

April 2016

It's all over for another year – the Convention, that is! Another great weekend of getting together with friends old and new, playing trains, drinking beer, playing trains, eating, drinking beer, playing trains... you've probably got the picture by now!



Photo 1 Running in full swing (Russ Cook)



Photo 2 Coal was King on the Black Diamonds layout this year (Russ Cook)



Photo 3 More Coal on the Black Diamonds layout (Russ Cook)

This year's event at the Trouville sparked some debate: was this the 25th Anniversary Convention or the 22nd or something in between? Certainly many have recollections of get-togethers at Staines, Torquay (of world cruise infamy) and then a series of Bournemouth hotels. Perhaps some wiser heads can come up with a definitive answer!

As usual the hotel did us proud providing excellent breakfasts and even better dinners on Friday and Saturday. The good news – we're going back next year! The bad news – the price has gone up - by £1! Come on, where else could you get a weekend like that for £110?

Put the dates in your diaries now – 3rd-5th March 2017.

We had good trade support this year, not only from Neal Carnaby (Neal's N'Gauging Trains), but also from Russ Kaufman (The N Scale Architect) with his range of building kits and scenic accessories. More of these later.

Before the convention we asked you to think about two issues which we felt needed to go to the membership. Firstly there was the thought from Neil Lancaster as to layout provision at future conventions. I have to admit that our research methods were far from rigorous, but by talking to members and engaging them in the discussion, it became clear that the preferred option was the *status quo* with the two layouts, one offering DCC and DC running options while the other offered full 'operations' but only in DCC.

The other issue was one I raised as to the future of this newsletter. Again the concensus view was to maintain the *status quo* so here we are - I'll stick with a proven format. One request was for a 'What's On' page. I'd love to do this, but getting timely information is difficult. It depends on you telling me what you know so I can pass it on.

It was always my intention that this issue should be largely photo-based, reflecting what went on at the convention, but I've received some nice items from others so without further ado...

From Russ Kaufman



Photo 4 Russ Kaufman (Ralph Snelling)

When Ralph asked me to submit an article for this newsletter, I spent some time pondering what topic the membership might find entertaining and perhaps useful. Though it won't help you to be a better modeller in the end, it may provide some encouragement given the gloomy predictions that often surround our hobby these days.

The last NTRAK-UK convention that I attended was in 2010. When I arrived in Bournemouth for the NTRAK-UK convention this year it was as if we started where we had left off over six years ago.



Photo 5 Neil Lancaster (Russ Kaufman)

Sure, we're all looking older and our joints don't work like they used to but the spirit of comradery lives on!



Photo 6 The Starman brothers from The Netherlands with Don Butterell and Neal Carnaby (Russ Kaufman)

There were discussions over lagers that began with model trains but typically digressed to dim views of our respective countries' conditions with "Brexit" or "TRUMP" often being popular topics. We caught up on the affairs of our families, the status of the members not in attendance and remembered those that were no longer with us.

Most days started off with a full English breakfast and ended in a circle of chairs surrounded by empty pint glasses. There was time to run trains,



Photo 7 (Russ Kaufman)

opportunities to show off our latest projects and, of course, the highly contested raffle drawing



Photo 8 Russ Cook (Russ Kaufman)

followed by the closing banquet.



Photo 9 (Russ Kaufman)



Photo 10 (Russ Kaufman)



Photo 11 (Russ Kaufman)



Photo 12 (Russ Kaufman)



Photo 13 (Russ Kaufman)

Sometimes, I think we underestimate the value of these events and the ability of our hobby to bring together people that most likely would not have otherwise met. Attending this year's NTRAK-UK reminded me of these things. I am grateful for the invitation and, all being well, look forward to attending again in 2017!

In the newsletter I noticed a solicitation for feedback on the content of NTRAK-UK. Along these lines, if there is an interest in building wooden and/or etched kits, I would be willing to conduct an informal demonstration as a supplemental activity to running trains and drinking beer. It would require some work space and chairs and, if it was to be hands-on, the participant could bring their own tools and paint/markers and we would provide the kits to build for a nominal fee (£10-15) to cover material costs. We would also be willing to provide a prize for a modelling contest should the membership have an interest.

Thank you.
Best Regards,
Russ Kaufman

Our thanks to Russ for his take on our convention as a guest used to the considerably larger US events. Russ also had quite a display of his products, including his lovely etched brass stage coaches and vans



Photo 14 All three kits (Ralph Snelling)

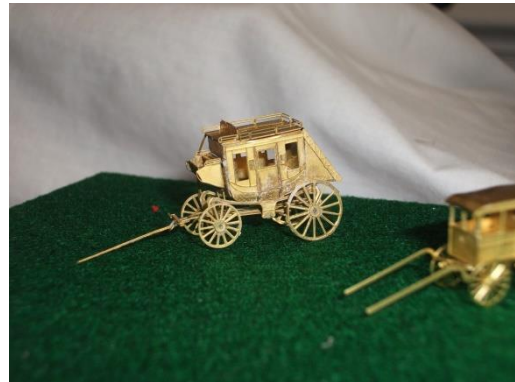


Photo 15 Stage Coach and Milk Van (Ralph Snelling)



Photo 16 Painted Stage Coach and Sleigh (Ralph Snelling)

He also displayed his range of lineside kits and took the opportunity to launch the latest in the range at the convention. In Russ' own words:-

Announcing the latest additions to our successful Trackside Series of N Scale kits... the Caboose Motel!



Photo 17 Caboose Motel (Russ Kaufman)

This kit is the seventh in our new Trackside Series which features easy-to-build laser-cut structures, re-purposed rolling stock from major manufacturers and custom detail parts. This "Caboose Motel" kit includes a re-purposed caboose with trucks and couplers, two sets of picnic tables, umbrellas, dishes, books and sign board, two concrete table platforms, laser-cut billboard sign, and a full-colour sign sheet.

Modellers can add cabooses to expand their accommodations! The photo-etched 'Picnic Tables & Umbrellas' kit (item #96642) is available separately for \$10.95. The completed display, as shown in the photos, measures approximately 2.75"L x 2.00"W. This kit (Item #10036) retails for \$37.95 and is available from local retailers or direct from THENARCH.COM.



Photo 18 Caboose Motel (Russ Kaufman)

The Year of the Hopper?

Looking at Neal's sales stand at the convention you could easily have thought that 2016 had been designated 'The Year of the Hopper' by manufacturers. There seemed to be a proliferation of hoppers from several manufacturers in styles old and new. Two that particularly caught my eye (and wallet) were by Bowser and portrayed the 4-bay Pennsylvania type H21



Photo 19 Bowser Type H21 Hopper (Ralph Snelling)

and the smaller 2-bay type GLa.



Photo 20 Bowser Type GLa Hopper (Ralph Snelling)

Both these were available in a variety of road numbers and paint schemes. They are well weighted (0.9oz for the H21 and 0.75oz for the GLa) and run well on metal wheels.

Invasion of the Insects?

No it's not another 'B' Horror Movie (straight from the drive in?) but the release by Broadway Limited Imports of the Baldwin 'Centipede' locomotive. When you look at one of these, words like monster, behemoth, juggernaut, etc. start going through your mind.



Photo 21 The Centipede - It's so big I couldn't get it all in or in focus (Ralph Snelling)

History

These locos were Baldwin's solution to the old problem of getting a very heavy loco over lighter lines. In this case Baldwin opted for lots of wheels – hence the nickname. Each loco was a 4-D-D-4 and, since the Pennsylvania always ran them as coupled pairs, you're looking at a 4-D-D-4+4-D-D-4 loco. Only three lines bought these from Baldwin, Seaboard Air Line and Mexican N de M used single units but the Pennsylvania, the main customer, used them as pairs. The Pennsylvania originally classified them as class BP-60 indicating a 6000hp passenger unit, but as passenger traffic faded and the more versatile EMD E units and Alco PAs came along they were downgraded to 5000hp and reclassified as class BH-50. The Pennsy units finished their days as

pushers on Horseshoe Curve amongst other helper allocations.

The Model

The initial reaction when you pick up the box is weight; these are heavy units, even as models. The box for my twin unit contained two locos, one fitted with the Pennsy's unique trainphone antennae, the other with a plain roof. Both units are powered and are fitted with BLI's own Paragon sound decoders. Also supplied are four geared axles with traction tyres (in case you want to tow a full size ocean liner with the model!), and a pair of Microtrains couplers – I'll come back to these later.

The two units are designed to be connected by a draw bar which is connected to the 'B' end of one unit. This draw bar is supposed to be screwed to a mount on the 'B' end of the other unit. Fine – except the screws used have to be amongst the smallest I've seen outside of a watch and the mounting point is part of the articulated underframe. Trying to make this connection without the use of a magnifier, a support cradle, a good light and a tiny watchmaker's screwdriver is near impossible and once the two units are joined there's no chance of getting them back in the box as the loco is now nearly two feet long!

This is where the supplied Microtrains couplers come in as the drawbar can be removed completely revealing moulded coupler pockets. However there's still a catch. The screws that held the drawbar are too short to retain the couplers so you'll need to raid the spares box for a couple of

Microtrains screws which will need cutting down by a couple of millimetres or they'll foul the underside of the loco. Sounds terrible but in reality it's no more than ten minutes work and now the two units couple at the same distance apart but can be stored in the rather nice original box without problems.

Both units correctly have default decoder addresses of 3. You need to decide, when reprogramming the addresses whether to keep one address for the whole combination or to give each unit a separate address and then run them as a consist. Since I'm going to run mine as a fixed pair I decided to designate the trainphone equipped unit as my 'lead' unit and then give the 'trailing' unit the same address but both methods will work.

On the track the loco performed superbly straight out of the box. Performance is smooth and powerful with excellent response to the throttle. Top speed is 'proportionate' and the crawl ability is excellent.

The sound is outstanding with lots of additional functions (like F9 for engine start/stop and tie down). The bell is a fine representation of an electric bell (clang – whirr – clang – whirr) and I'm told the engine noise is true to Baldwin units. I particularly liked the automatic notch-up effect as the loco gathers speed.

I purchased my unit from Neal and I have to say I'm really delighted with it. I think it comes in the category of 'If anyone had told me that...'

Other News

Mohawk Valley lives!

Alan Cross has rejuvenated the late Barry Peacock's Mohawk Valley layout and has put it back on the exhibition circuit. One of its first outings was to Newbury Show earlier this year and I was privileged to help Alan operate the layout with Russ Cook.



Photo 22 Alan trying to show me how the control panel for Mohawk Valley works (Russ Cook)

The day of the exhibition was one of the coldest, wettest days of the winter which, combined with the layout of the exhibition venue, meant we had a cold, wet struggle to get the layout into the exhibition hall only to find that there was a problem. The school, in whose hall the show was held, without telling the organisers, had used a corner of the hall to store a mountain of tables and chairs so now the exhibition manager had to re-plan the floor layout on the fly! Alan and I ended up trying to put the layout up, in our overcoats, in a freezing cold foyer! But at least we did have a space and it did warm up a bit when they closed some of the doors.

We were wondering where Russ had got to when we learned that his boiler had broken down and he wouldn't be with us till later, so Alan

and I got on and managed to get everything working in time for the first paying customers – just! Russ arrived at lunchtime, so Alan and I could take a break and I must say having three sets of hands did make breaking down a lot easier, though by then the weather had turned even colder and nastier. We managed, at that point, to commandeer a trolley which made getting everything back to Alan's car much easier.

My overall impressions of my first day as an exhibitor? It was good fun and Mohawk seemed to go down well both with the 'aficionados' and with the many children and parents that came through the door. Who says this hobby doesn't have a future? Those children may not join a club today, or tomorrow, but when their own children are grown and they want a hobby... perhaps they might remember that day in Newbury.

Mohawk Valley will be at the NMRA Summer Meet at Benson on June 4th 2016 and may be going to the NMRA BR Regional Convention in October. If you see us at any of these events come and say hello.