

Dilemmas

by Bob Pawlak

I look forward to receiving and reading each Northeast NTRAK Newsletter. I sincerely thank those who have contributed articles during the last several months and those responsible for preparing and distributing each issue. This series of articles has posed several new dilemmas in addition to others I have been wrestling with. The articles have caused me to assess my own situation relative to club activities and reach some conclusions which I would like to share with the rest of the club members.

I am one of those that do not have a module, do not have trains nicely organized in trays ready to roll, and have, therefore, participated in very few shows. Some of the dilemmas raised in recent articles are the following: The club would like to display prize-winning-quality modules so there was an excellent article on the attributes of such modules. But a big problem is that many members don't have a module at all so there was an excellent article on suggestions for how to keep a first module simple. That way new members can quickly become regular show participants.

The simplest type of module to build and transport is a three-track, straight, 2' x 4' section. But I have frequently heard pleas from several club members for trying to include Mountain Division trackage on any new module. There is also the frequently mentioned need that the

club has for more corner modules. Since I currently have no place to personally run trains except for a test loop on a hollow core door, I also keep asking myself - should I build a module or a home layout?

My biggest dilemma though, which is probably quite common among several club members, but which has not been mentioned in any of the recent articles, is the following. I don't seem to have as much time as I would like to devote to model railroading, especially in 4, 8, or 12 hour blocks of time. The thought of a two day overnight block of time for an away show seems especially unlikely for me to accomplish. When I can muster a big block of time my dilemma becomes: should I use it to work on a home layout; a module; my backlog of coupler conversions; trays for taking trains to shows; or "blow" the time by going to a show to help set up, take down, run trains, and simply enjoy the rest of the show?

Other smaller dilemmas I have are: Should I continue to buy and just look at those mint-condition Micro Trains freight cars or should I break down and plan to run them? Will I ever get over that psychological barrier of "ruining" freight cars or locomotives by weathering them to look more realistic? (I think it will take a series of group therapy sessions sponsored by the club to help me

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Conway WrapUp

by Ernie Poole

The Conway show was held on a positively beautiful spring weekend. The downside was that temperatures in the low 80's, with bright sunshine, kept the attendance down. The show was a small one by our usual standards, with only eight module owners participating. The change in weekends from the previous year's Memorial Day weekend, to this year's weekend before, caused some of our people to be unable to join us.

Our layout was 14' x 22', with the yard making up one side. Cappers and Smith each formed an end with their module pairs, and Brotherton, Tremblay, Lawson and a bridge made up one side with the Poole setup yard for the other. Rockwell, Munroe, Lawson, and Wood (borrowed by Poole) provided the all important corner modules. Roland Kelly ran his Circus train for a couple of hours and gained some new fans. Chuck showed off his long Santa Fe coal train with those great red hoppers. Overall, we ran pretty well.

Next came the annual cookout. It was held in a different place this year, as Jim Whitehead was off in California playing on full scale trains. With special effort from Cindy Poole for putting the weekend rental together and organizing much of the food preparation, Linda Cappers, and Chuck Tremblay for peeling, cutting, and cooking, Ed Smith for

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eventually overcome this problem.)

As a result of these various dilemmas, I have spent a lot of time designing various layouts and modules. Indecision has heretofore paralyzed me and prevented me from making the plunge to start building either although I have dabbled to build self confidence in certain areas.

The recent set of articles has forced me to make some hard decisions which I plan to stick to over the next several years. I have settled on a design for a 12' module (two sixes) that can also serve as the start of a home layout. But this plan has some important features that are too complex for a first module. Therefore, I have decided to build a 4' corner with emphasis on mountain division trackage as a first module to give me some practice. It will match the planned 12' module on one edge.

A few months have gone by since I decided this and I have not changed my mind (yet) which is a very encouraging sign. I have even decided where to buy which plywood and have thought through most of the construction details for the corner.

Meanwhile, several months ago I found a source of plastic trays and settled on a scheme of foam padding and separations for storing rolling stock. Little by little I have been making coupler conversions on freight cars and am ready to make the plunge on coupler conversions for locos. By the Fall, I should have at least a half dozen trains ready to roll. With a little luck, I might even be able to debut an operative, though partially finished corner next Spring.

I have further decided that when I can muster big blocks of time, my priority will be to use the time to work on the corner. As a result, for

at least the short term, my presence at shows will continue to be scarce.

I hope readers will conclude that there is still hope that Bob Pawlak will some day have a module and trains to run at future shows.

By writing this letter, I feel I am committing myself to specific goals and a plan of action in support of the club's overall objectives. I hope such public statement of my goals may stimulate some understanding and encouragement from club members which will hopefully keep me motivated sufficiently to follow through with my goals. As a worst case, I will eventually retire and have no more excuse for lack of time to devote to the hobby and the club.

Food for Thought by Bruce Alcock

(Excerpted from The OK Waybill, August, 1994)

Nothing sticks fear in the hearts of people like the word 'standards'. Standards are like rules - they start out as a convenience, but soon they become inconvenient, changes are made and variations start to appear. And then, a new standard is born. Before long, there is a plethora of standards from which to choose, and compatibility is lost.

One reason why Ntrak has been so successful is the fact that N scale module standards can be summarized on one sheet of paper. Most HO module standards require reams of paper and detail everything from the construction of the module to the color of the hat to be worn while operating a train on the outer loop.

Today, Jim FitzGerald has asked

for comments on updating the standards that have resulted in thousands of modules, across the country, that interconnect. Ntrak 2000 is an effort to update the standards after 25 plus years. Some of the suggestions have included: changing track spacing to a more prototypical 1.25 inches, moving the branch line to an alternate position, specifications for lightweight modules, and more. Over the years, modifications have been made, including the addition of the mountain division, the addition of an optional line in from of the red line, alternate backboard heights, and more. But the key to success has been maintenance of the basic, core standard, and all other additions and addendum have been optional, and provisions made for running with existing modules has never been lost. The electrical connections have remained the same, module height hasn't changed, although suggestions have been made for alternate heights when incorporating a module into a home layout, and track spacing and offset is as it was in the original specifications. This constancy serves as a tribute to good planning by the original founders, especially Jim.

As mentioned above, changes are being proposed. While reducing the distance between track centers might look more prototypical, the cost of making obsolete existing modules is too high. One change that should be made is in the rail - code 55 should be adopted for all track with a phase in period. The one feature that stands out as oversized, in any picture of an Ntrak module, is the rail height. Atlas code 80 rail is oversized, even for the heaviest mainline rail. Code 80 is used for HO scale mainlines. That makes it almost twice as big as it should be for N scale.

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Modules using code 55 track could be mixed with modules using code 70 Railcraft or code 80 Atlas track (solder Atlas railjoiners under the code 55 rail so the rail heads match). The problem is that deep flange equipment, most notably Arnold Rapido engines, will not run on code 55 track. If Ntrak, as a national organization representing N-scalers around the country were to notify manufacturers of a change in the standard, one that would require flange depth closer to NMRA standards, new engines could be built with appropriate wheels (Kato and Atlas engines will run on code 55 track today) and companies like Northwest Short Line could provide replacement wheelsets. With a three to five year notification period, there is no reason why any manufacturer could not produce engines that meet the new requirements. Freight and passenger cars are a non-issue since, in most cases they already will run on code 55 track. For older equipment and any anomalies, Micro-Trains, Precision Masters and Northwest Short Line already make a variety of replacement wheelsets.

Today, Railcraft and Peco make code 55 track. Peco makes code 55 switches (Peco buries the rail in the ties, so it is code 70 rail, but the visible profile is code 55). If there were a bigger market, as created by Ntrak standards, how far would Atlas be behind in offering code 55 track?

Readers are welcome to respond and let Jim FitzGerald know how you feel whether you are in favor or against this proposal. As always, Ntrak responds to input from the membership, not the opinion of one or two individuals.

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Quill in Hand

by Ed Smith

This will be my last newsletter for a while. Over the last six months, I have become very busy with both work and personal travel and I have not had the free time necessary to write, edit, print, fold, and stamp a newsletter containing information that this club needs and deserves.

I spent some time recently looking through the newsletters that I have written starting with my first back in May of 1987 for the North Conway show. In those days, Northeast NTrak didn't have a formal monthly newsletter, the coordinator for the next show was responsible for our participation in the show and reminding the membership about the show. Since each show was coordinated by a different person, each mailing looked very different. I "volunteered" and was elected to be the secretary that year.

I introduced a "typeset" style of newsletter and tried with varying amounts of success to send one out each month. Summer newsletters were and still are mostly about the Annual Meeting and any planning information about the two NTrak National Conventions. At this time, Ernie Poole and Jim Whitehead are at the Portland Convention and will provide us all with a perspective on the national NTrak scene.

The most enjoyable newsletters were those written for the Museum of Science shows. Everyone in Northeast NTrak had a good time and there was a lot of information to write about and send to the membership.

Well, I'm almost out of space and out of words, except to say that I have enjoyed writing to all of you each month and will look forward to just reading our next newsletter.

Dues

This is just a reminder that Northeast NTrak annual membership dues will be payable in September. Please send \$12 (checks payable to Chuck Tremblay) by the end of September to: Northeast N-Trak, P.O. Box

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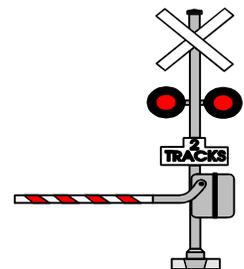
two yummy apple pies, and Roland for diving right into the cleanup effort after dinner, it was a real good evening. We ended up feeding 14 very hungry people. Everyone agreed that the the marinated sirloin tips Bill Munroe brought for us were excellent. Sorry Bill, but you are probably stuck with this job again next year.

I'm going to quit right here for the summer, but hope to see you all at the annual meeting.

Keep on 'keepin on'.....



I have received a flier for the next Amherst Railway Society Hobby Show. It will be held on Saturday and Sunday, February 4-5 from 10 AM to 5 PM and this year it will be in **TWO** big buildings. The original site in the Better Living Center and now, the adjacent Young Building making up nearly 4 1/2 acres of railroading fun.



Annual Meeting - August 27, 1994

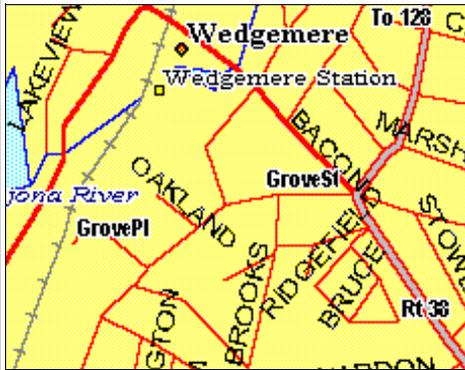
The annual meeting will be held this year at the home of our club President, Bill Munroe. The address is 63 Grove Place, Winchester, MA.

On the meeting agenda:

- Show Schedule.
- Special Events.
- Treasury Report.
- Membership Report.
- Club Elections.

After the meeting there will be our annual summer picnic. The club will provide food, drinks and desert. Also, Bill has a pool in the backyard so bring your swim suits.

Now the most important information, directions to Bill's house, refer to the following map:



- From Rt. 93 & Rt. 128
- Follow 128 south to 38 south.
- Follow 38 south to the five corner intersection.
- Take the 2nd right off intersection, 1st is Bacon, 2nd is Grove.
- Take the 3rd right off Grove St. onto Grove Place.
- At the bottom of the hill turn right (also Grove Pl) and park where you can.

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Northeast N-Trak

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