
THE COUPLER

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Two Rutland trains exercise trackage rights on Lou Sassi's well known HO scale Boston & Maine West Hoosic Division. The diesel-powered is leaving Williamstown and the steamer is headed for Bennington, both crossing the Sacco River. This layout is just one of the attractions in store for the upcoming NER Fall Convention, the Commodore Vanderbilt, hosted by Hudson-Berkshire Division. See the latest information starting on page 7. PHOTO BY LOU SASSI

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THE COUPLER

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BY KEN MAY NER President



I would like to start this column with a question: **What do you expect from the Northeastern Region of the NMRA and what do you want from the NER?**

The recent change in structure of the NMRA which resulted in eliminating region and division 'membership' has, I believe, placed more of a focus on region and division activities. It is certainly easier for a member to get to division activities and establish relationships with other modelers at the division level. In addition, it seems that the 'success' or 'lack of success' is related to the strength of leadership at the local level.

It is difficult for many of us to establish and maintain the same kind of relationships at the Region and National level for a number of reasons. The NER and NMRA do not have as many meetings as an active Division, the distances to travel are greater, often requiring the additional expenses of housing and meals. If you can only attend a Regional or National event once every few years it is hard to develop those relationships. Strong relationships increase a sense of belonging or ownership and reinforce the feeling of value. As Editor

Phil Monat pointed out in the last issue of *The Coupler*, only 33 members from a membership pool of about 1,900 voted in the NER election last spring and that is a pretty strong indicator that many of us don't have a strong sense of ownership.

The NER essentially provides three services to NMRA members in the Northeastern Region: *The Coupler*, Regional Conventions and the NER website. The NER does facilitate some other programs such as the Achievement Program and membership information to the Divisions, but that is not directly visible to the membership. About two years ago the NER made a commitment to upgrade *The Coupler*. The editorial team headed by Phil Monat has made great progress at updating both the look and the content of *The Coupler*. While we are still limited to sixteen pages per issue for the immediate future, we are still discussing how we can make the newsletter even more relevant to our members. I am sure that Phil and his staff are open to suggestions from the members.

Regional Conventions remain a wonderful opportunity for our members to realize the benefits of joining with fellow modelers to enjoy a weekend of model railroading activities. A committee lead by Vice-

President Paul Allard is scheduled to report back to the Board in April with recommendations that will make our convention program more in tune with member needs. The goal is to make our Region Convention program more rewarding and accessible to the members improving attendance and providing better opportunities to build relationships with Region members.

The Region website is old and tired. The Board recognizes that fact. A committee lead by Mike Roqué has been formed and is charged with reporting to the Board in April a set of recommendations that will make our website more valuable and responsive to our members. Both the content and presentation will be addressed and the most critical issue to be solved is to simplify the manner in which information on the web site is managed and updated.

Both of these programs—conventions and web site—can benefit from your input. Unless you, our members, let us know what activities or information would make either the convention program or the website of particular value to you, our volunteers will only be making guesses as to the activities or information you want. Why not volunteer to give us a hand?

—Ken May, NER President

FROM THE EDITORS

How I joined the NMRA and still had fun

I joined the NMRA sometime in 2002 after an invitation from a member of Metro North Division whom I kept running into at local train shows. I had been active in model railroading for many years, and participated in some NMRA activities upstate, but never took the time to join. I can't seem to remember how I joined, but I think one of the division members asked if I'd be willing to present a clinic. That went well, and I met a lot of nice people that day. I don't quite remember how it happened, but somehow I got swept up into planning the 2005 NER fall regional convention in Stamford (the "Metropolitan Limited"). I think it started when I said, "Hey, I can design a logo, if you'd like." Before I knew it, I was serving on committees and wearing many hats. Soon after, I joined the team that took over design and production of *The Coupler*. I don't quite remember how that happened either. I think I said, "I might be able to help with

that." Obviously, I don't mind helping out (from what I can remember)! Am I one of these superhuman figures some of our NER membership talks about in hushed tones—social and outgoing, able to rise above the chaos and take charge? Hardly.

I joined the NMRA to meet fellow modelers and have fun. I am always dismayed at the number of disappointed members who write each month to tell us how the NMRA failed them in some way. They grudgingly send in their dues each year, muttering under their breath how the organization is focused on so-called "super modelers" who model an exact moment in time and care only about Advancement Program and their MMR.

Is someone holding an imaginary gun to our heads? I am not a "super modeler," and I'm not super-human. I do not gain inner strength from helping others. Instead, I've met a lot of nice people, seen a lot of interesting layouts, and learned some new

things along the way. I'm not interested in the AP program right now, and no one has had an unkind word towards me or my models (I haven't built a model in a couple of years, actually). I don't go around judging or mocking other people's work, neither does anyone else I know. I have fun. How can we help you have fun?

The NMRA is about fellowship and learning, not forcing everyone to get MMR. If you're feeling left out, get involved locally! Would you like to learn more and possibly improve your skills? Make suggestions to your division officials if there are topics you wish were explored at the next meeting. He may even ask you to volunteer to help realize that goal. You could make a difference (and you don't have to volunteer as often as I seem to)! Don't know where to start? Please e-mail me, and I'll try to help you out, or steer you to someone who can.

—Otto M. Vondrak, Art Director
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Railway Post Office

Letters giving interesting information, corrections, or expressing your views on model railroading are welcome here. Mark them "To the Editor" and forward to Phil Monat, Editor.

COMPILED BY THE COUPLER STAFF

Want more education? Just ask!

Relating to Peter Smith's letter in the last issue, "Education" is quite a generalization. Achievement Program is "Education" in a big way. Look at the non-craftsmen categories - Dispatcher, Official, Volunteer and Author. All of them are a learning experience no matter what your background is. What would you like to receive as education? History? Current events in the world of railroading? Explanation of New concepts? Like DCC? Or...?

Art Ellis brings up really valid problems. Being an "outsider" and shy and fairly conscious of not having the money demanded by dealers for almost any car or loco or even paints. So you go to a meet and are disappointed that no one is running trains [Some times it is really hard for the organizers to rent enough space to have trains running].

One of the neatest ways one Division had to solve that problem back in DC days was for everyone to bring several lengths of track and maybe a turnout.

The Officials shoved several tables together and just laid the track on the tables. You brought a loco and some cars or not and soon trains were running.

The meet I attended had 3 sets of tables with track and trains and they were looking for more tables. Some of the more limber people put their track on the floors and still more trains were running. One really nice fun filled day.

I've been in NMRA since 1961 and "played" with trains 15 or more years before I could afford NMRA. I am one of the shyest people you'll ever meet. I didn't know squat about building kits or laying track or anything. So I started to ask people at a meet. I had a set of plans but didn't know how to even start. A couple of men sat down with me and answered my really dumb questions. I left feeling as though I now had a chance to build a car correctly. Came back at next meet with the car partially put together and they politely showed me how to finish the car. I never

did finish that car but later was able to build better kits!

We live in a very hostile environment in USA today. I really can understand a shy person being unable to enjoy anything. A Flea market is a daunting experience for me. Makes me sweat as soon as I enter the door. But I have learned to just plough through. After 30 min or so I usually see someone I have seen before and go talk with him. Sometimes I'll be home way before my wife expected me as the press of bodies and general noise level has just overcome me.

Art, believe me, go to a division meet and ask questions. Very few men will turn you down. This hobby really can be a fun filled experience.

—Rick Shoup

Many NER members contribute to outreach

I would like to dispute a couple of Peter Smith's points:

1) "The NMRA just has to expand its horizon beyond model building and the emphasis on AP and MMR...."

That is a rather narrow view of NMRA activities and doesn't give much credit to the things NMRA does in standards (Douglas Crate, Jr.'s point), clinics at all levels of the organization, historical work of the Kalmbach Library, publications or the other facets of the organization. Also, those that are MMR's didn't get there without some contribution to the hobby and fellow hobbyists other than building models.

2) "Consider more emphasis on education and outreach..."

The implication is no one is making a good enough effort now. There ARE people trying to do this at all levels of the NMRA. Some of us do participate in "The World's Greatest Hobby" program. Some Divisions and club sponsor adult (read: family) education programs on model railroading. People volunteer for the Boy Scout Merit Badge program. Some do some pretty creative and selfless things that don't always get publicized.

The Bedford (NH) Boomers have run a donations only, non-commercial show for 24 years and sponsors layout at a local library and two veteran's homes. The Great Falls Model Railroad Club (Lewiston, ME) not only does two adult education courses a year, it has a public access TV program ("Train Time") with about 135 half-hour episodes that are available to about a third of the population of the state of Maine. The Amherst Society of Model Railroad Engineers sponsors an annual train show, but a lot of the income is donated to railroad historical preservation projects and other worthy efforts. These are only examples I know about in my corner of the world and they ALL involve NER members.

There are local outreach and education programs, the NER is trying to act as a conduit to spread good ideas, we have the encouragement and a small amount of money from NMRA. The important point is that ideas tend to die on the vine without local support. I think it is fair to say both NER and the Divisions are willing to publicize these activities that promote the hobby (I am not suggesting every train show gets free advertising).

Peter, the emphasis you seem to want comes from people doing work: show us those willing to do the work and we will support them. Nobody that's doing the work that is being done now is a paid staffer and very few expenses are reimbursed. If you want to re-focus the activities, volunteer and get others to volunteer to get it done!

—Larry Cannon

Why waste a stamp?

In answer to Phil Monat's editorial on elections, the people I spoke to did not want to vote in a one-person election. Why waste a stamp they all said, the guy on the ballot was getting in, like it or not.

The ballot I think should also be printed on the last page so it's not hard to tear off and it would include your mailing

label. Maybe even with fold marks so it can be folded stapled and mailed easily. But that's my thoughts.

—Tom Wortmann

All together now?

In the past, it has been my experience (as well as others) that the NMRA want YOU as a member, but otherwise wants YOU to keep your nose out of OUR organization. Believe me, people do read you column.

—Charlie Reynolds

Can a greying organization innovate?

I don't know if you've noticed, but the hobby is graying. If my Division is a microcosm, we haven't gotten very many new members recently. And some of those that we have gotten are already as 'grey' as the rest of us. Most of the Division membership has been retreaded through the ranks I don't know how many times, and we want to get back to modeling. So what you may be seeing is more exhaustion than apathy, and that includes getting enough people to step up into leadership positions. We still have two unfilled Directorships, after a year and a half. One reason I can take time to write to you is the weather - it's been a wet winter; don't have to shovel, can't work in the gardens, so I can spend a little more time on the computer - between bouts of building railroads (models at 12" to the foot as well as smaller scales)

As far as relevance—what was the last big thing that NMRA has done, as a part of its core business? I don't think that conventions are 'core business', but Standards and Recommended Practices are. How long has it been since a new standard has

As far as relevance—what was the last big thing that NMRA has done, as a part of its core business? I don't think that conventions are 'core business', but Standards and Recommended Practices are. How long has it been since a new standard has come out?

—Rolf Johnson

come out? Revisions—yes, but something new? It appears that the Industry is taking the lead, or the hobby itself is making standards determinations; e.g. Bachmann set the standard for On30. Is there even an NMRA ratification of that standard? How about Sn2? For a while, there was discussion about N gauge or HOn30 gauge. The Hobby that's interested has selected HOn30. Did NMRA even know this was happening? What happens when On20 and On18 really get going? There are some of us already working these scales already. The last big thing to come from NMRA is DCC standards. That's BIG, and welcome indeed. But are they too getting exhausted?

A lot of questions, a lot to think about, and how is the hobby going to attract the electronic/virtual generations?

—Rolf Johnson

Focus on the modeler's needs first

Letters to the editor in the Jan-Mar 2007 *Coupler*, though few in number, may be trying to tell us something. While nearly all volunteer organizations have a relatively small core of hard-working, dedicated individuals who hold the organization together, those organizations are likely to have a much larger group of members who are more passive, perhaps apathetic. It appears that this situation applies to the NMRA, its Regions and Divisions. It is unrealistic to expect to change the NMRA to an association whose entire membership is highly charged, motivated and very active. After all, its members are volunteers in a non-critical endeavor of the hobby of model railroading and who have jobs to perform and families to support.

The hobby is made up of modelers, each with their own priorities/preferences, whether it's the scale they choose, modeling a prototype or free-lancing, featuring scenery, track work, structures or signaling, etc on their layout, or through trains or switching, DC or DCC—the list could go on.

Modelers bring to the hobby a wide range of skills from museum-quality layouts to layouts that fall well short of that quality. Some modelers thrive on being part of a club while others prefer to work alone. These are just some of the characteristics of model railroaders, but they

show we are part of a rather diverse group that can be a challenge to unify. There are many differences among modelers, but note there is one common characteristic--each one is a human being.

It is a fine line to walk, but it appears an "attitude adjustment" is needed in the NMRA to address the issue of member apathy. How might this change be made? Here are some ideas:

1) The NMRA needs to de-emphasize its attention to the 'crème de la crème' of the hobby by promoting excellence awards, featuring articles on museum-quality layouts and otherwise hyping members whose work is outstanding but likely beyond most modelers. I tip my hat to Master Model Railroaders as they have certainly earned their awards. I know a few of them and they are good people. From comments read in past months though, NMRA's continuing emphasis on these awards is turning some modelers off. I realize that such a change will 'gore the ox' of some members, but change is needed to address apparently apathetic membership.

2) NMRA needs to recognize that this hobby (and indeed the NMRA) exists not for those new locomotives, DCC, intricately designed rolling stock and structures, but for human beings—the modelers! It's very tempting and easy in this hobby of 'boys and their toys' to focus on the 'toys' and overlook the more important aspect, the 'boys.' The hobby is supposed to be fun—simple as that! Who cares if a modeler's layout doesn't have #20 curved crossovers, doesn't have an advanced control system designed by MIT, who didn't base his layout on conditions as of 2:37 PM on August 14, 1947?

3) Recognize that modelers like all human beings, need to be welcomed and respected in the hobby. We've read comments, from those with the courage to write, of their bad experiences at conventions from finding conventions unfriendly to receiving condescending remarks from other modelers. Probably each of us has experienced the "thrill" of encountering a modeler who fancies himself as "The Guardian of the Truth" and who points out an incorrect number of rivets on a bridge, criticizes weathering techniques on rolling



Railway Post Office

Continued...

stock, finds fault with scenery, operations—you name it. If the modeler enjoys what he's doing, either compliment him/her on finding enjoyment, or keep quiet. If the modeler wants your comments, let him first ask for them.

4) Recognize that the critical element in this hobby is the modelers themselves and emphasize the human aspects of model railroading--some might call this fellowship among modelers.

5) Recognize that the NMRA's focus should be to serve (read: be useful to) the majority of its members. I quickly acknowledge the invaluable service to

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—Stan Jordan

members by the NMRA in creating standards for track work, rolling stock, DCC decoders and more, but more remains to be done for modelers.

6) Have a hospitality group at every convention, train show and NMRA meeting at each level to greet each member/visitor, offer assistance and make each person feel welcome. Some representatives of the host organization should circulate around to help people find meeting rooms and answer questions.

7) In addition to clinics at conventions and shows, have a chat-session for modelers to exchange ideas, provide comments on how the hobby can be improved, etc. Have a couple of host reps. there to lead the discussions and take notes for follow-up action as needed. Deliberately conduct

the sessions so as to be non-intimidating to attendees. Consider having separate sessions for each scale. Topics could include:

- "What would you like to see changed in the hobby?"
- "How could the NMRA Region and Division become more useful to you?"
- "What modeling techniques work and which don't?"
- "Should you consider DCC over DC?"
- "Good/not-so-good features of the various brands of DCC"
- "How could model railroad magazines be more useful to you?"

8) The national publication, *Scale Rails*, is the most visible and most effective means to communicate with members and is the 'face' most modelers see of the NMRA. We've seen recent improvements in the magazine, but further changes should be made to make it more useful to the majority of modelers:

1) In one issue per year, give credit where it is due and concentrate that issue on the Achievement and Master Model Railroader Programs. Include one or two articles with photos on outstanding layouts and provide information on the modeler, perhaps through a brief interview, to discuss items such as his concept of his layout, what he is most pleased with, why he chose certain construction techniques, what he overcame for problems and how he did it. If the article contains photos of attractive features such as a tough truss bridge, a steel trestle, roundhouse, station bldg, diesel fueling facilities, provide the manufacture and product number of the item so modelers can obtain one for themselves.

2) In the remaining issues, focus on the needs of the majority of modelers by providing info. useful to them such as: pick a modeling material (could be foam, flex-track, weathering chalks, etc) and do a feature article on it with one or more modelers who can discuss in detail how to use it. If there are choices of the particular material, list them and advise which is best and

why.

Do the same thing with a new locomotive or line of rolling stock, kits for any kind of product, various brands of DCC, signaling systems, wire, etc. Have one of the modeler's critique the product, specifying what he likes about it and what he doesn't like.

These articles shouldn't be of the "We never met a product we didn't like" approach, but help the modelers by specifying if the product has flaws, what they are. The result would be better-informed modelers and, hopefully, improved products.

Institute a column, hosted by a group of skilled modelers, which would provide answers to modeling questions sent in by members. (I know one of the hobby magazines has something like this, but can't NMRA do a better job of helping modelers by sharing their knowledge?)

Pick a product carried by prototype railroads. Do a feature story on how the railroads handle that product from origin to destination. Then follow-up with how that service could be modeled with diagrams and photos.

Those are some ideas. My comments should not be taken as "throwing rocks" but offered as constructive suggestions.

What do you think?

—Stan Jordan

Broaden our horizons, update the web site

Mr. Monat, in your recent editorial you wonder if "we are a group of passive, apathetic modelers." Some of us may be introverted as Mr. Ellis suggested in his letter but I do not believe for one moment that we are a passive bunch. A passive individual would be swayed by outside forces and change their beliefs to conform to those beliefs. I see no evidence of this occurring in the members of the region. As for us being apathetic I agree that as a group we may be but I think you should be asking why we have become apathetic. Apathy is a lack of interest or concern. In the case of

the region is it a result of members feeling that they do not belong to the organization?

We all joined the NMRA and the NER Region for a reason. Those reasons are as diverse as the individuals that make up the membership of our region. I joined because I wanted to improve my modeling skills and the members of the Central New York Division made me feel welcomed and openly shared their experience with me when I attended a few of their meetings as a guest. They did not judge my skill, or lack of skill, as a modeler but rather encouraged me to try new things and to take risks with my modeling. The division leadership provides a range of clinics that meet the needs of all members, insure we all know what is happening, what their reasoning is for the decisions they make, listen when we provided suggestions and either act on our suggestions or provided us with a good reason why the suggestion will not be acted on. Above all else they engage the membership through their communication with us. I am an active member of the division and very much feel that I belong there. I cannot say that I feel the same way about the region.

I do not mean to imply that the region has not welcomed me or made me feel unwelcome or that the leadership is not doing a good job. I just do not know much about the region and do not feel engaged. I have not had any personal contact with the regions leadership or with other divisions within the region. I admit it is cost prohibitive for the regions leaders to travel to division meetings to meet with the members and it is cost prohibitive for region members to travel to other divisions meetings. There is a means by which the region leaders can communicate with the members in a timely manner. While the columns in *The Coupler*, which is delivered quarterly, are informative, the regions web site provides a means by which region business can be discussed and feedback gathered from the members on a weekly basis if desired. This timely exchange of information will begin to engage the membership in the business of the region and share the experiences of other members

"I have monitored the web site over the past few years and I believe that the web site is under utilized. Other than the updating of some directories, posting information for the conventions and the placement of the most recent edition of *The Coupler*, which is a positive step forward, there has been little information placed there."

—Edward Olszewski

through photographs. I have monitored the web site over the past few years and I believe that the web site is under utilized. Other than the updating of some directories, posting information for the conventions and the placement of the most recent edition of *The Coupler*, which is a positive step forward, there has been little information placed there.

As I said, we all joined this organization for a reason. I also believe that we all want to feel like we belong to the region whether we enjoy modeling in a club or would rather be Lone Wolf modelers like Mr. Crate. I encourage you to find out why we joined and then use that information to setup programs and *Coupler* columns to meet our needs. The members in the region have a range of experience from the new modeler to accomplished prototype modeler producing museum quality models. Why not have columns in *The Coupler* to address the needs of each group? Use our web site to provide additional information to support the columns. I am not a prototype modeler but enjoy reading articles about building highly detailed models because they help me to improve my knowledge of the hobby and in some way my skills as a modeler.

Other things I would suggest be done is to place the regions constitution and by-laws on the web site. These two documents, more than anything else, will convey to members and visitors the guiding principles of the region, how the region is structured and how we operate. The photos section on the web site has not been updat-

ed since 2000 according to the date on the bottom of the page. In fact, the only photo that was there no longer loads. This page provides the convention committee with the means to provide all region members, especially those who could not attend a convention, with a photo story of what went on at the convention. There is no cost and the only limitation I am aware of may be the total size of the files placed on the web site. If the company hosting our web site has no size limitation why not make full use of it. If there is a limitation then post photos for two weeks then switch them out for other photos. There are limitations to the number of pages published in *The Coupler* and therefore you have a limitation to the number of photos you publish. Use the web site for additional photos that could not be published. I would like to have seen more than the one photo published of the wonderful coal dock built by Rich Walz. Use the web site for these additional photos and include some close up detail shots. I hope that Rich can be persuaded to write an article about the planning and building of the coal dock in a future issue of *The Coupler*.

Our hobby has many facets to it with modeling being one of them. We all need to understand that we are a group of individuals looking for different things from our hobby. We all do not aspire to build highly detailed models or large operation oriented layouts but I believe we all want to improve our skills in an area of the hobby which interests us. This diversity does not make the job of our leaders at the divisional, regional or national level any easier. They need to make our organization all things to all people and this will not be an easy job. I challenge each of you to do one thing this year to become more engaged in the region. Whether you supply a photo of a division meeting for the web site, communicate your suggestions to the leadership and members of the region or write an article for *The Coupler*. When our leadership succeeds we all benefit and begin to feel that we belong to the organization a little more.

—Edward Olszewski

Letters giving interesting information, corrections, or expressing your views on model railroading are welcome here. Address all correspondence to Phil Monat, Editor. We reserve the right to edit letters for clarity and space restrictions. This special web edition of *Coupler* 226 has all the letters reproduced complete and unedited.



CONNECTICUT-WILLIMANTIC

April 22: The Connecticut Eastern Railroad Museum (affiliated with the National Railway Historical Society) will sponsor a Model Train and Die Cast show at the Windham High School, 355 High Street, Willimantic, Ct. Hours are 10:00AM to 3:00PM. Free Parking, Food on site, Handicapped Accessible. Donation: Adults \$5.00; Seniors (62 yrs+) \$4.00; Children (8-12) \$1.00; Children (Under 8)-Free. For information contact Joseph Sokol 1-860-872-2240 or e-mail joseph_sokol@msn.com

GREEN MOUNTAIN DIVISION www.greenmountainmra.com

Division meeting schedule:

March 4, 2007
May 6, 2007
September 16, 2007
November 4, 2007

All meetings are scheduled to be held at the Richmond, VT Elementary School. Please see web site at www.greenmountainmra.com.

GARDEN STATE DIVISION www.trainweb.org/nergsg

April 22: The Garden State Division will host it's Spring meet at The Model Railroad Club, Union NJ. at 12 noon. Clinics, judging, white elephant table and a light lunch will be served. \$5.00 Donation at the door. We will be asking layout owners to open some home for us.

October 27: The Garden State Division is scheduling our Fall meeting in conjunction with the New York Society of Model Engineer's (NYSME) Fall All Scale Swap Meet in St. Joseph's RC School, East Rutherford, NJ. Their swap meet starts at 9 am and our GSD meet will start at noon. This will be the GSD's first meet held in conjunction with the NYSOME's annual swap meet. The GSD will have our usual agenda of clinics and model judging.

METRO NORTH DIVISION www.metronorthnmra.org

March 17: Metro North Division meeting in the Trumbull, CT Library, clinic presentations by Carl Liba and Henry Freeman, plus a member's model showcase. Local members will have their layouts open for visit after the meeting.

May 5: Division meeting in Stamford, CT at 10 AM. Details will be on the Metro North Division web site: www.metronorthnmra.org or contact Brain Sullivan at (203) 329-8088

SEACOAST DIVISION www.trainweb.org/seacoastdiv

April 19: Meeting of the Great Falls Model Railroad Club in Monmouth, ME., with operating sessions on April 21. Contact Terry King at tkping@adelphia.net or (207-933-2477).

April 28: Spring Model Railroad Show, Mt. Ararat High School, U.S. Route 201, Topsham, Maine. Sponsor: Great Falls Model Railroad Club. For more information, please call (207) 933-2477

August 11: Saturday. Gorham, N.H. Gorham Historical Society will stage several events to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the town's Grand Trunk Western Railway station. FMI: Mary Jane Ames at (603) 466-2085.

August 29 - September 1: 27th Annual Narrow Gauge Modelers Convention based at the Holiday Inn By The Bay, Spring Street, Portland, Maine. Clinics, tours, and more. Please contact Martha Sharp Registrar (207) 639-4462; or visit www.27thnarrowgaugeconvention.com.

HUB DIVISION www.hubdiv.org

April 20: Railfun Night. 8pm, Cambridge School of Weston, MA. HUB requests a \$3 donation for adults, free for children, and that buys you refreshments plus all the parts and materials for the clinics. At these meetings, a clinic is usually given concerning some model railroad or railroad topic. Members or invited clinicians often give the clinics. There is also plenty of time for members to socialize and discuss hot model railroad topics. Anyone can give a clinic. Contact the Railfun Night Coordinator if you would like to schedule yourself for giving a clinic. Please visit the website for details.

CANNONBALL DIVISION - LONG ISLAND

June 30: West Island Model RR Club (Farmingdale, LI, NY) Fourth Annual Invitational Operating session. This is an invitation for you to participate in a great day of model railroad operations on a large model railroad recently featured in Kalmbach's Great Model Railroads of 2007. There will be two operating sessions: Morning - 9:30 AM to 1 PM and Afternoon - 2:00 PM to 5:30 PM Where: At the club headquarters- 188 Merritts Rd, Farmingdale NY 11735. Rear basement entrance. Visit the club's website: www.wimodelrrclub.com or e-mail westislandclub@yahoo.com

NEARBY: NIAGARA FRONTIER REGION "FLOWER CITY FLYER" NFR SPRING CONVENTION: March 16-18, 2007, Rochester, NY. There's still time! Join us for a long weekend of model railroading in Rochester, New York, hosted by Lakeshores Division NFR and the RIT Model Railroad Club! Clinics, layout tours, prototype tours, banquet and more. Visit www.nfr-nmra.org for the latest information and updated registration packet.

NUTMEG DIVISION www.nutmegdivision.com

May 11: 7:30 PM at the Wethersfield Police Station Community Room, Wethersfield, CT. Show and tell and a clinic on building light-weight modules presented by John Campbell and Ken May.

HUDSON BERKSHIRE DIVISION

April 27: Business Meeting of the HBD at 9pm during the visit to Jack Smolik's layout, where special elections will be held. Also a visit to Dick Elwell's layout.

May 4: A visit to Marvin Kahn's layout. For more information contact Greg Whittle (518) 785-8439

October 18-21: Commodore Vanderbilt NER Regional Convention. Clinics, layout tours, prototype tours, banquet and more. Contact Diane Steel at yankeefloral@yahoo.com.

HUDSON VALLEY DIVISION

Contact: Wayne Karns, (845) 216-3984 or e-mail waynerep@verizon.net.

Next Division meeting not scheduled yet, but these activities within the area are proposed:

Delaware & Ulster Railroad – www.durr.org
They start running the end of May and they're just 45 miles from Exit 19 on the Thruway (Kingston). Ride is from Arkville to Roxbury. You might also want to look into the Rip Van Winkle Flyer Dinner Train and the Belleayre Music Festival as a way to finish the day.

Catskill Mountain – www.catskillmtrailroad.com
They start running the end of May and they're just 22 miles from Exit 19 on the Thruway (Kingston). Ride is from Phoenicia to Boiceville. At Phoenicia you will have a chance to visit the Empire State Railway Museum in the depot.

Trolley Museum of New York – www.tmny.org
They start running the end of May and they're just a few miles from Exit 19 on the Thruway (Kingston). Excursion ride runs 1.5 miles from the foot of Broadway in downtown Kingston (Rondout) to picnic grounds on the shore of the Hudson River (Kingston Point). Picnic tables are available at the Hudson River and the West Strand Park (Rondout Creek) trolley stops.

Northeastern Region NMRA Website www.trainweb.org/northeasternregion



Needing extra help to prepare his layout in time for convention visitors, Bob Hamm enlists the help of Bob Hamm, Bob Hamm, and Bob Hamm for a special quantum physics construction session. While wormhole technology has not yet been perfected, the members of Hudson Berkshire Division are working overtime to bring us a great NER regional convention! PHOTO BY TONY STEELE

Commodore Vanderbilt Convention Update

Get ready to go “back to the future” this October in Albany

By Tony Steele

Hudson Berkshire Division

“Check the flux capacitor and set the time circuits, Marty!” As we gaze out over the delightful Valentine’s Day vignettes of snowy surprises, the Hudson Berkshire Division continues its preparations for the NER Fall Convention. Clinic and layout offerings are still being added and tweaked, in hopes of providing serious resonance with your “Inner Modeler.” It’s time to let that rascal out and enjoy its sense of mischief. Explore the layout hosts’ achievements and inventiveness, the clinicians’ expertise and deviousness, and the convention volunteers’ generosity and ingeniousness.

Coordination is being pursued with two other local organizations, hosting celebrations scheduled close to ours. The Bridge Line Historical Society is holding their Albany Convention (BLHS Blast 2007) on October 12-14. The Rensselaer Model Railroad Society is marking their current layout’s 35th Anniversary on Saturday, October 20. For a few dedicated individuals, some synchronous scheduling of spare time may avoid tortuous “either/or” decisions. *Continued...*

LATEST CLINIC UPDATES: General Clinics are still being arranged. Suffice it to say, when the dust settles, the scheduling (3 or 4 rooms times 2 or 3 days) will probably resemble the usual game of “Clinic Twister” [NOTE: ★ indicates a new addition]:

- Dominic Bourgeois** (D&H Locomotive and Car Modeling)
- Tony Bucca** (Digital Photography & Backdrops)
- ★ **Jim Cesare** (Architecture in Model Railroading)
- ★ **Gardner Cross** (Rubber Rocks/“Hands-On”)
- Jeff English** (NYC Box Car Prototype)
- ★ **Ken Goslett** (D&H’s Napierville Jct. Ry. Prototype)
- ★ **Bob Hamm** (Helix Design & Construction)
- ★ **Jean Harra** (Schoharie Valley Ry. Industries)
- ★ **Jen Hathaway** (Sports Massage)
- ★ **Paul Hoffman** (DCC Locomotive Fine-Tuning Software)
- Mike Ledley** (G-scale Kitbashing)
- Mike McNamara** (Vermont/New Hampshire Layout Design)
- ★ **Mike Rose** (Northeast Prototype Modeling)
- Jim Six** (Locomotive and Car Kitbashing)
- Rich Smith** (Urban Structure Modeling)
- ★ **Diane Steele** (Banquet Floral Centerpieces/“Hands-On”)
- ★ **Gustav Verderber** (Custom Layout & Backdrop Photography)

The “Hands-On” Workshops may be limited to 25-30 persons for the Rubber Rocks Clinic and 15 persons for the Banquet Floral Centerpieces Clinic. No material charges are proposed for either. Participants may take their Rubber Rocks work home; the centerpieces, however, will be featured at the Saturday evening banquet, before they are rededicated to some lucky attendee.

**JOIN US FOR THE NER FALL CONVENTION
COMMODORE VANDERBILT
OCTOBER 18-21, 2007 • ALBANY, NEW YORK**

COMMODORE VANDERBILT



**OCTOBER 18-21, 2007
ALBANY, NEW YORK**

The Guided Bus Tours (extra-fare) are still as described before. Self-Guided Tours are also being adjusted for the model railroad Layout Visits and Operations. Keep abreast of changes in the offerings via the Convention portion of the NER Website, which will have updated info and some photo “teasers”. For example:

As can be seen in the Iron Gorge & Western photo of the “Four Bobs”, we are quadrupling our efforts to have twice as much ready as is normally possible with single-mindedness! [To see them pour out of the rented Clone Car during Colorado Prototype-Research excursions is really something to behold.]

Meanwhile, back at the Steeles’ layout, a potential lack of scale crud on the cement plant components is being alleviated with precise stain, rust, and “glop” applications. Recycling of former layout sections is taking place, like scenes from a Cirque de Soleil inverted pyramid performance. Now if only the new helices and mainline trackage can fall into place by convention time!

Some other fine layouts have joined the fray. Bill Duffe’s B&M has previously graced the pages of a Kalmbach annual. Bill McChesney’s has been augmented (since its publication) with a new section featuring the Jersey City LV docks and float terminals. The Schoharie Valley Model Railroad Club has come forward, in place of the Schenectady Model Railroad Club (which regrettably had to be dissolved).

Winter snows should be melting by the time you read this... it’s never too early to plan your convention attendance. Mark your calendars and join us in Albany for a weekend of model railroading you won’t soon forget! ■

LAYOUT TOURS AND OPERATING SESSIONS: The following hosts are continuing their collaboration with us. Below is an updated guide including layout identity, scale, past magazine documentation, and location. [NOTE: ★ indicates a new addition]:

FRIDAY NIGHT - MOHAWK RIVER & SOUTH

Jim Cesare’s NYC – Albany (HO) [Niskayuna, NY]
Andy Clermont’s Rutland O&LC (HO) [Albany, NY]
Dick Davis’s ATSF Cajon Pass (HO) [6/04 RMJ; Schenectady, NY]
John McBride’s Crown Point & Hammondville (G Indoors) [Clifton Park, NY]
★ **Bill McChesney’s Lehigh Valley** (HO) [3/98 RMC; Schenectady, NY]
Ken Nelson’s Poco Valley (HO) [7/94, 1/91 MR; 10/80 RMC; 2/00 BULL; Scotia, NY]
Vic Roman’s NYC Hudson Div. (HO) [Schenectady, NY]
Lou Sassi’s West Hoosic Div., B&M (HO) [96, 99 GMR; 7/88 MR; Charlton, NY]
Jack Wright’s Schoharie Valley Railway (HO) [96 GMR; Glenville, NY]

SUNDAY – SARATOGA COUNTY & NORTH [AND OUTLYING]

Tony Bucca’s Adirondack Br. (HO) [Greenfield, NY]
Paul Delasco’s Boston & Albany (O) [Lenoxdale, MA]
★ **Bill Duffe’s B&M** (HO) [98 GMR; Easthampton, MA]
Dick Elwell’s Hoosac Valley (HO) [f. 10/90 MR; 96 GMR; Adams, MA]
Glens Falls Club Layouts (HO, N, O, G) [Glens, Falls, NY]
Bob Hamm’s Iron Gorge & Western (HO) [f. 5/85, 7/85 MR; Saratoga Springs, NY]
Paul Hoffman’s ATSF Albuquerque Div. (HO) [Mechanicville, NY]
Mike Ledley’s A&LM (G) [8/06 MR; Duaneburg, NY]
Henry Propst’s NYC Mohawk Div. (HO) [Burnt Hills, NY]
★ **Schoharie Valley Model RR Club** (HO, N, O) [Cobleskill, NY]
Rich Smith’s Milwaukee Road (HO) [12/06 MR; Saratoga Springs, NY]
Jack Smolik’s Not-So-Great-Eastern (O) [Johnstown, NY]
Diane & Tony Steele’s D&H/Rutland (HO) [f. 1-5/89 RMC; 10-11/99 RMJ; Waterford, NY]
Kevin Surman’s PRR/CNJ NY&LBr (HO) [Saratoga Springs, NY]
Marcel Zucchini’s Saratoga Union (HO, G) [Saratoga Springs, NY]

Layout Operations are still being scheduled. When dates become a little less dynamic, information on operating positions, control and communication systems for each site will be collected and shared.

THURSDAY NIGHT OPERATIONS

Jim Cesare’s NYC/Albany (HO) [Niskayuna, NY]
Dick Elwell’s Hoosac Valley (HO) [Adams, MA]
John McBride’s Crown Point & Hammondville (G Indoors) [Clifton Park, NY]
Ken Nelson’s Poco Valley (HO) [Scotia, NY]
Henry Propst’s NYC Mohawk Div. (HO) [Burnt Hills, NY]
Lou Sassi’s B&M West Hoosic Div. (HO) [Charlton, NY]

FRIDAY OPERATIONS

Bill Duffe’s B&M (HO) [Easthampton, MA]
Dick Elwell’s Hoosac Valley (HO) [Adams, MA]
Henry Propst’s NYC Mohawk Div. (HO) [Burnt Hills, NY]

SUNDAY OPERATIONS

Mike Ledley’s A&LM (G) [Duaneburg, NY]

Please understand that the above intentions are subject to ongoing review, by the hosts and organizers, and even last-minute revisions.



Forms? Matrices? Best practices? Where does one begin? Bob Hamm helps us break it down and understand it's not that hard!

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

We break down the model contest for the newcomer

By **Bob Hamm, MMR**
NER Contest Chairman

Why would anybody in his right mind...? **The Good:** It's a lot of fun! The model contest is a very enjoyable convention activity and a great way to improve your modeling skills. It provides an opportunity to share your modeling expertise and receive recognition for those many hours of work you put into your model. It also affords the opportunity to earn merit awards, which are an important part of the achievement program.

It's not for everybody...! **The Bad:** There are people who simply don't care for it, and there have been letters to the editors over the years to that effect. Some object to the competitive nature of the contest. For those folks we have kicked off the Model Showcase activity, which is completely non-competitive and a great way to share our model work with other modelers. Still others may feel the judging is unfair for one reason or another. The contest staff takes judging very seriously and bends over backwards to help make the contest a positive experience and to give each entrant a fair shake. So, to those good folks who don't like the contest, I say God bless; we respect your choice, but

please don't slow us down.

The dreaded forms...! **The Ugly:** Unlike judging for the achievement program (often done at the modeler's home) it is not practical for the modeler to be present to verbally describe his model, so a written description is necessary.

Not all models are scratchbuilt. Most are a combination of scratchbuilt and commercial parts. And, in a well done model those parts are well integrated, and it is likely difficult if not impossible to tell them apart. We need to know which is which. For example, two modelers start with a ready-to-run diesel. One adds a couple of parts and does a little weathering. Beautiful model, but not much modeling effort. The second guy strips off all the cast-on detail parts; extends the car body using sheet styrene and shapes; builds a new pilot from scratch and then adds on a bunch of scratchbuilt detail parts. Another beautiful model, but this time the direct result of a lot of research and modeling work. Clearly it would be unfair to judge the two models as equals, but without a written description there is no way the judges can completely discern the differences.

What's the contest all about...?. It is not a contest to see who has the biggest, most

expensive or most popular model. There is a very specific format for NMRA contests. This is done to provide a uniform method of judging, so that that the same model judged at any regional or the national contest would achieve the same score. This is particularly important to provide a basis for merit awards, which essentially provide a pass-fail requirement for many of the achievement categories. This (uniform scoring) is hard to do. Judges and contest staff work hard to achieve that end by adhering to the format and its underlying philosophy and following specific guidelines for how they judge (matrix method).

Let's talk for a minute about what is emphasized in the judging. There five factors which are judged on a point score basis comprising construction (40 pts), detail (20 pts), conformance (25 pts.), appearance (25 pts.) and scratchbuilding (15 pts.) for a total of 125 pts. This places just under half the points on construction and scratchbuilding and so provides significant emphasis on traditional model building or scratchbuilding. Specifically this addresses what percentage of the model you have built from basic materials and the level of craftsmanship used. The more quality building you do yourself

the greater the score. The other aspects such as detail, conformance to prototype and appearance are also important and must be there to receive a high score but are individually less important than the model building per sec.

All models are eligible provided you built them yourself. Models that have won a first place (region or national) cannot compete again in that category. However, any regional entry can go to the national.

Where does my model fit? NER Categories are:

- Locomotive - Steam
- Locomotive - Other
- Freight Cars
- Passenger Cars (and head end cars)
- Non-Revenue Cars (MOW & cabooses)
- Structures (no attached scenery items judged)
- Dioramas (structures and scenery judged)

Matrix judging, say what...? - Each of the five factors is judged based on a two dimensional matrix or table, which takes into consideration both the complexity of the model and how well the models did on that factor generally meaning the quality or quantity of the work. The matrix provides a table of point values that helps guide the judges to arrive at a fair and uniform score. Each factor has its own matrix. For example, the construction matrix shown in Figure 1 compares the complexity of the model to the craftsmanship and quality of construction.

		Quality and Craftsmanship																																
		Poor							Good														Exceptional											
Complexity	Simple	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34
	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	
	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34		
	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34			
	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34				
	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34					
	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34						
	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34							
	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34								
	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34									
	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34										
	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34											
	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34												
	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34													
	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34														
16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34																

CONSTRUCTION MATRIX - FIGURE 1

I built and entered a little section house some years ago and let's explore how the scoring might have been done using the construction matrix. Because the structure is fairly simple they would have gone down the rows about a third of the way to the one beginning with 5 and ending in 30 This sets the range. Then they would have judged my quality and in this case decided it was very good but not exceptional, so they would have gone about 3/4 of the way across the top to the column beginning with 19 and ending with 34. The point where they cross sets the score or at least the point where the members of the team judging that factor may debate to use that score, 24 in this case, or go up or down by a couple of points.

Now as a modeler you don't have to worry about figuring out the matrices, but you should know that this is the manner in which your model will be judged and that model complexity is an aspect that will be considered in the score as well as the quality (construction, conformity and appearance) and quantity (detail, & scratchbuilding) of your work.

Back to those pesky judging factors - Let's examine each one individually.

Construction - As noted before this factor deals with quality and craftsmanship of construction as demonstrated by proper handling of materials, modeling skill and execution of the finished model. The particular method of construction is not important as long as the modeler has done the work. A model built from basic materials requires more effort and results in more opportunities for errors than most kit-built models and so will generally score higher. Stick kits are harder than plastic kits. Likewise, entries largely based on ready-to-run models require less effort yet and will probably score lower and so on. Some of the modeling specifics we look at:

- Neatness of glued parts, absence of any visible glue; fingerprints
- Fit of parts, no open joints, squareness, evenness, matching ends
- Unsanded or fuzzy wood
- Even spacing of grabirons, windows, etc.

Figure 3 illustrates a range of model complexities and the resulting scores based on six structures I once entered. Some of the aspects that determine model complexity are:

- Amount of time and effort to fit multiple parts
- Difficulty of model and construction techniques
- Numbers of attributes such as walls, rooflines, windows and doors.

Conformity - This refers to the prototype or prototype intent of the model and is worth up to 25 points. The matrix is based on the complexity of the prototype and how well you have captured the prototype in your model. Simulating the prototype requires close attention to replicating prototype features, dimensions, simulation of construction materials, choice of components, and arrangement of detail. If the model has been selectively compressed, consider how well it captures the features and balance of the prototype. Kit-built and ready-to-run models generally will not do as well because you will not get credit for what the manufacturer has done. Your score depends on your effort.

Freelanced models of fictitious prototypes can do well provided they use good prototype practice and design features. Some of the key considerations are:

- Is it logical?
- Would it do the job?
- Would it take the intended loads?
- Does it conform to normal construction practice? If not, why?

Achieving high scores on this factor requires good prototype documentation. Be sure to attach prototype plans, photos and/or others as illustrated in Figure 5 to substantiate your model. For free lance models show documentation for similar prototypes. If there are no plans, draw them yourself. Lacking any documentation will limit your score to a maximum of 15 out of 25.

Detail - This factor focuses on the quantity and refinement of detail added to the model and is worth up to 20 points. The matrix shown in Figure 6 pits the quantity of detail (how well you did) versus the complexity of those details. Remember the detail has to be added. Details that are cast on kit parts or ready-to-run shells require no modeling effort and do not count. Details that are an integral part of the prototype (necessary for form and function) or working details are more important and receive greater consideration than incidental, non-working details such as knee braces under a station overhang or working doors and windows get higher points than a trash can or pallet of boxes

Some modeling specifics include:

- Refinement of detail - ex. brake cylinder made of several parts vs. a single piece
- Completeness of detail - add everything you can see on the model
- Underbody detail is very important on cars such as air lines, brake rigging, brake cylinder, truss rods and queen posts, air hose.

On structures and scenes consider board-by-board construction, nail lines, fascia boards, eaves, gutters, down spouts, bolt/nail heads, door knobs and hinges, utility connections (electric service entrance, gas meter or oil tank, phone lines), etc. Consider visual effects like number of signs, colors and lettering.

Appearance - Also known as finish and lettering, this factor is based on the quality and skill of the finish and is pitted against the complexity of the intended appearance. The factor is worth a maximum of 25 points. The matrix is shown in Figure 7. Here it is important for the modeler to describe what he was trying to achieve. Whether the model is unpainted, freshly painted, or weathered or the finish is to simulate wood or metal needs to be pointed out.

Quality of finish refers to such aspects as smoothness, opacity and evenness of painted, crisp transitions from one color to the next, correct placement of colors and appropriateness of the shine or dullness of the finish. For lettering, stripes and signs consider spacing, straightness, and evenness. For decals is the film visible? Are there air bubbles? If the model is weathered, is it appropriate to the usage described? If the top of the car or loco is weathered, how about the underside and the trucks?

More complex finishes might include multicolor paint schemes, striping, more rather than less lettering, intricate combinations of finishes such as rusted metal, weathered wood, signs on structures. Whereas weathering does not necessarily add to the score, it can add to the complexity of the finish.

Some other appearance specifics might include:

- Quality of painted surface, brush marks, unevenness, runs, thickness
- Gloss or flatness of painted surface
- Decal application, even spacing, air bubbles, sheen, film
- Quality of decal itself not responsibility of modeler

Scratchbuilding - This is a 15 point factor that addresses how much of the model was built from scratch. The matrix compares the fraction of the model that is scratchbuilt versus the complexity of the parts and is shown in Figure 8. For example, bent wire grab irons are not as complex as metal pieces cut, file bent and soldered. Drawing plans is a part of scratchbuilding. Likewise photo-etching or casting parts is considered scratchbuilding.

Strategies - I've observed and talked to a number of contest modelers over the years and found several prevalent philosophies. One is to enter all of the major models you build. So, if you put that scratched bunk house or kit-bashed the mill complex, bring it to contest and see how it does. I think those who follow this approach generally do what I would call layout-plus quality work.

Another approach is to be more selective about your entries and decide before hand when you are going to build for contest. These entries are the ones that can knock your socks off if you do a really good job, totally scratchbuilt, intricate structure, individual shingles, research to the hilt...etc., etc. Both philosophies are fine. The "bring everything" approach may in the long run net more ribbons and merit awards, but I suspect be hard pressed to beat out the "build for contest" modeler on an equal skill basis.

A third approach prevalent among those going for achievement awards is to build models aimed at breaking through the 87.5 point barrier to get a merit award. This is kind of a combination of the earlier two, but to be successful you need to have fairly good calibration (generally by previous entries) to get your model over that hump and into the 90 point range.

All of these approaches have their merits. The important thing is to engage the process and enter. The more you enter the more you learn. Also, signing on as a judge is another way you can get involved and improve your skill level. If you've never done it before, that's OK; we'll teach as part of a judging team.

Kit or Scratch? Make no mistake; the contest is still aimed at the scratchbuilt model, and those that are nicely done (construction, appearance, detail etc.) will almost certainly reach the merit award score of 87.5 points. On the other hand, a craftsman kit such as a Fine Scale Miniatures structure or Accurail car kit done to a similar quality may not reach that level. So you say "With so many great kits out there why would I want to scratch-build, and if I can't get the points with a kit why enter the contest?" The short answer is "it's a multidimensional hobby and you don't have to be just a kit builder or just a scratchbuilder. You can do both and enjoy success in the model contest.

If you prefer kits by all means build the kit. But, on any model railroad that plans its cars and structure especially around a prototype there will be candidates that are not available in kit form. Scratchbuild these. If you can build a good looking stick kit, then you have the modeling skills needed to scratchbuild.

Prototype versus Freelance - Either choice is certainly OK, but may require slightly different strategies to reach the same score. If you choose a prototype to model, coming up with the goal is easy. You do some research and get a set of plans and/or photos and make the model look like those. A picture is worth a thousand words and when you can show several photos showing front, rear and side views of the real thing and they really look like your model down to the last detail, that's hard to beat at least in the conformity category. Going a step farther and narrowing down to a specific number car or engine in those categories at a specific date in time is even better. In fact in your documentation using copies of photos and drawing arrows to the individual details you have added is a great way to show conformity and detail.)

Freelance models may seem easier. "Well, it's freelance; I can do what I want, right?" Well yes you can, but to do really well on the conformity factor you need to establish a firm basis for why you built it the manner you did. This generally gets back to plans and photos of similar cars, locos or structures either specific prototypes that embody the imaginary prototype you are building, or as an alternative get copies of general engineering drawings or guidelines that demonstrate engineering practice

Well, we've hit on some of the major contest topics. I hope this little discourse has given you a better idea of what the NMRA contest is all about, answered some questions and made you feel more comfortable. If you have questions, call me or email me or anyone on the contest staff. If you really want to get in on the fun, sign on as a judge. Come on in; the water's fine, and believe me, all of us on the contest staff are with you. . We know how hard you worked, and how much emotion has been put into your model, and we promise to be fair and strive to do our best, so you receive the recognition you really do deserve. ■

MADE IN THE NER: Model Tech Studios

By Barry Abisch

Metro North Division

James Bester says he has been building models “ever since I could hold a razor blade.” He’s still building models, but not only for himself—now, he builds them for others, including model railroaders.

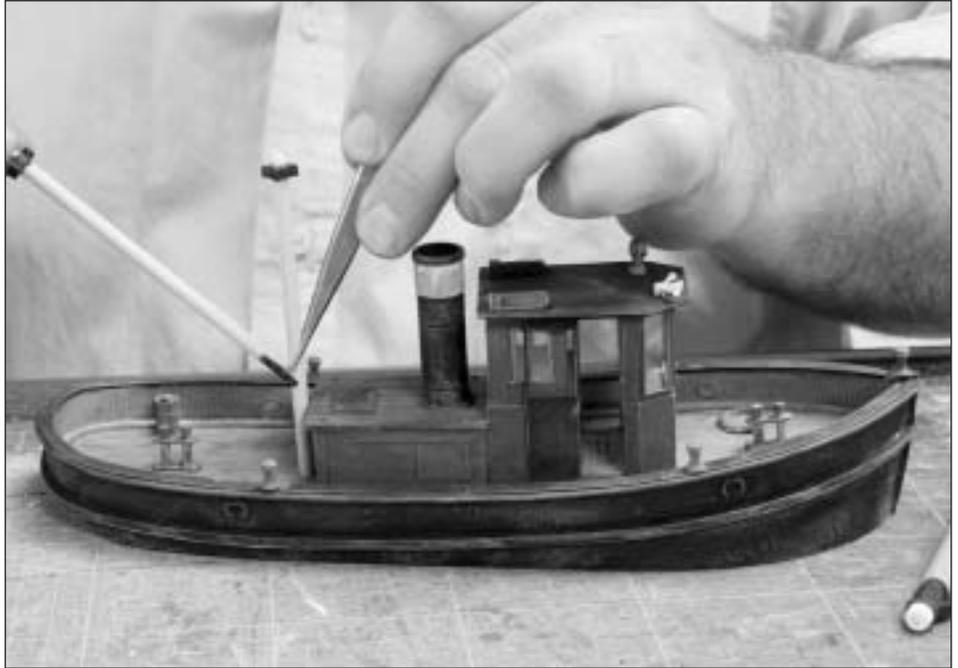
Bester, with help from three family members, runs Model Tech Studios, based in North Hampton, NH. Model Tech is not the best known hobby supplier, and it certainly is not the largest. But Bester sees that as an advantage for the modeler who buys a Model Tech structure for his layout. There’s less chance a visitor will recognize a Model Tech building as something he has on his own layout or has seen on four other layouts, Bester said. “If someone visits your railroad and says, ‘Oh, I can identify every one of the buildings,’ it detracts from the layout.”

Model Tech has been in business since 1988, when Bester graduated from Roger Williams University in Bristol, RI with a degree in architectural design. Its first products were a series of scale amusement park rides, which Model Tech still sells. The company’s Web sites also offer built-ups of its kits and custom model building services for architects, manufacturers and even for jewelers, who need precisely crafted models for the small investment castings necessary to replicate their designs.

Yet, while Model Tech may be a small company compared to industry fixtures such as Walthers – the manufacturer Bester most often cites while making comparisons – it is not small in scope. Its online catalog lists some 450 products in N, HO and O scale, from American flags in N-scale (two for \$1.50) to the O-scale Borden’s Moving Co., available as a kit for \$169 or assembled and aged for \$375.

What sets Model Tech apart, Bester says, is the approach his small company takes in designing and manufacturing its buildings, the materials used and the way the kits come together when the modeler opens the box.

“We develop all of our own products,” he said during a recent telephone interview. “Many manufacturers have an idea for a kit and then go outside to have it made. We don’t do that. We do all the development, from mastering to manufacture.”



Modelers are attracted to the high quality castings, like this tugboat, that lead to highly detailed models in less time.

“We’re doing things a little bit differently,” Bester said, beginning with the fact that he does not attempt to replicate prototype structures.

A building that is prototypically accurate is not necessarily interesting, at least not to Bester. So he will begin with a general prototype and add details to enhance the design of the structure. He seems especially interested in improving roof lines – not a bad perspective when one considers that model railroad structures often are viewed from above.

Bester also envisions structures that are seen not in isolation, but as part of a scene. “We want to make the buildings appear like they are in the middle of a busy workday,” he said. “Everyone’s space is limited, so why do boring buildings?”

To that end, many Model Tech kits come with detail parts included; other details are available separately. Even Model Tech detail parts are different from those offered by other manufacturers, Bester said. “We sell not just one of something, but a pile of something,” he said, whether it’s the pile of milk cans included with the Dairymen’s League creamery or the piles of pallets available as detail parts.

Another key difference Bester cited in explaining the Model Tech approach is that the kits come with much of the tedious, and

difficult, work already done. These are not kits for modelers who enjoy devoting many weeks to assembly, Bester agreed, acknowledging that there are railroaders who especially enjoy that aspect of the hobby. But that is not everyone.

“Modeling has fundamentally changed,” he said. “People want to build a little faster.”

“None of our kits typically take more than a couple of days of building,” Bester said. “Many can be built within hours.”

To attain that goal, Model Tech kits are delivered with the more complicated aspects, such as roofs, cupolas and other complex elements, already assembled. “You don’t lose the details,” Bester said. “Our kits are as super-detailed as anything on the market. So you get a high-end kit without the hours.”

To offer specific examples, Bester pointed to a line of masonry structures added recently to the Model Tech catalog. The basic structures are assembled before they are shipped, so “there are no corner joints to deal with,” Bester said. “The first night you’re putting in the windows and putting on the roof. This allows you to focus on the finishing and the super-detailing.”

Bester seems as proud of Model Tech’s manufacturing techniques as he is of the design experience he brings to the product line. He is particularly critical of the laser-

From the perspective of a new modeler...

I have never assembled a Model Tech kit. In fact, until accepting the assignment to interview James Bester for *The Coupler*, I was not even familiar with the company. Paging through Model Tech's three Web sites, one building in particular caught my attention. It is a background model of a Dairymen's League creamery.

Here's how a Model Tech product looks from the perspective of a modeler just beginning a new layout:

The shelf layout I am building is a freelanced railroad I imagine as a successor to the New York, Ontario & Western. The dairy industry is a focal point. To make the most use of my limited modeling space, I intend to use background structures along an industrial spur. At 20 inches long, the Model Tech creamery is two times the space I have allotted for my creamery, but at 1 3/4 inches deep, it is perfect for my plan.

Based on the Web site photo, the creamery exhibits the characteristics of Model Tech structures extolled by Bester. It has a busy look to it, and shows the wear and tear one would expect of a wooden building in the latter days of its active life. Bester does not promise prototypical accuracy, and the cupolas on the Model Tech creamery appear to me to be features more appropriate to a Borden's creamery, not found on League buildings. But they certainly make the structure more interesting.

And here's the kicker: on page 299 of Robert Mohowski's *Milk Cans, Mixed Trains and Motor Cars* is a photo of the Dairymen's League creamery at Edmeston, N.Y. The League purchased the building from Borden's in the 1920s, and the Borden's cupolas still line the roof (Albeit with rectangular windows, not the arched windows on the Model Tech kit).

Although I am freelancing, I do want to model at least some structures prototypically. For the rest, my goal is a prototypical look – buildings appropriate to use, time and place. The Model

Tech creamery satisfies that goal.

Right now, I am not sure if the Model Tech creamery will be on my shopping list. I'm wondering what I would have to eliminate from my switching spur to allow for the added length. I'm also still considering my original choice: the Laser-Art Structures creamery from Branchline Trains.

The Branchline creamery is a mere 5 inches long; the accompanying ice house adds 4 inches. (Guess where I got the 10-inch estimate I used on my initial track plans?) But to adapt it as a background structure, about half of the depth will have to go. Something would have to be done to assure the structural integrity of what would become a three-sided laser-cut building. On the plus side, it is based on an original O&W prototype.

Since dairying will be a focal point on the layout, maybe the creamery should be large enough to dominate the scene. And it does seem evident, at least from the photo, that Bester has met his goal of providing a more interesting structure. The promised speed and simplicity of assembly certainly are positives for a modeler who has taken forever to get started on his layout and wants to accelerate completion.

A basic O&W creamery is a fairly simple structure. Since I want to construct it as a narrow background model, it might a good first project for scratch-building.

Right now, I don't know what I will decide. It is not an easy decision, and spending time with James Bester discussing the art, mechanics and philosophy of model building did not make it any easier. He clearly has thought about aspects of modeling that had not previously entered my mind. Whatever I do decide, I'll let you know in a future issue of *The Coupler*.

—Barry Abisch

cut kits offered by many of his competitors, although laser cut parts are included in some kits, when appropriate. "Laser cutting has made a lot of companies lazy," he said. "But it's not always the best way to do everything. Fancy cupolas or cornices are not best achieved by laser, for example."

Bester said Model Tech kits typically use a variety of materials for different parts. "Our kits are all hybrid," he said. "We use a variety of materials, and we make the tough parts in pre-finished form." One result of the process is that the bricks or cut stones in a Model Tech building typically have a surface texture not usually found in styrene kits.

"It's very labor intensive to produce our kits" Bester said of the company's proprietary manufacturing techniques. For example, it takes the company one hour to make each building in the merchant's row kit.

Bester is obviously pleased with the results. "To capture a scene or capture a viewer's attention, you have to have buildings that just say 'wow'." ■

—See also www.finishedmodels.com and www.modeltechnology3d.com.



Bricks, cut stones, and wood shingles in a Model Tech building typically have a surface texture not usually found in styrene kits.

**MADE
IN THE
NER**

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NER Convention Questionnaire

By Glenn Glasstetter
Green Mountain Division

Why do you go to the NER Conventions, or more importantly, why don't you go to NER Conventions? I will bet that whatever your reasons, the Saturday night banquet is not your primary reason for going or not going, but it may be a factor. On the next page is a Convention Questionnaire that covers many aspects of our conventions. We would like to hear from you so that we can make our conventions better for everyone, but be aware, whatever you may like or dislike about our conventions there are probably others who have opposite opinions.

The two primary reasons I have heard why some of you may not like our banquets are they cost too much and are too long. Let me explain why we have them and what we have done to try to improve them based on comments from many of you. Most organizations hold banquets at these gatherings as the one opportunity for everyone to get together with all the other attendees in one place, and to recognize the achievements of their members. It is an

opportunity for you can see old friends you may not have seen during the weekend and a place to meet new people.

The banquets at our conventions are optional, so if you don't like to attend, or have something else you would rather do, you are free to do so without being charged for the meal. A number of other regions use a single registration fee that includes a banquet whether you want to go or not. A number of people have said that the meal is not worth the cost. The hotels make part of their profit on the meals that we eat at the hotel. Like everything else, our room costs have increased over the years, but they would be even higher without the guarantee of a banquet. We continue to struggle to keep all our convention costs down, including our registrations, room costs and banquet costs. You would not believe the prices of standard hotel banquet meals.

The only activity we still currently hold at our banquets is the recognition of those achieving awards for the Model and Photo Contests and the NMRA Achievement Program including the Master Model Railroader Award. I believe, as do many others, that these awards should be present-

ed in a forum that allows the recipients peers to honor their achievements as opposed to just handing them out in some back room. In the interest of shortening the program, we have combined the contest and achievement awards into one activity.

We have also shortened the program by eliminating drawing the names for the raffle during the dinner, the presentation for the next convention and the head table with introductions. Some of our recent conventions have not included a speaker, but that is up to the local committee.

One variation that the Hub Division has tried is an Awards Breakfast. This is an option, but some recipients need to leave Saturday night, or are not staying at the hotel as they live locally and may be opening their layouts Sunday morning.

We would like to hear what you think – in fact, we NEED to hear what you think and what you would like. Please take the time to respond to the following Questionnaire. It just might make the Convention experience, the NER and the NMRA work better for you. ■

Be heard! Tear off and mail today! 

NER New Members

List of new members joining the Northeastern Region NMRA, compiled by the regional office manager. Please send corrections and additions to Don Irace, Office Manager.

COMPILED BY DON IRACE NER Office Manager

New Members List As Of 12/17/06

CALIFORNIA

Daivd Howard
William Bird

CONNECTICUT

Bruce Harrison-Columbia
Joe Perzawowski-Meriden

FLORIDA

James Reeves

OHIO

Charles Williams

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Joseph Crowe-
Moultonborough
Michael Grahame-Stratham

NEW JERSEY

Charles Baldi-Hopatcong
Lou Baumbach-Peguannock
Paul Kayne-North Brunswick
Authur Ross-Mendham
James Rosenbauer-
Creamridge

NEW YORK

Robert Martin-Staten Island
John Adams-Voorheesville
Arnold Martin-Bronx
Michael Keating-Auburn
Michael Romanowski-
Queensbury

MAINE

Edwin Nordfors-Brewer

MARYLAND

John Bongard

MASSACHUSETTS

Paul Agnew-Braintree
Marc Audette-Abington
Jim Bertone-Quincy
Kevin Corbett-Newtonville
Sandy Ford-Kingston
Paul Azevedo-Fall River
Leo Hamel-Fall River
Richard Michaud-Attleboro
Kevin Donahue-Westborough
Thomas Stambaugh-Brookline

PENNSYLVANIA

Robert Wittemann

RHODE ISLAND

Kenneth Osbon-Portsmouth

VERMONT

William Stinson-Waitsfield

CANADA

Harold Nicholson-Hartland

*Welcome
Aboard!*



NER CONVENTIONS QUESTIONNAIRE

If you could please take a few moments to answer the questions below it will really help us find out what you like, dislike, or would like to see changed in the NER regional convention experience. If you would like to respond via e-mail, please refer to the question number in your message, and send to: john_ner@yahoo.com. If you would like to mail your response, copy (or tear out) and send to John Campbell, 63 Alexander Drive, East Hartford, CT 06118. PLEASE ADD PAGES AS NEEDED, and share with us as much as you can. THANK YOU!

1) Have you attended Regional Conventions before? How many?

4) How important is location to your attendance decision?

2) If you have NOT attended, or have not attended recently, can you give the reasons why? Feel free to list your own reasons in addition to the ones below:

- Boring.
- Too expensive, not worth it for the time and money.
- Nothing new, same old people and programs.
- Location of event inconvenient.
- Contest and/or other programs unappealing.
- Quality of Clinics - simply not good enough or do not contain interesting material.
- Quality and variety of Layout Tours.
- Availability of Prototype Tours.
- Prefer not to 'socialize' with others in the hobby.
- Other:

5) How important is cost to you attendance decision?

6) What events would you like to see that we currently do not offer?

3) What events or activities currently in our convention program hold the most interest for you? Feel free to rate them from 1 to 5, with 5 holding the most interest for you:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Auction | <input type="checkbox"/> Make & Take Clinics |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clinics | <input type="checkbox"/> Operating Sessions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Contests | <input type="checkbox"/> Banquet |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Proto Tours | <input type="checkbox"/> NER Board Meeting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Layout Tours | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Modeling With The Masters Clinics | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Socializing with other model railroaders | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Area attractions for non-participating family members | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Non rail activities - are they important to you and your family and do they effect your attendance decision? | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: | |

7) What would really make you want to attend a Regional convention? What makes you say, "Man, I GOTTA go to that convention!"?

8) Any suggestions, comments, advice, criticisms and thoughts about the Regional convention experience would be helpful.



Rutland 403 hauls a way freight over Lou Sassi's HO scale Boston & Maine West Hoosic Division. This well known layout will be just one of the attractions at the upcoming Commodore Vanderbilt NER Fall Convention, hosted by Hudson Berkshire Division. See page 7 for the latest info. PHOTO BY LOU SASSI

The Northeastern Region (NER)
National Model Railroading Association
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