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Thoughts of Chairman Dell A Nice Day at the Farm!

Reg Piper asked me if I would take the roller and if John Squire would bring his miniature Burrell to a Farm Day on 27th August at Holly Hill Farm. As they would pay all expenses, I couldn't refuse. The farm was the same farm from which I bought my tractor. As the show opened at 10.00am it meant an early start. I told the others that I would light up and they could arrive around 6.00am (the others being John Squire, Jim Macdonald and his son Peter and Ian Reddish). Its nice that youngsters take such an interest in live steam.

I arrived at the track at 4.30am and found that I had left my keys at home. I didn't know at the time that Peter and Ian were sleeping the night in the coach as they were afraid of being late. However I returned home, picked up the keys and returned to the track by 5.15am – not a good start. Worse was to come!

We left Colney Heath at 7.30am and had a splendid run arriving at the farm at 10.30am. The event was supported by the Herts Heavy Horse Association. The horses were magnificent as were the restored cart and carriage that they pulled. One outstanding example was an hotel horse omnibus pulled by two dappled Greys equipped with full American show harnesses. With tassels and bells they made an impressive sight.

Later in the day Adrian and Kate Reddish arrived along with Brendan, Pam and Donal. All were to play a part in the events which followed. About 2.00pm as I was walking round the roller I saw water coming over the ashpan damper. I thought at first that the foundation ring was leaking but on further examination it was the tubes – not so bad but bad enough. We had a conference on what to do. John thought it would be wiser to stay at the farm and try and fix the tubes the next day. Myself being a home boy thought it would be better to get the roller home. But how? It was obvious that we wouldn't be able to make it under our own steam. Jim had his mobile phone so he rang the track and asked for heavy haulage John West. At the time he was busy assembling the tractor as the previous day we had changed the valve stem rubbers. John said he would be as quick as possible and would arrive at the farm within two hours – which he did. We decided that we would steam the roller as far as possible before connecting up with the tractor.

Off went the roller, with the tractor and bowser following 5mins behind. We hadn't gone very far when the tractor started to misfire. We were now in deep trouble – a roller that wouldn't roll and a tractor which wouldn't trac! We came to a halt and to add to the situation it started to rain quite heavily. Then we had a piece of luck. Bob Potts, who I bought the tractor from, came sailing by with his 1942 Foden timber tractor.

*'What's the trouble?' Bob asked,
'Fuel starvation', said John.*

We had with us our usual tool kit – a spanner big enough to tighten the prop-shaft of the Queen Mary and another small one of unknown dimensions! Bob quickly coupled up his chain and towed us to the nearest lay-by. He took from the cab his tool kit, which looked like it had every spanner known to mankind, quickly undid the fuel pump and filter, cleaned both out, blew down the feed pipe and we were away. As we passed Bob he waved us down. His battery terminal post was loose and he had melted the bolt! We found some stout wire and rigged up a bodge and away went Bob. In the meantime Kate and Adrian were ferrying up and down keeping us posted as to the roller's progress. 'Out of steam at Potters Bar traffic lights' was the latest report. Brendan then arrived with the Range Rover and took the bowser in tow. It was our intention to use the tractor to push or pull the roller. So by towing the heavy bowser behind the Range Rover this would help a lot. They pleaded with me to join them in the comfort of the Range Rover. I refused at first – the captain goes down with the ship! As it was raining quite seriously I later let myself sink into the comfort and promptly fell asleep. 'Let them get on with it!' was now my motto.

John was now hitched up to the roller and we arrived at Colney Heath at about 8.30pm, all of us quite exhausted. I promised myself a curry when I got home and told everyone I would put it in the liquefier and drink it through a straw in bed!

I would like to thank everyone who helped during a difficult time. Its wonderful how friends help out in times of stress. To think we do all this for fun – shaken to bits, covered in coal, grease and oil and you can guarantee something will go wrong. We must be mad . But after all we are British!

Finally, I have to report that there was no Council Meeting in September due to the fuel crisis.

Frank Dell

Editorial

A Year of Ups and Downs

This issue marks one complete year of our editorship and it is appropriate for me to say that apart from the many hours of hard work and the inevitable panic each month to meet the deadline it has been a satisfying task. The job has been made enjoyable by a regular flow of high class contributions. Thank you to everyone who has contributed, especially to those who do so month after month. I would also like to thank my daughter, Jill Prior, for designing and compiling the News Sheet on her computer every month. In fact the redesigned front page was all her work: We have a real professional working for us. In contrast I've stumbled along and the observant reader will have noticed the many mistakes and the inconsistent changes which have appeared and then disappeared over the months! It often feels like “one step forward and two back”.

Of course I've made some pretty big blunders along the way. Probably one of the worst occurred after Mike Chrisp took an extensive series of photographs of the Three Valleys Water Company Open Day. As Editor of the Model Engineer he has precious little spare time yet he took the trouble to put them, and many other Society pictures, on a CD. He also printed them all out in a small 'thumbnail' format for identification purposes and sent the lot to us. It was at this point the trouble began! Somehow the CD became jammed against something very solid in my brief case as I rode home from work on my push-bike and when I opened the folder the battered CD had sheared clean in two! You can imagine the look of horror on my face especially as the deadline was upon us! But Mike came to the rescue by spending that evening printing off the required pictures from his files in final News Sheet format and driving all the way to Hertford from Hemel Hempstead to deliver them personally!

Even the computers have had it in for us with floppy discs becoming corrupt, e-mails getting lost in 'cyber space' and occasionally losing whole articles which we'd typed into 'Microsoft Word'. One such disaster which springs to mind concerns 'phantom' word changes. Approaching one of our tighter deadlines and having a spare half hour at work I decided to type up some hand written material for the News Sheet. Reading through what I'd typed I was horrified to see that what should have been Starley and Sutter (early bicycle makers) had turned to starkers and smuttier! The only explanation I can offer is that 'big brother' in the IT Department was checking employee's screens and on finding my 'non-business' work decided to have a bit of fun with it! Or was it some bizarre Freudian slip on my part!!

Finally, I am happy to report that the appeal of the News Sheet doesn't stop with model engineers or even humans. Jill's two cats, Boot and Cobweb, appear to find it irresistible too! On the evenings we are finalising things round Jill's house the cats are always eager to get involved, chasing pens, sitting on laps, purring, and snudging (slimey-nudging) any available document, object or person. The highlight for the little girl cat, Boot, is the printer and it is almost impossible to distract her from chasing the moving toner cartridge for long enough to get out a few unsmudged or unripped pages!

'50 Years Ago'

When I took over the job as Editor I planned that we should have a "50 Years Ago" slot, so I'm pleased to say this month we have found space to present the first one. I wanted this for two reasons. Firstly I think by the very nature of our interest in models we are also interested in things from past years. Secondly the Society does have a long and proud history. When we look at that history it gives us a sense of continuity, reminding us of the effort former members made and encourages us to make sure our actions today are worthy of the fine Society we have inherited from them. It should be remembered that in 1950 the News Sheet generally referred to members by their titles rather than their first names and it is often not possible therefore to give first names of individuals. I have picked out what I think were the interesting items of the day and I hope you find them interesting too.

Grahame Ainge

Loco Section News

After three derailments in the last few months on the raised track a full survey was

ordered on its condition. This has now been completed by Mike Foreman and copies of his report presented to the Track Committee, Although there are no immediate safety changes required we need to form a team willing to tackle the work in the winter working parties. Details of the work will be discussed at the next Loco meeting at Headquarters.

With much of the running season behind us the Track Committee and Section Leaders turn their attention to the winter working parties. Apart from the general maintenance and raised track work already mentioned, a proposal by Brian Abthorpe on how to manoeuvre the passenger carrying carriages on and off the track by one person is to be investigated. Les Brimson is to look at the carriage storage situation.

Mike Collingwood has been approached to look at the installation of a safety anti-tip rail on the Steaming Bay curve. Jack Edwards and Keith Bartlam (upper station and turntable) are to continue with the ground level track with help from myself and Mike Chrisp (lower station). If you haven't seen the new section of track between the level crossing and the lower station it's worth a look as I hope to give more details on its use at the next Loco Meeting.

Our first Loco Section meeting at Headquarters this winter will be work in progress, with the first 20 min dedicated to work at the track this winter. After a short review of work to be undertaken members are invited to put questions to the Section Leaders or Track Committee on decisions already made.

Finally we hope to have a special Christmas Meeting and invite all Sections to join us for a cheese and wine evening with a special talk and interesting demonstration by Chris Reynolds of the making of Robot Wars. Note the change of time 7pm until 10pm 8th Dec 2000.

Jim Macdonald
Joint Section Leader

[“50 Years Ago”](#)

[To view this article please click here](#)

name

[Slot Car News](#)

NLSME in Guinness Book of Records

Motor racing, from its earliest days, has been about endurance racing; not just the length of racing but also the arduous conditions under which these races were held. Tracks were little more than dirt tracks and the cars were glorified carts with big engines. Although the tracks and the cars have changed out of all recognition from those early heroic days, endurance racing is still a great test of man and machine.

Slot racing has obviously reflected the full sized world and as such endurance races have

a place in the history of slot racing. The racing calendar has over the years always included team races and 24hr races. Endurance racing is one discipline that NLSME has excelled in. A team from our Club has regularly won the team race at the Nationals as various trophies around the clubroom will testify. A team from our Club also has the distinction of being mentioned in the Guinness Book of Records for holding the world record for the furthest distance traveled by a slot car for 24hrs, a distance I believe of over 300 miles!

This tradition continues as two teams from our Club are regularly competing in a European 24 hr series taking in England, Belgium, Holland and Newcastle, wherever that is! The NLSME team last year took the series and continued their winning ways this year by winning the recent Reading 24hr by over 300 laps. The victorious drivers were, Ian Fisher, Dan Condon, Greg Harwood and James Cleave. Our other team, Walmington-on-Sea, who so nearly won the series last year came in third. This team's regular drivers are John Secchi, Bob Hallums, Mark Harwood and John Newton.

Brooklands

While on the subject of the history of motor racing the word Brooklands holds a special place in many people's hearts. Now a museum, there are some fine examples of cars, bikes and aeroplanes, being the venue for many air races and the Vickers aircraft factory. Only a small part of the old race track remains, but what a part! The members banking and bridge remains. It truly is an awesome sight. To struggle up to the top, it is very, very steep, takes some doing and just take in the vista of the banking, starting away to your left, under the bridge and then disappearing off to the right is a very humbling experience. Trying to imagine primitive racing cars negotiating this section of track at around 150 mph and the bravery of the drivers being able to do it. Going over the top at those sorts of speed just doesn't bear thinking about as the whole thing was and still is lined with trees. There was also a hill climb at Brooklands and fortunately it is still there. We walked to the top to see the old famous restaurant and that is also very steep (the hill, not the restaurant).

It is an excellent day out, but we were there not just for the museum but to race our hastily built rail cars. The event was set up in the clubhouse and as well as the rail track there was slot-stox track and a scalextrix-type track for go-carts. Unfortunately the organisation of the event was lacking as there were no proper races for the rail cars. As we had spent so long putting these cars together and by the end of the day they were working as well, if not better than the opposition, to be unable to race them properly was a disappointment. However there is talk of running the event again next year so it's up to us to get the organisers to run a proper event. The visit around the museum and track more than made up for the lack of racing and John Secchi, Tony and Dan Condon, Ian Fisher and myself had an enjoyable day at the original home of motor racing.

ing Calendar for October:

5th F1
12th Sports
19th 1/24th GP12
26th 1/24th Production

Steve Francis

The Dockyard

I've got 14 of them now. No not children or grandchildren but model boats of various types and sizes. Most of them are in my garage, now called the Dockyard by the family. No room for the car but the 'Dockyard' has a strong work bench and some machine tools and a decent light together with a space heater for the winter nights. It all started when I was eight and, 45 years on, the interest in my hobby is as strong as ever.

Making from scratch takes months or years as many of you will testify, so I now tend to renovate old models or simply buy them if the price is reasonable from owners who say they are too difficult to build, too large, too heavy or who just simply have lost interest. Taking on a model then usually means that all sorts of problems are inherited and many times I wish I had started the whole thing from scratch. The honest owner might tell you that they cannot find the water leak, the radio and speed controller are unreliable or it never did work properly! At least these comments give an indication of the project ahead for the next few months and with it the problems we all experience in model making. But at least its better than decorating the house.

The next insurmountable problem is getting the model into the 'Dockyard' without the wife finding out and I have now run out of suitable excuses. Has any reader experienced the same situation?

Usually the first thing I do is remove all the electrics from the model and connect them up on the work bench in the 'Dockyard', charge the batteries and find out what works and what smokes! Frequently electric motors are not right for the model and rarely have suitable suppressors fitted – vital if problems at sea are to be avoided. Speed controllers can give major problems, so I usually fit new ones from a reputable supplier. No need to spend that much on these items and I can recommend Action Electronics or Electronize for the larger model. More about these suppliers in another issue.

Next comes the paint job and if spraying the model goes wrong then I lose interest very quickly and so its often back to the paint brush. The finish of the boat is critical so no short cuts can be taken at this stage. Many model boats are spoilt because little time is spent on making a decent and presentable stand – essential if exhibitions are to be considered and this is the project on hand for all my models at the present time.

Propellers are for me a subject for experimentation once back on the water. So often, simply a different 'prop' makes such a significant difference to the performance of the model. Don't forget to grease the propeller and rudder shaft. I use Teflon cycle grease from Halfords. Then out with the ammeter to measure the current drain for the selection of suitable batteries, which should be done with the model in the water under load. The choice of radio control is a subject for wide debate but I like 40MHz and a couple of spare channels for later additions like siren horn, navigation and deck lights, sound effects, funnel smoke – and the list goes on.

Often I spend a lot of time sourcing the history of the boat if it's a true scale model: Useful for discussions at club meetings and again for exhibition display. Oh! Don't buy a submarine as an early project as I did – you won't sleep at night!

I am always happy to talk boats so if I can help any member in any way call me at home most evenings. And its bon voyage for the present.

Roland Duffett

Digital Command and Control For Model Railways. **& Why I Use It**

When I resumed an interest in model trains about five years ago, it was after many years of living internationally. The frequent moves, made a layout of my own impracticable.

Travelling meant frequent trips to the States with surreptitious visits to model shops after work. The variety and quality of the available products developed an interest in US prototypes. A pre retirement move to a flat meant that the only available space for a decent size HO layout was to suspend it from the living room ceiling. A ceiling height of about 12 feet allows viewing from below or from a mezzanine to one side. This gives operational access to the tracks.

Digital Command and Control (DCC) simplifies the electrical wiring compared to conventional DC blocks. I needed to minimise the ugly spaghetti beneath a conventional layout. Masses of electrical wiring on display and viewed from underneath, would have made the project unviable.

A demonstration by a N. London dealer indicated that a ZTC system was within my capability and comprehension to install and operate and I thought the installation of the loco decoders would be an interesting challenge (it has been). I accordingly invested in a ZTC 511 master unit and two, loco decoders! I was also pleased that ZTC along with LENZ and Digitrax, were founders of a common standard for DCC which had been adopted by the NMRA.

The DCC system supplies the track with a constant AC voltage (about 17 volts for HO). A decoder in each loco rectifies this to DC to power the motor, lights etc.. The loco decoder receives digital instructions from the control unit, telling it to open and supply DC to the loco motor and start running, forward or reverse. Further instructions tell the decoder to increase speed or to slow down. Up to 128 speed steps are now available to give smooth acceleration. In an initial programming session, each decoder is given a numerical address, usually based upon the last digits of the cab number . This is remembered forever or until you decide to change it. Most decoders have three auxiliary outputs for head-light, tail-light, smoke or whatever. Each output is switchable.

In practice you select the loco you want to run from its cab number, set the direction and speed on the controller, and off she goes. You can then select another loco and set that running. Your first choice continues running until you reselect its number and give it new instructions e.g. speed-up or stop. I can control 3-4 trains at once on my layout.

There is no need for an electrical block system and in theory all you need is two wires from the controller to the layout. In practice you may want to break a DCC layout into a number of power areas to simplify diagnosis of faults and to provide enough power for a large layout. Mine has two power areas, each provided with a five amp. power supply, meaning I have power to run 10-12 locos at once, subject to sufficient operators.

The absence of individual electrical blocks enables me to do things you can never do with a conventional layout. I can manoeuvre two locos together on the same piece of track to make up a consist or separate them at the end of a journey and drive one away

e.g. a helper after climbing a long grade. It also means there are no electrical blocks to safeguard against collisions! - One of the reasons why I only run three trains at once when on my own. Another very nice feature designed into the NMRA standard relates to reverse loops where there is no need to stop and change polarity provided the loop is supplied via two power circuits. Each power booster can check the polarity as it receives a new loco and change polarity automatically.

Fitting the loco decoders is getting easier for American prototypes, at least. Most new releases from Bachmann, Kato and Lifelike have a standard NMRA socket into which you plug a decoder, set the loco address and off you go. Older locos and brass locos do require you to install and solder in place a decoder. This means 7-8 connections for a loco with head and tail light. In HO there is usually plenty of space and tiny decoders are available for N and even Z scale.

The cost of decoders is coming down, especially if bought in bulk. The cost of the master controller and two power boosters is about that of one decent brass loco. No question it's more expensive than a DC system - but it also does a lot more .

After 3 years operation I am a happy railroader. DC operation now seems restrictive because one is limited to the electrical blocks selected. Incidentally, there is much less need to clean the tracks with DCC, because of the 17v. AC power supply. On the negative side, switch installation and wheel alignment is more critical. It is important to minimise derailments and short circuits, which shut the system down immediately - a safety precaution given the 17v. 5 amp power supplied to the track continuously.

I am convinced this is the start of the future for model railways. Already excellent sound decoders are available from Soundtraxx and most suppliers offer decoders to run switches and lineside accessories. Roco offer a working HO crane! In the USA there are now four DCC manufacturers, with Lenz in Europe. The NMRA standard means that any loco equipped with a decoder will run on mine or any Lenz, Digitrax, NCE or Wangrow system. There is an enormous development programme over there to develop the system and add new products.

In my view anyone planning a new layout should seriously evaluate DCC . Much of the higher initial cost can then be offset by savings in the purchase of electrical switches, wire, and the time taken to install all this where multiple cabs are planned. We can and should embrace the future!

Stephen Black

The opinions and views expressed in this News Sheet are not necessarily those of the Society or editor.

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