

The Semaphore

North County Model Railroad Society (NCMRS)

On Saturday, May 30, 2008, the club meeting will be held at 10:00 am, at Boney's Marketplace, 1820 Oceanside Blvd., Oceanside



Work

Schedule

Thursday and Saturday are work days at the club.

There are plenty of tasks to perform.

Visitor Schedule

Thursday 3-8:30PM

Saturday 9:30AM*-4PM

*11:00AM meeting days

Upcoming

Operation Dates

Tuesday, June 17

Tuesday, July 8

Tuesday, August 12

Setup time 1:00 pm

First Departure 4 pm

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President's Message by Dick Miller

A Great Model Railroad

What makes a great model railroad? I read an article several years ago, written by Tony Koester who does a monthly column for Model Railroader magazine. Tony is building a large railroad, and he is very interested in realistic operation, so his list of things that make up a great railroad tends to be biased in that direction. His list is somewhat different to mine.

He includes Staging, a linear track plan with walk around control. He feels that his layout should have a car-forwarding system and one or more interchange points. He suggests modeling at least one large industry, to allow switching of a large number of cars. He emphasizes that any railroad, large or small, should have plenty of opportunities for switching. I

agree with him on this item. He further suggests some form of traffic control that includes a dispatcher and/or train order operators. He thinks that including a branch or short line adds interest to the overall operation. Finally, he embraces DCC with sound for realistic operation. Our club layout seems to include all of Tony's design suggestions.

From my point of view we have a great operating layout, and our operating sessions get better every month.

In the next few months we will decide how to extend our layout into our new expansion area. I would like to see a large classification yard and a diesel and steam engine service facility. This would allow for lots of switching. In addition it would relieve some of the congestion in our fiddle yard. If space permits it could also include a large

passenger terminal. There is a lot of passenger train interest in the club.

Since I joined the club I have had the opportunity to visit a number of member and non-member model railroads. Some layouts I have visited are pure art. What impresses me is that all of the layouts are very different and very personal.

We each go about designing and building our railroads in very different ways. They differ in part because of variations in our individual skills. It takes many skills to build a great model railroad, and very few of us have all the skills required to complete that ultimate model railroad. I am pretty good at basic construction, track work and wiring— all the mechanical stuff. I am totally lacking expertise when it comes to scenery and structure creation. One of the reasons I joined our club was to develop my scenery construction skills. I am learning, little by little.

When I think about what is required to build a great model railroad my list is very different to Tony's.

1) First and foremost, for me, is precision roadbed and track work. The main line should always proceed straight through a turnout. Eliminate "S" curves. Use the highest number turnout and the largest turning radii consistent with the size of the layout. If you don't get the sub roadbed and your track work right you will never be happy.

- 2) Provide for multiple industrial switching locations.
- 3) Have a staging or fiddle yard and an interchange track.
- 4) Model an era and a specific locale.
- 5) Incorporate compatible industries consistent with the era and locale.
- 6) Formalize your operating sessions with train orders, etc.
- 7) If your track turns back on its self at some point, add a tunnel, trees, or buildings — something that will break the line of sight.
- 8) Separate towns and industrial areas with appropriate scenery.
- 9) Include engine storage, engine servicing, and an engine house appropriate for the size of you layout.
- 10) Equip your layout with walk around or wireless DCC.

That is my list of items that it takes to create a great model railroad. What is on your list?

All aboard

Dick Miller

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NCMRS EBAY MONEY MAKING MACHINE

by Tom Bernhardt

eBay sales continue to provide much needed funds for the club. Donations received in the past year are equivalent to the dues that 88 more members would pay. This has allowed the club to grow and maintain itself with less concern about rent payments.

The fuel that feeds this eBay money machine is the saleable donations made by Club members and the surrounding community. The huge Wheeler Donation was the start of it all.

Leo Valley, helped by Nick Ruddick, took on the initial task of setting up an eBay account. Tom Bernhardt, helped by John Stevens, Charlie Tucker, and George Benton, sorted and identified the more than 2,500 items that made up the Wheeler collection.

Leo Valley and Tom Bernhardt took over operation of the program. Tom managed the continuing incoming donations, while Leo handled the huge eBay selling job.

One advantage of the NCMRS IRS 501(c)3 tax free status is the ability to sell merchandise on eBay without being burdened with tax payments.

After two years Leo handed the selling effort to Tom (that's me). This is when I really learned the "Ins and Outs" of how EBay works. (It's like taking a bath -- you

really do not know what it's going to be like until you step into it!).

For those of you who may be interested, there are several steps necessary to successful selling on eBay. You must

- Have quality merchandise.
- Identify and research your items.
- Research eBay to observe how much buyer interest is out there.
- NOT list competitive items at the same time. Spreading out helps achieving higher bids.

Railroad Quiz

Where are they talking about???

"As a bullet seeks its target, shining rails in every part of our great country are aimed at ???. Drawn by the magnetic force ... day and night great trains rush toward ... dive with a roar into the two-and-one-half mile tunnel ... and then ???. Crossroads of a million private lives! Gigantic stage on which are played a thousand dramas daily!"

Hint: If you are less than 75 years old, you probably don't know or remember these once famous lines. (See answer next month!)

Amtrak Guest Rewards and You
(how to actually get a free ticket)

By John Barkley

For those of us with a couple of hundred thousand airline miles that have been devalued faster than a third world currency, frequent flyer programs are looked at with lots of skepticism. The Amtrak program actually gets you free train travel, so I'll present the "Cliff Notes" version for you.

Unlike most airline programs, the Amtrak program is dollar based, not mileage based. This means you get one point for every dollar spent on train travel, with 100 minimum points earned per one-way train trip. So, the \$10 fare from Oceanside to Solana Beach or the \$60 fare to Salinas both get you 100 points. For higher fares and long distance sleeper accommodations you also get one point for every dollar spent.

You also get fare discounts outside the Guest Rewards program from AAA and other organizations.

So what good are the points?

You can get a one-way trip on the *Pacific Surfliner* (runs from San Diego to San Luis Obispo, and points in-between) for 1000 points for coach or 1500 for business class. For long distance trains, Amtrak divides the USA into three zones (West, Central and East). The Western zone includes

Albuquerque and Seattle. Our family frequently takes the *Southwest Chief* from Riverside to Albuquerque, leaving at 8:00 PM and arriving at 11:30 AM the next day (and usually early, I may add). The return trip leaves Albuquerque at 4:30 PM and arrives in Riverside at 6:00 AM (the end points of this train are Los Angeles and Chicago). The points really pay off here, as you can get a Family Sleeper (2 adult sized beds, 2 kid sized), or a Deluxe Sleeper (2 adult beds, plus private bathroom and shower) for 20,000 points one way. The Family Sleeper is usually more expensive to buy than four one-way coach tickets on Southwest Airlines at \$150 each.

So, other than a lot of trips on the *Surfliner*, how else can you get points?

Well, the good 'ole American way - charge it! Amtrak offers a co-branded MasterCard with Chase, and you get 5,000 points for signing up, plus one point per dollar charged. If you have a family that buys groceries, gas, and that eats out, it can add up. Also, if you have a business, you can get lots of points. Pay your bill off on time each month, as the interest is no bargain. The card has no annual fee, unlike the hated airline cards.

I think the card deal is a good one, as \$20,000 in spending will not even get a highly restricted, and nearly impossible to use, ticket on most airlines, but it will get the four of us to Albuquerque, saving \$600 in

In this case, it is a 3% rebate, and Mom has no excuse for not taking the train on the family trip.

Longer trips can be had for more points. For example, Oceanside to Chicago is 40,000 points. All connecting trains are included as long as your travel is in the geographic zone.

Unlike the major airlines, Amtrak redemption is very easy. There are some blackout dates near holidays, but you can work around them. Space is limited for the family sleeper, as there are only two on each train, so you should always book far ahead. There are no miscellaneous fees for booking. You just call Amtrak Guest Rewards, make your reservations, and they mail you the tickets. We often take the train one way, and fly the other way on Southwest, as they don't rip you off on one way fares, as other airlines do.

If you want to do this, just hit the link to Guest Rewards at www.amtrak.com.

Visit to the Club des Modélistes Ferrovière
de l'Estrie
by Dan Conway

During a trip to my wife's hometown of Sherbrooke, Quebec, I visited the "Club des Modélistes Ferrovière de l'Estrie (CMFE)", in English the "Eastern Townships Model Railroad Club". The club is located in the basement of a hardware store in Sherbrooke, a city about 100 miles East of Montreal. The club has an independent entrance into the building, and a staircase down to the layout room. They use about two thirds of their available space for the layout, and the rest for workspace,

meeting space, a small kitchen, and storage. The CMFE, which has 18 members, started life in January, 1988 as a modular club, and in 1994 started work on a permanent layout. Their railroad is called the Kenebec Railway. It is set in Quebec, with its rolling hills and valleys, and many lakes and rivers. The time is the transition period, 1950-1960, but the club is relaxed about the equipment and locomotives that members operate. Modern motive power mixes with steam. The club meets Tuesday nights at 7 PM, and meetings are open to the public. Members work on the layout whenever they wish, but Tuesday nights are running nights.

The layout is largely finished, and it is beautiful. The scenery is of excellent quality. There is a large port scene with a river running past a operating lighthouse. The river runs under several railroad bridges to a large coal loading dock, which is scratch built and very impressive. It stands more than a foot high, with a track for hopper cars on top and chutes for loading ships along the side. It is highly detailed, and even the doors on the coal chutes open and close. There is also a three track car ferry in the harbor, and each track can accommodate three 40 foot cars. Moving cars onto or off the ferry is done using two idler flat cars, as the locomotive cannot go past the dock apron.

Great detail has been worked into the scenery. There is a fairly large city scene. A scale-sized traffic light is suspended from fine wires over the main intersection. The traffic light works, changing from red to green to yellow and back to red. The club has used hundreds of figures to give life to its scenery. There is a large turntable and a

roundhouse with a fully-detailed interior. The roof of the roundhouse is made partly of clear plastic, with chimneys attached that can be used as handles to lift the roof sections off to access the interior. The clear Plexiglas sections of the roof allow viewing of the interior without removing the roof. Plexiglas is used extensively to protect the layout from damage, especially around delicate parts such as the coal dock.

A notable feature of the scenery is that most of it is removable. Large sections can be lifted out to give access to hidden tracks or wiring. Smaller hillsides, buildings, or fields are removable sections made on a Styrofoam base. Small doors in the fascia provide access to hidden tracks. There are doors through the backdrop, so that hidden tracks can be reached from the work area behind. Most of the non-urban, non-industrial scenery is of rolling hills rather than large mountains, but at the end of the layout nearest the entry door there is a mountain section. The mainline runs around a 4-turn helix there, but rather than hide the turns, the club has built them with exposed tracks facing the front of the layout. There are large radius curves at the bottom, with each succeeding layer having a smaller radius. At the front of the layout, each level crosses a canyon on a different type of bridge, from a stone viaduct at the lowest level to an absolutely spectacular trestle at the highest level.

The trestle is, I would estimate, 30 inches wide, and 20 inches high. It is entirely scratch built, and is detailed down to the bolt heads on the sides of the timbers. The builder was very proud to explain that the details are complete on both sides of the trestle, even though the back side will not be visible.

He said that he worked on the trestle every morning from 5 AM to 11 AM, from August, 2007 to February of this year. This is the same man who built the coal dock, the operating traffic light, and many other scratch-built features on the layout. He is a master craftsman.

I visited the club with my wife Lise, who is involved in building our home layout, Lise's long-time friend Rita, and Rita's adult daughter Monique. The club members were a little surprised when this group of four visitors arrived, but were very welcoming and hospitable. I introduced everyone in French, explained my wife's and my interest in the hobby, and gave them my NCMRS business card. Two of the members were kind enough to switch to English when my French vocabulary hit such barriers as "uncoupling ramp", while the three Quebec women chatted in French with other members. Rita and Monique had never seen a real model railroad before, and both were fascinated.

One member asked if I wanted to run a train, and I replied both "yes" and "oui." I was given a way freight to operate over the layout, with the member serving as my conductor and guide. Car movements are controlled by a card system. The layout runs beautifully. The Digitrax DCC system was problem free, and the track work was excellent. No stalls, no derailments, lots of switching challenges, including the car ferry. It was an enjoyable and educational evening. Now that I am back, I am looking at my home layout, and planning removable scenery sections to give access to my hidden tracks.