not unreasonable, then, to suggest buying second hand. Yes, buying a used Gauge 1 steam locomotive has the same risks as buying a used car. You've probably heard the old saw — that new cars of the same make and model are all basically the same, but every used car is different from every other used car. The same is true of steamers. But there's a great way to minimize that risk — buy at a steamup.

There's an intrinsic advantage to a purchase at a steamup. Generally, you'll know the person you're buying from. If a problem develops, you can call him and complain — and he knows that. Most importantly, it's a steamup tradition for buyer and seller to go put the engine on the track and steam it up. The seller can point out any peculiarities of the engine and the buyer can ask questions.

In my previous columns I've mentioned the importance of the social aspect of the live steam hobby. There are a few books and lots of YouTube videos illustrating how to fire up a simple butane-fueled Gauge 1 loco. Most of them are pretty good, but nothing gives you the sense of the experience like being hands-on with an experienced veteran at your shoulder.

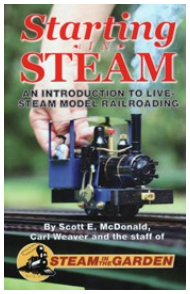
So I'm going to assume that you've studied the videos, been to a local steamup or two, watched as the operators brought their engines up to steam and learned the basics of steam oiling, lubrication, water and fuel. Hopefully you've even had the chance to light an engine off yourself and send it on its way, and it felt like fun. Now you're at a good sized steamup, and you find your eyes drifting over to the swap tables.

Before heading over there, I'd like to offer a few caveats and parameters.

continued on next page



Steamers check out the bargains at the NSS in 2016.



Starting in STEAM , a handbook for those just starting in Small Scale Live Steam assembled from articles in the discontinued magazine *Steam in the Garden*, is available in digital format as a free downloadable PDF. This 148-page book not only introduces new hobbyists to the fun and excitement of small-scale live steam, but will also provide experienced steamers with tips and tricks from seasoned hands.

Download a free copy of *Starting in STEAM* at
https://smallscalelivesteam.com/sitg_archive/pdf/Starting-in-Steam-eBook.pdf



Swap table variety at the NSS in 2018.

Alcohol, Butane, or Coal? I recommend the beginner should stick to a butane-fueled engine. Some alcohol burners tell me that it's just as easy to fuel and run an alcohol fired engine. They tell me this while they're fussing with a leaking "chicken-feed" fuel reservoir, or repacking wicks, or keeping a fan on the stack while they're adjusting a blower control. And coal is for experts. Stick with butane.

Auxiliary Water Supply? Some engines, especially larger ones, can extend their runs with an auxiliary water supply in the tender. This is great, but the water has to be pumped into the boiler, under pressure, with an axle pump or a hand pump in the tender. These can be problematic, and they require more attention during a run than a beginning engineer might provide. Avoid if possible — you can pump more water into the boiler with a Goodall valve when needed. (Check if your prospective engine is equipped with a Goodall valve; if not, they're inexpensive and easy to screw in.)

Lastly, what are you looking for? What do you see in your mind's eye when you hear the phrase 'steam engine'? Admittedly, your first loco isn't going to be a Big Boy or a Flying Scotsman, but there are differences in style and engineering heritage that will or won't appeal to you. Does your imagination see a high-wheeled loco with a balloon stack riding across the prairies? A crew of dusty slate miners hanging on to a brightly painted two-footer with shiny brass fittings, racing towards the industrial revolution? Don't just buy an engine because it's a good deal. Buy the engine that tells you a story!



Photo by Scott McDonald

A red Cricket pulls a tourist train past a whistle stop.



Thelma Thomas tests out a "Dora" from the swap table at the 2025 National Steamup Symposium in Lodi.

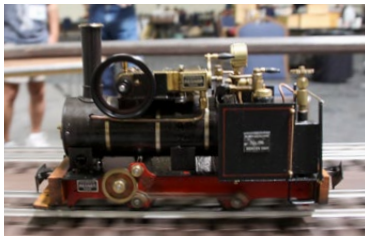
Low-end Engines? Your railroad empire must start within your budget. For this exercise, shall we put up a limit of, say, $1,000, give or take a few hundred? (Because like anything else, you'll find what you want for just a little bit more than you budgeted!)

I'm guessing that the first engines you'll find at the low-price end of our hypothetical swap table will be small engines with oscillating cylinders. These will be engines such as the early Berkeley Cricket (later Crickets had dual single-acting cylinders), Accucraft's Dora, most Regners, and Mamods (hopefully rigged to burn butane rather than those anemic 'fuel pellets').

Oscillators, sometimes slanged as 'wobblers', are not intrinsically prototypical. Oscillating steam cylinders move quickly back and forth across steam inlet and exhaust ports, opening one and blocking the other in sequence. Their fast action sometimes creates a vibratory blur of motion and a sound that's more 'buzzy' than chuffy. Because of the simple design, wobblers are often used in small scratch-built engines, and some manufacturers like Regner specialize in them. While not usually realistic in appearance, 'wobblers' often use mechanisms like flywheels and chain linkages in the drive system which give them a sort of 'steam-punk' charm of their own.



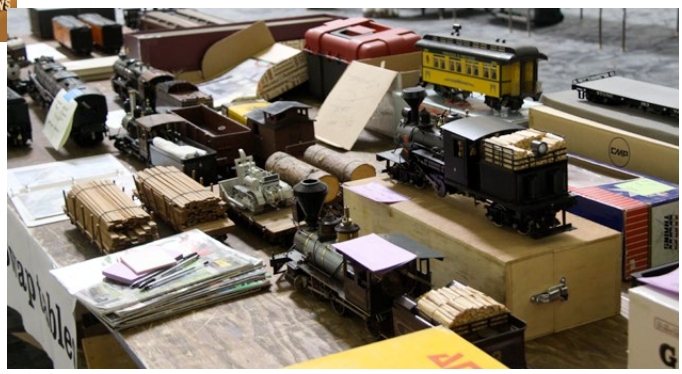
Mamod Brunel



Regner Vincent

Regner seems to go in two directions on this. Their lower end engines, such as the Vincent, seem to celebrate their "Rube Goldberginess" with lots of shiny brass drive chains, fittings, and flywheels. Their more expensive engines, like their Heisler, Lumberjack, or Guinness Tram, take pains to emulate prototype engines to varying degrees.

continued on next page



Swap tables often feature a variety of locomotives.

Moving a bit further along, we get into Ruby territory — probably the most popular entry level Gauge 1 steamer ever made. When the Marc Horowitz-designed engine hit the market around the turn of the century, it took the hobby by storm. Priced around $500-$550, it was the most affordable introduction to a semi-realistic Baldwin-style engine to be found, and probably still is. Accucraft still makes an improved version of the engine, and it now runs about $700. You can also get it as a 'bolt-together' kit for about $50 less. (Some Ruby versions came with sight glasses and/or pressure gauges, but I'm surprised that the current offering seems to have neither. Putting a pressure gauge on is inexpensive and not too hard; a sight glass is trickier. I know veteran steamers who swear that these two accessories are at best inaccurate, and at worst, misleading. Nevertheless, I prefer them.)



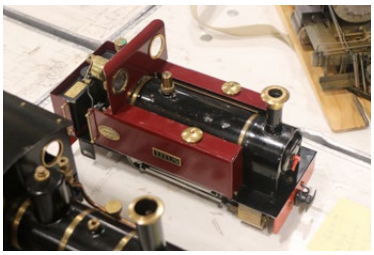
Two Rubys doublehead

The "Ruby" chassis and drive train became the foundation for an entire series of smaller Accucraft locos; the "Ida" and Porter Ruby versions, the 2-4-2 "Mimi" with tender, the "Iuki" plantation engine, and 0-4-4 and 2-4-4 versions of their 1:20.3 scale Forney. None of these are currently in production, but they're good starter engines and easy to run when you can find them. I have seen new steamers get years of service out of the Forney in particular. Be willing to pay a bit more for this one.

Two peculiarities of early Rubys to be aware of:

1. Like most small engines, Rubys have a tendency to 'jack-rabbit,' barely creep along, then suddenly accelerate. Sometime in the 2010–2012 time frame, Accucraft expanded the cylinders from 3/8ths" to 1/2". The extra power helps smooth out this problem… somewhat.
2. The 'admission timing' of early Ruby's, at least, made the engines run out of the box much smoother in reverse than in forward. This is easily fixed in 5 minutes with a small wrench — there are plenty of YouTube videos on how to do it.

Mid-Range Engines? Moving down the table, (and deciding maybe we can spend a bit more), we'll start to see some Roundhouse engines and probably some of Accucraft's smaller British outline engines, like a Hunslet or Excelsior. Roundhouse has a wide variety of locos, most available as kits. The company separates their live steam line into two groups, the "Basic" series and the "Classic" series. The "Basic" engines, like the Bertie and Sammie run around $1000 new, while "Classic" series engines like the Billy and Lady Anne start at about $1900 and go up from there. The reason for this jump in prices has to do with the running gear - the Classics have a simplified Walschaerts-style running gear which is close to prototypical; they can change direction with a simple flip of a lever. The Basic engines, however, use a much simpler 'slip-eccentric' running gear, which means you physically have to give them a little push in the direction you want them to go. For some folks this is no big deal; for others it's unrealistic and a deal-breaker. As you can imagine, this difference in prices is also reflected in the second hand market.



Roundhouse Millie



Roundhouse Lady Anne

Roundhouse engines aren't bullet proof, but they are pretty solidly reliable - there's a phrase in the live-steam hobby, "It runs like a Roundhouse." Their biggest problem for me personally is simply that they don't make many American profile engines.

If you're new to live steam, you may not recognize some of the names you might find on our hypothetical swap table: smaller or older lines such as Pearse, Archangel, DJB Engineering, Catatonk. These are often beautiful, near hand-crafted engines, but if you're seeing them on a swap table for a low price, odds are you're looking at a 'project' engine that, like a classic car, will take some loving attention to bring up to snuff. Admire them, but not recommended for beginners.

If you're willing to look at the $1,400–$1,600 range of locos or higher, your universe of choice widens considerably. Possibly you've been running your Ruby or Cricket for a while, and you're looking for a larger engine that will drag more cars for a longer run? Many different Accucraft, Roundhouse or Bowande locos might be available on this table, although you probably still won't be seeing any of those high-end (and expensive) Asters. You don't see many beginners driving Asters.

continued on page 39

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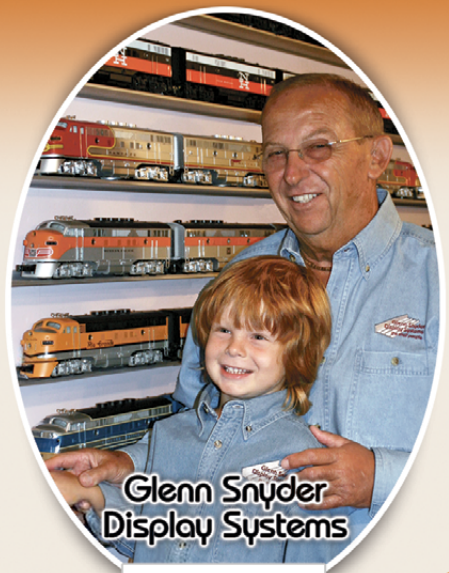


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Peter Ronney explains how to prep a Forney.

Inspection Tips: So you've found an engine that you like, at an asking price that doesn't make you gasp for air. A few things to inspect before you track down the seller and head to the test track:

1. Cosmetic damage? There's likely to be some cosmetic damage in any used engine— paint scratches, minor dents, a bent marker light or a broken transom plate.
2. Does it look like it's been well-cared for? Sometimes a layer of dust is just dust, but sometimes it indicates a deeper level of neglect.
3. Have the bearings and lubrication spots been oiled, or have they become greasy? Sometimes this just means the engine hasn't been run in a while — more problematic are rust spots.
4. Does the smokebox seem burned or discolored? (I was once warned away from a used engine because the smokebox indicated heavy usage or a flame set too high — but this engine turned out to become an easy and reliable runner.) If the smokebox door can be opened, how does it look inside?

No single one of these elements signifies a go/no-go in my experience. What you're looking for is the aggregate of all of these. Realistically, you should expect some wear. If it feels like a reasonable possible purchase, it's time to run the engine.

Before you and the seller even put the engine on the track, do the wheels roll smoothly, without a lot of play? How about left-to-right? There can be a bit of lateral movement to compensate for track irregularities, and drive rods should have some play, but not too much.



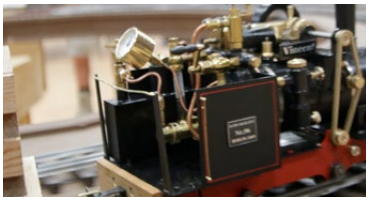
Prep for a Test Run: It's time to steam up. Pay close attention as the seller shows you where the hidden or difficult lubrication points are, and any peculiarities of steam oil, fueling up or water levels. (Some Roundhouse engines apparently need a gas filler valve different from the common 'Ronson valve,' for instance.) If the engine has a sight glass, it might show a different level than you'd expect, depending on how it's mounted to the boiler — what's your seller's experience been?

How quickly does the engine come up to pressure? If it's taking longer than expected, and you're getting a loud sound from the chimney, it may mean that the cylinders are worn and allowing steam to escape up the chimney. (I've heard of this, but haven't experienced it personally.) A bit of water, then steam, will leak from the cylinders as they warm up but that's expected.



Accucraft Mimi

If it has a gauge (I believe in pressure gauges), the engine should want to run by the time it's built 20-25 lbs of pressure. See if it does, both in forward and reverse, for a few feet. Does the Johnson bar (the reverser) move back and forth okay? Sometimes they can be pretty stiff, especially on newer engines, but shouldn't stick too hard or move too loosely.



Regner Vincent gauges

Close the throttle again, and allow the engine to build up enough pressure to open the pressure relief valve at the top of the boiler — the pop valve. This could happen anywhere between 40-65 lbs, depending on the engine. (Smaller engines generally have a lower pop-off pressure — that's fine.)

When the pop-off blows, does it recover quickly enough and reseat, to retain most of the pressure you've built up? An older valve may need to be 'slapped down' with the blade of a flathead screwdriver or the like, which can be annoying if you're not right there and the engine loses a lot of steam.

continued on next page





Time to let the engine do several loops around the track. Does it stay on the track, or does it derail for no particular reason? Sounds basic, and is, but I've seen pony trucks hunt their way off the track because an axle is just a smidgen off gauge, or a wheel is loose. Worst case scenario, continuous derails can be a sign of a bent frame. (However, if a derail is only happening at one particular spot, it may be more the track's problem than the locomotive's.)

Marc Horovitz once said (paraphrasing from memory) "Any engine runs good at high speed. How does it run slow?" At higher speeds, the momentum of all the parts of the drive train are more likely to overcome any binding of misaligned drive gear or missing or off-timed valve events.

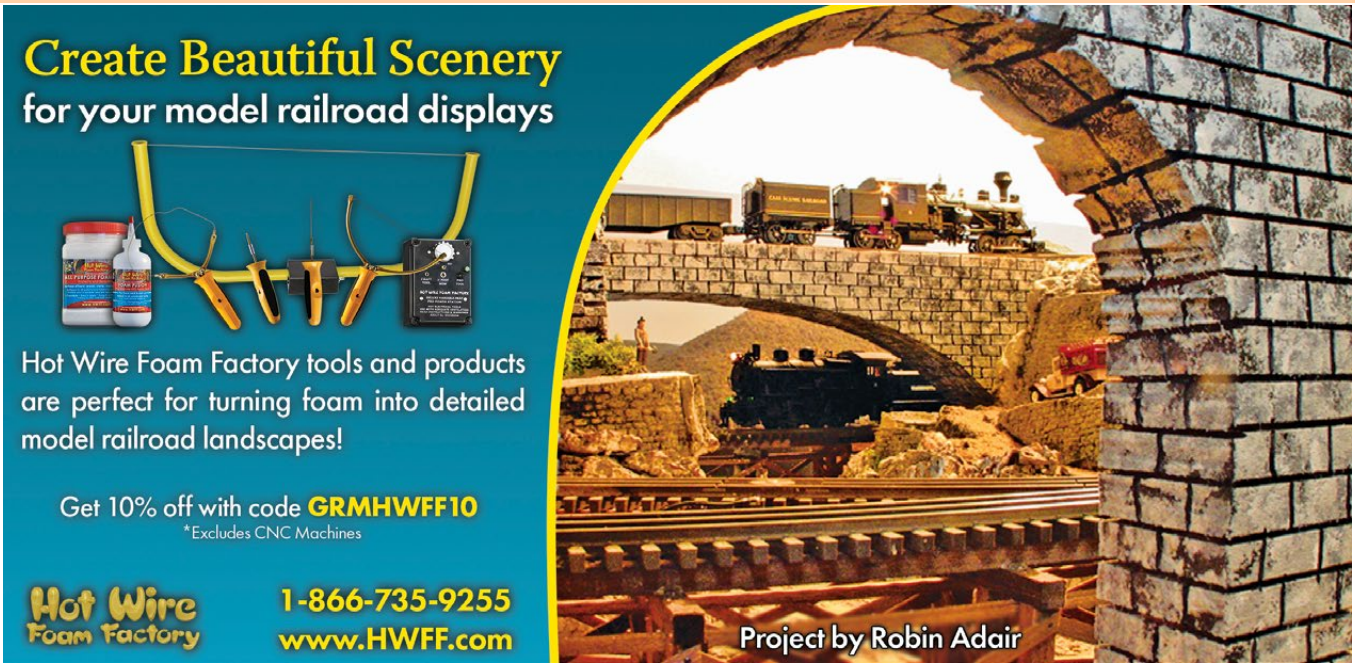
An engine that runs smoothly at slow speeds is one with its running gear in proper order. So your next step is to turn that throttle down until the engine creeps as slowly as possible. Is it still running smoothly, or does it jerk and stall? This is NOT a make or break test — steam engines often 'fall out of timing' as they get older, which means that rod position and valve events slip out of synchronization. (And frankly, some engines just don't seem able to hold timing for very long.) It's a judgement call — does the engine run smoothly enough at low speeds for you? If not, every steamup has a few timing/quartering gurus; ask one of them if they could re-adjust it. (I don't recommend new steamers try this themselves — it's a fussy task that gets easier with practice.)

A best testing scenario would allow you to hook several cars up to the loco, and give it a load to pull. After you've adjusted your flame and your throttle to compensate for the cars, is it running smoothly at an even pace, without the pressure gauge dropping below, say, 20–25 lbs. (accepting that it will slow down around the curves)? Is it putting out a nice plume, or making a nice chuff? (It never seems to be both at the same time!)

Last question — are you smiling?

If so, there's only two more things to do. The first is to reach for your wallet.

The second is to enjoy your new live steam engine.



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Split Jaw Station Stopper

A Review by Ken Brody

In July, I bought one of Split Jaw Products' new Station Stopper train control units to use on train show layouts which the Redwood Empire Garden Railway Society sets up several times per year on the floor at various venues. I first tried it out on one of Don Herzog's outdoor layouts, then installed it on our show layout at the Sonoma County Fair where we used it on most of the Fair's nine days. Here is what we experienced.

With the Wireless Receiver installed between the power supply and the track, the Station Stopper works by regulating the power to a continuous loop of track. Remote units placed along the track where you want the train to "slow down" and to "stop" tell the Receiver unit when to reduce and shut off the power. After a pre-set period of time, the power ramps back up and the train makes another circle around the track. It also can be set to stop the train only after a preferred number of circuits.

The setup instructions were very good, though a bit confusing in a couple of spots. With the help of my friend and model train electronics wizard Dick Couden, we did the initial installation on Don's layout in about half an hour. First, we disconnected the track wire from the power supply and connected it to the Central Receiver unit. A short piece of additional wire was then used to connect the Central Receiver unit to the power supply. One little hiccup that was not fully explained in the instructions was that the optional enclosure for outdoor use of the Central unit doesn't have any holes in it to run the wires out. This will allow any user to customize the wiring position, but you will need to have a drill handy to make some holes and enable the cover of the box to be closed.

The Remote Transmitter sensors can be either wired directly to the Receiver unit or powered by 9-volt batteries. When a train with a magnet installed under it passes over the sensors, the sensors send a signal to the Central Receiver unit. The first or Start Decel sensor tells the train where to begin to slow down, and then the Stop Now sensor says where the train should stop. Since our desired stopping spot at both Don's and the Fair layouts was about 15 feet from the control unit, we used the battery-power option. The Start Decel and Stop Now sensors must be between 3 to 20 feet apart; in our case the separation was about 5 feet.

continued next page

Description

Function: Stop/Start automation using wireless sensors controlled by a track-powered central unit
Fittings: Central Unit, wireless Deceleration and Stop Sensors, Receiver Unit, Magnet for locomotive
Optional: Sheds for the Decelerate and Stop sensors
Enclosure for central unit/receiver



Central Unit above; Track sensors below



Optional enclosures below





Kids and adults stop to watch the train circle the Redwood Empire Garden Railway Society layout at the Sonoma County Fair in August. The train will start decelerating as it passes the sensor in the track just before the town.

The train we were running at the Fair was mostly a freight train, but with a drover caboose at the end. I wanted the caboose to stop at the station rather than the loco, so I placed the magnet on the caboose. I had to add a block of wood under the caboose to lower the magnet close enough to the sensor to trigger it. Since the magnet and sensors determine where the train slows and stops by reducing the power to the track, it doesn't matter that the magnet isn't on the loco.

The instructions note that it can take multiple trips around the loop of track before the Decel and Stop sensors get the train to stop where you want it to. I found that the self-teaching software took at least a half dozen cycles to get the stopping right. Sometimes the train would stop close to the right spot, then begin moving after the stop but stop a second time a few feet down the track. Also, for some unclear reason, the blue/red fault lights on the Receiver unit kept initially triggering during this startup period. This shuts off all power to the track and stops the train. The instructions say this is caused by a sudden surge in amperage, though we could find nothing that was doing this. (Note: I have not contacted Split Jaw to get their insight into this situation.) Anyway, turning the power off for a second or two and then back on recycles the unit. After a few off-on cycles, this stopped happening.



The drover caboose stopped at the station. The Stop Now sensor can barely be seen under the caboose. The bit of white is a piece of double stick foam to hold it in place.

continued next page



The Sonoma Fair layout. Our crew (Terry Strom, Doug Lodge, and Becky Herzog) is relaxing just before the gates opened on the first day. The Receiver and Power Supply are hidden behind the castle. The station (with stop sensor) is out of view in front of Doug, and the foam holding the Decel sensor barely shows as a white speck on the track in front of Terry.

Once the train consistently stopped close to where we wanted, I found that the precise stopping point can be adjusted by a few inches by very slightly changing the speed of the train. Basically, the point at which the train stops is a function of how long it takes to go between the Decel and Stop sensors. If the train stops a bit short, speed it up to get to the proper spot and if it stops long, then slow it down a touch.

Once I got everything running as I wanted, it ran great for around six hours straight on most of the days at the Fair and stopped within an inch or two of the same spot every time. The Receiver unit remembers its last settings, so shutting off the power overnight and restarting it the next day usually didn't affect the Station Stopper operation. All in all, we found the Station Stopper fun to use, and visitors to our layout seemed to enjoy watching the train stop and start.



The battery box for the remote sensor is hidden inside the gray shed next to the station. This battery-powered Big John locomotive, one of several locos Redwood Empire GRS ran at the Sonoma County Fair, pushes a hand car in front of it with a strong magnet keeping them apart. Because it doesn't run via track power, the Station Stopper won't control it.

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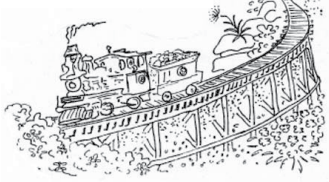
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Repairing a Locked-Up Shay Piston Assembly

Article and Photos by Bill Thurston



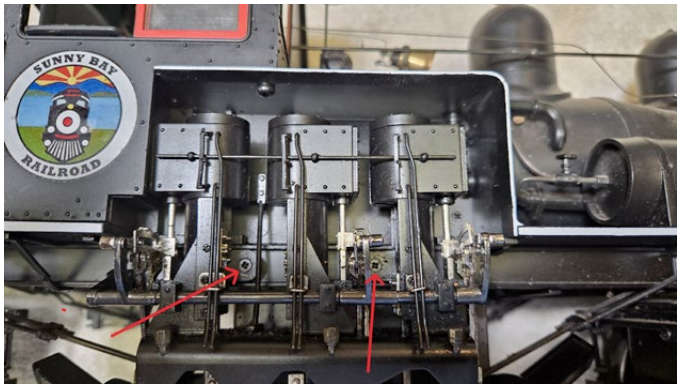
Bill Thurston's repaired 38-ton Bachmann Shay is back at work pushing his work car with rail-cleaning brush at the front.

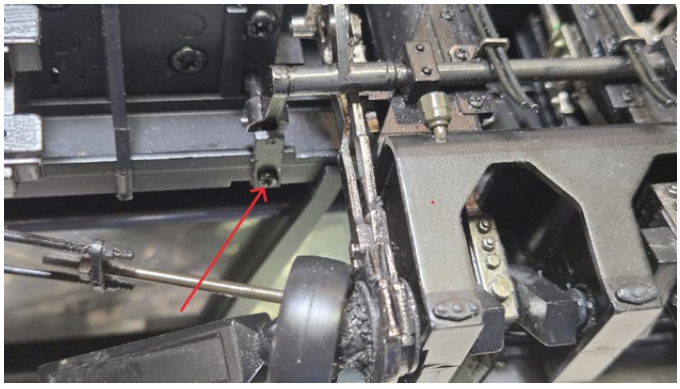
Fifteen or more years ago, I bought a used 38-ton two truck Bachmann Shay. I converted it to battery power, and it has been a real workhorse for me as the primary engine I use to push my rail cleaning brush car. Recently, while clearing the track, it came to an abrupt halt.

After checking the usual suspects— had the battery run down or become unplugged — I hauled it to the workbench. It took some fiddling, but I finally found that the piston assembly had locked up, which prevented the front truck from turning.

I was intimidated about trying to repair that complicated looking piston assembly. I was not sure my old eyes and stiff fingers were up to the task. But I decided I had to try rather than just retiring the Shay to the shelf.

After several Google searches, I found some helpful info and began the task. The first step is to remove the assembly from the Shay. It only requires unlatching the drive train and the removal of three screws that are quite accessible.

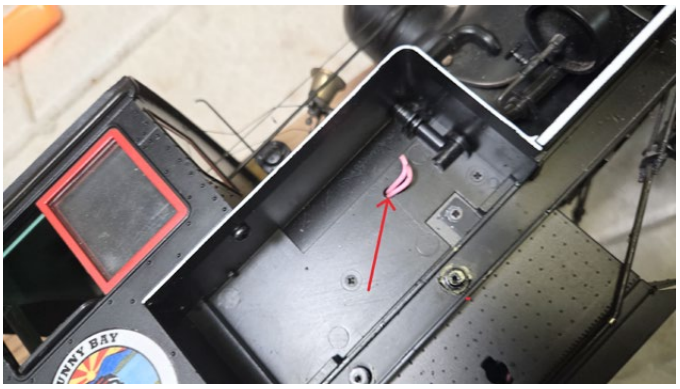




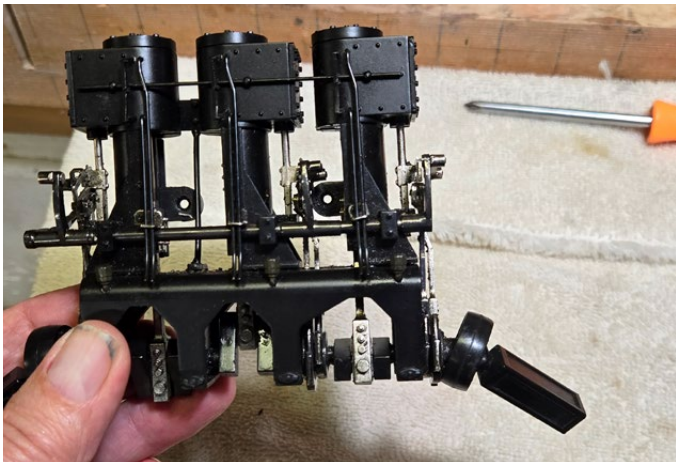
Arrows point out screws to remove piston assembly for repair.

Continued

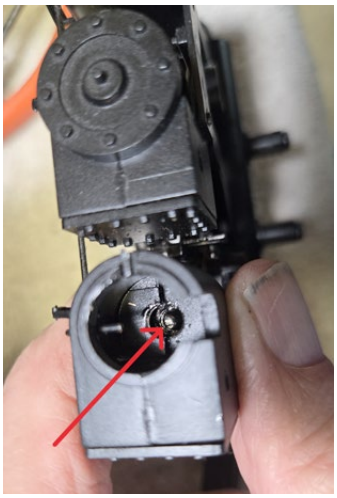
With those screws removed the whole assembly comes off. The wires from the chuff trigger bar prevented me from completely setting aside the assembly so I chose to cut them off. Since I use the generic Revolution sound system, I did not need them. Later I found I could have just unscrewed the bar from the assembly and left the wires in place, but in my case, there was no problem anyway.



Chuff trigger wires were cut as I use a Revolution sound system, but wires could remain by unscrewing the trigger bar from the piston assembly if needed.

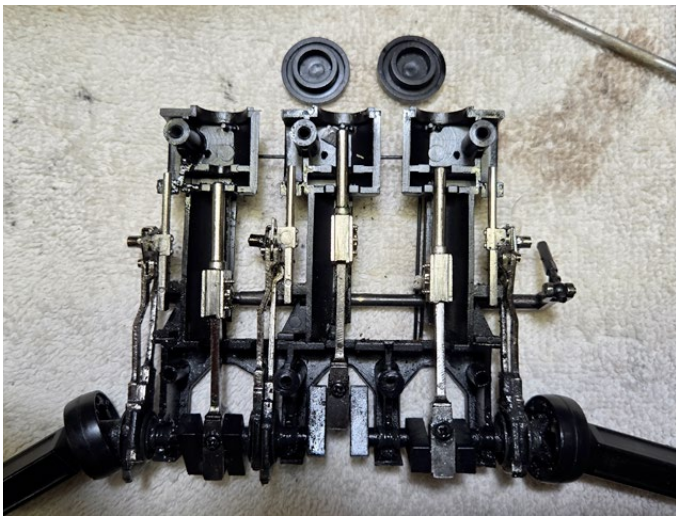


The piston assembly removed showing misaligned rod (left).



With the assembly removed, I removed the tops of the cylinders and found what was causing the assembly to lock up. After years of use, enough slack had developed that one of the piston push rods was coming out of the hole in the bottom of the cylinder on the down stroke and hitting the cylinder bottom on the upstroke. That caused the whole assembly to lock up.

I figured that if I could add a shim to the bottom of that cylinder, it should solve the problem. To do that I had to pull apart one whole side of the assembly. By removing the tops and side panels of each cylinder and removing two screws on the backside, I could lift off the whole backside. I did this very carefully by laying the assembly face down on the table and lifting the back off. I wanted to keep all those moving parts in place!

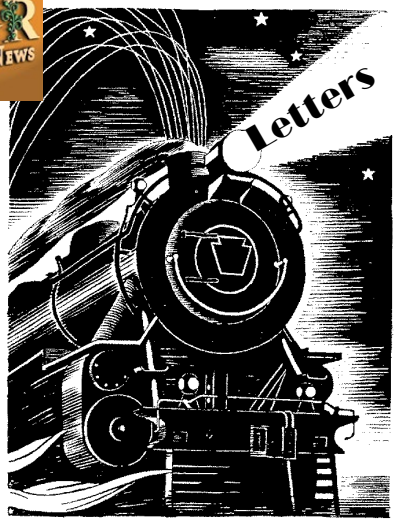


Piston assembly with backside removed



With that done, I pulled the offending push rod out of the way and glued a small shim (with a hole for the pushrod) onto the bottom of the cylinder. I put the push rod back in place, re-assembled everything and attached it to the Shay.

It ran fine on the test stand and has been returned to service. It remains to be seen how long my fix will last, but so far so good.



STRAIGHT FROM THE IRON HORSE'S MOUTH

Letters to the Editor should be sent as e-mails only to Carla Brand Breitner at:
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Letters will then be addressed accordingly and/or passed on to the author for further edification. Unless marked otherwise, letters to this publication are assumed to be submitted for print. Please include your name and club affiliation. Please note that we may not be able to print all letters, though we will try to respond to them. Letters may be edited for length and clarity. We are unable to answer requests for information about specific products or systems; these are best addressed to the appropriate manufacturer.

Another View: Track Pickups and Deadrail

I've found the recent discussions about removing track contacts for battery power installations quite interesting. Let me preface this by saying that I've been a dyed-in-the-wool user/advocate of battery power for 40 years. So it might come as a shock when I say there are many reasons NOT to remove track contacts when doing battery installations, and I've actually made a point of keeping the track power connections in the conversions I've done over the past few years.

The reason is simple—flexibility. Garden railroading tends to be a social hobby where we often bring locomotives to run on others' railroads or at public displays. Let's take a locomotive with a Soundtraxx Blunami board installed. If you discard the track pickups from the installation, you are limited to running that loco from battery power only. You're not limiting the functionality of the board in any way by doing that, but the Blunami board is at its core a DCC decoder. If you set your locomotive on a track with a DCC signal on it and you have connection to the track, it will spring to life. As such, you can bring your locomotive to a DCC-powered railroad and you can simply run it on track power using the native DCC system on that railroad, taking full advantage of whatever cool features such as consisting, location, or automation that railroad might have. If the railroad is running traditional track power, you can set the track power to full, set your locomotive on the track, and run your locomotive via the Blunami app on your phone as you would with battery power.

That same premise holds true with other flavors of command control as well. RailPro, Rail Boss, Revolution, LocoLink—they don't care whether the DC voltage comes from the rails or a battery. If the loco is wired so to give you an easy way to make that choice, why not take full advantage of it? It's nice to have the option of taking my trains to club displays where we run for 4-hour shifts and not worry about batteries.

Pete Thornton mentions resale, that's definitely a consideration. I refurbish and customize locomotives to sell. It's no more work (in some cases, less work) to keep the track power option in place, especially on locos wired "DCC Ready" or similar where you can easily go in and isolate all the lights, motor, and other functions for the installation. But even when it's not, I'm typically doing an electronics overhaul in the refurbishing process anyway. Why not keep my options open and my potential pool of customers the broadest possible?

One last consideration, the future. I have locomotives on my roster that are 50 years old. I've changed the control electronics on them four, maybe five times as the technology has changed over the years. There may be something coming down the tracks in 10 years that we might want that links to the rails for some reason. Who knows, but why needlessly take that option away?

Kevin Strong
Denver GRS
Centennial CO

Thanks, Kevin, for your thoughts on flexibility regarding power source.

Yours, Carla Brand Breitner
Editor
Garden Railroading News

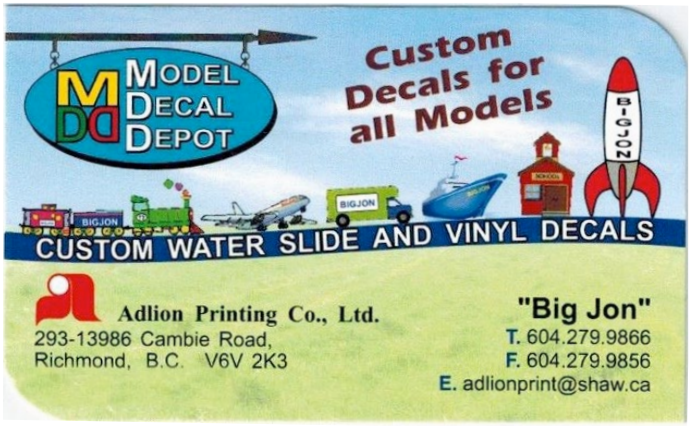


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..... Northwest Arkansas Garden Railway Society
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..... VDO Garden Railroad Club
..... West Valley Garden Railroad Society
CA ..... 1:32 Scale Group
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..... Central California Coast Garden Railroad Society
..... Del Oro Pacific Large Scale Modular Railroaders
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..... Sacramento Valley Garden Railway Society
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..... Shasta Garden Railway Society
..... Southern California Garden Railway Society
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CO..... Denver Garden Railway Society
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..... Northern Colorado Garden Railroaders
CT ..... Boothe Memorial Railway Society
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..... Model RR Division of Florida RR Museum
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IA ..... Central Iowa Garden Railway Society
ID ..... Southern Idaho G-Scale Railroad Society
ID/WA*..... Inland Northwest Garden Railroad Society
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..... LGB Model Railroad Club of Chicago
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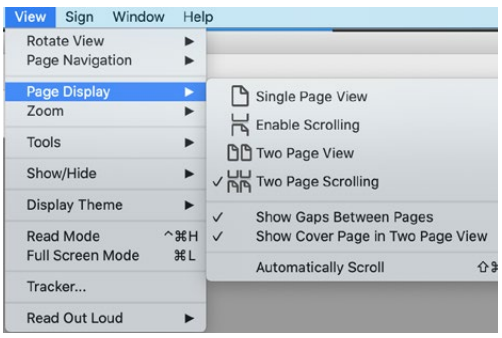
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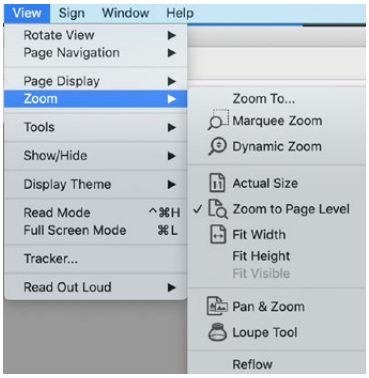


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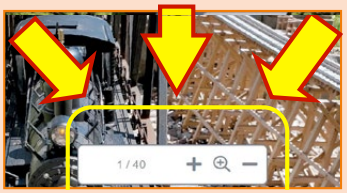




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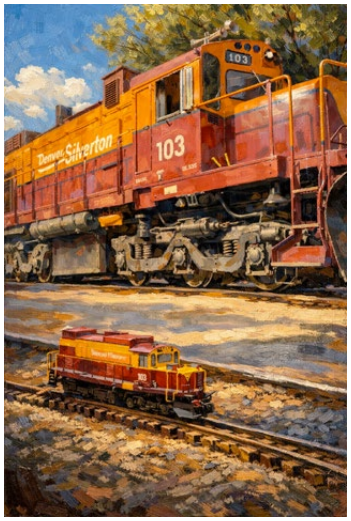


Photo by John Cushman modified with ChatGPT

John Cushman's custom model in the foreground of the prototype Durango & Silverton diesel, photo made to look like an oil painting.