NORTHEAST N-TRAK

FEBRUARY 2021 NEWSLETTER

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President's Message
Bob Fallier

From the Presiden't Chair, February 2021.

Happy post-Winterfest! I hope everyone has recovered from the Non-Show this year and also thank everyone who did attend our Winterfest "Mini-Show" on January 29th. Presenting at the Mini-Show were Eric Smith (MicroTrains), Lowell Smith, Bobby Allard (Rapido Trains) and Michael Groves (Dwarvin Lighting). Also heaps of thanks to Jim Nolan for organizing it and Bruce Alcock for use of the NTRAK/NRAIL Zoom license. Eric announced that MicroTrains is beginning to ship with metal wheel sets. Rapido has announced a new Bus in N scale. Lowell continues with his custom painted, era specific cars, and Michael has introduced some new fiber goodies for expanded lighting animation.

Before getting into other business and bits, I need to address a saga which began at the Greenberg show in November 2018. I received a message from Jack Brown on February 5th, 2021. To give everyone a brief background, Jack was at the time a teenager. He "borrowed" an engine from a dealer (David Hobbs), broke it, and it became an incident. There is no need to include all the details. Sufficient to say we have all made mistakes and are guilty of occasional bad judgement. The incident turned ugly, threats made, names called, profanities proclaimed, and so on. I was drawn in between the two parties and mediated a payment schedule. It was not ideal, but it was sufficient to get the thing behind us and not further involve Northeast NTRAK.

I spoke with Jack at the Lexington show the following February (2019) and advised him that until he formally apologized to NENT, he would not be allowed to participate in our activities and his membership was revoked. None of us is perfect.

On February 5th I received the following:

"Hey Bob. I've been thinking. I realized I never apologized to everyone in Ntrak. If you can copy and paste this next part into an email, I'd appreciate it:

Dear Northeast N-Trak, For those new members who don't know me, my name is Jack Brown. For those old members, this is for you. I know I made a mistake a couple years ago, and I have been in a group home working on my life for the past year and a half now. I realized I never truly apologized to you all for that mistake. I'm not going to make any excuses, because the issue I caused with the seller was extremely inexcusable. I didn't make a good choice, and for that, you all had to suffer because of me. I want to truly apologize from the bottom of my heart. It shouldn't have happened, and I won't let it happen again. If you're all willing to allow me back, I'll pay my dues with Bob (Pawlak), and see you at our next train show. If not, you have every right to hold this grudge against me, and I'll take my leave like an adult.
Sincerely, Jack Brown"

I sent this out to a few key members as soon as I received it and am making it public for the balance of the organization to read. If you knew Jack, I would appreciate your feedback before the end of February. BFallier@Email.com A decision on reinstatment is up to the membership and not my choice alone. If you did not know Jack, please abstain from negative comments.

Moving on....

Darn...! I missed the NRAIL meeting yesterday. Mia culpa. I was working on my own new module and forgot all about it. Otherwise I'd give you some updates. Every NTRAK (now NRAIL) member is invited to join both their Zoom meetings and of course we have our own on the first Tuesday of each month at 7pm. If you aren't getting the invites, contact Jim Nolan. Roland has been sending out monthly reminders as well.

The Westford NMRA show in October is "On" unless I hear otherwise. This is where we would like to focus on Operations as that will be the theme of the show. Whether you have a single switched siding or a full blown switching layout, we'd like to have it in the show.

I have not heard yet, but I think the August show in Concord may go live. I hope so, as this would be a good test run for operations in November. The last Concord show in 2019 was very well attended with set-up on Saturday. More on that as the year progresses.

I'm also assuming that the Tour de Chooch will happen again this year. Very hopeful on that as there are a few home layouts I'd like to go visit.

Advertising: If you have not been able to locate PECO rail joiners, call Ray at Trains on Tracks. (Rt. 101, Amherst, NH) He had about 10 packages when I was there yesterday.

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Ray@TrainsonTracks.com or phone 603-554-1543. He will also start to sell N scale PECO turnouts once they begin shipping from the UK again. He has been a PECO HO and Kato N dealer for some time. Always good prices and no sales tax.

Last month I spoke a bit about the new Digitrax 602 throttle and the most recent Model Railroader has a review of the Digitrax DCC UT6D Duplex Radio Utility Throttle ($136 at www.SBS4DCC.com). Digitrax DCC DT602D Advanced Duplex (radio) Super Throttle for $195. Dwarvin is also advertising in Model Railroader. Model Tech Studios has some interesting N scale details you should check out.

I still have a number of things available from Rolands collection. Mostly PRR but who says you can't do a little patch job on the numbers or lease a few for your private lines?

Modules, modules, and modules.

As I mentioed last month, I've done some work on my Disney and Imagination modules and also worked with my great nephew on his new module. Xavrian has learned quite a bit while working on his module. Things like screw sizes and thread count, how to strip and crimp wires, and he is beginning to equip
himself with useful tools for model railroading. Donations gladly accepted.

Being bored and not a lot of work coming in, I decided it was time to start building again. Another module. Other than a little bit of lighting, no animation. This is just a "scenic experiment" that I hope everyone will enjoy. A few pictures starting with the box. Thou shalt not disturb the dragon lest he nip your fingers.

New in the Trottle and Tool Box (big yellow bag). The DCC Specialties RRampMeter DCC Amp/Volt Meter Ver.3. This is so easy to use, even a cave man could use it. Or Big Foot. Even I figured it out.

Place the contact strips against the rais - read the display. Done! Or Plug in the test leads and use the probes to test track or other connections. Immediately indicates if a track section has a voltage drop. Our layouts should be no less than 10V on the rails and preferably 11-14v. Shows current as well as amperage. No knobs to turn, all automatic. About the only thing it won't do is tell you if you have reversed polarity on a DCC module. For your home layouts it is a great diagnostic tool - I should know, having had more than a few "issues" whenconverting from DC to DCC!!

Longwood Station on the Green Line
Dan Pawling Sr.

Recently Dan Jr. and I had the urge to see real trains in action. The Longwood station on the Green Line has parking next to the tracks. This outbound trolley was one of several trains we saw going in both directions. On the left is one of the automated train arrival boards. Trains were arriving every 15 minutes. Boarding platforms are at track level. Overhhead are the catenary lines.
Passenger activity very light at mid-day. We enjoyed the visit very much.

"Tests have shown that meters not designed to read the DCC wave forms can be off by as much as 50%" Battery: Meters are powered by the Input Voltage, which must be greater than 7 volts to operate. The Version 3 has an option for a 9V battery for operation when the input voltage is below 7V. Measuring Track Voltage: The edges of the meter have adjustable tabs which can lay directly on the track. "True RMS" (Root Means Square)? Most common meters can measure DC or AC, but not accurately read the high frequency DCC, due to the shape and frequency of the DCC wave form. The two status indicators show either DCC or AC voltage. If DC voltage is present Both LEDs will be on.

When measuring voltage at the Rails, if there is a notable drop from one module to the next, replace the rail joiners. If they are all loose, then they can cause a significant loss.
Clean the track. There may be a loss if the jumper from the track Bus is damaged or poorly soldered to the rails. If needed, disconnect the module and check the voltage at the CONNECTOR of the previous working module.
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Cricut for Model Railroading

For Christmas, my wife wanted to find something to "keep my mind exercised" so she thought a 3-D printer would be just the thing. After consultation with my daughter, they purchased me a Cricut (pronounced "cricket") machine.

For those who are unfamiliar with them Cricut makes a line of cutting machines that will cut 2 dimensional shapes from various materials such as paper, card stock, leather, and fabric. It is primarily aimed at scrap bookers, crafters, and fancy home greeting card makers. While not mentioned on their website, a google search found that the "Maker" model, with a heavy-duty blade, can cut styrene up to .030" in thickness. Having access to a 3-D printer at our Town library I thought I would give it a try, and if I do not like it, well there is always eBay!

The Design Space software that drives the machine allows you to "freehand" draw shapes to be cut out. There is a detailed YouTube video of an NMRA convention clinic where the presenter draws and cuts out a small shed. It also can import images, edit, and cut them out. My thought was that if I could get line drawings or "square" pictures of specific buildings, I could import them and make accurate models.

Of course, you need to walk before you run, and I thought I should make a simple structure, one that I had drawings of. I recently built a barn to house my workshop and railroad and had created plans and views of the structure to get the permits and for the contractor. If I could get them into a format Design Space would accept, I could play with that. The design software could generate color "3-D" renderings of the building, so I printed and scanned them into a JPG files, one per side, which Design Space could use.

If you are working from an image (JPG) file you first need to import it to Design Space. This basic process includes tools to crop and erase unwanted parts of the image. At this point just grab the whole side and delete what you can easily. The fine tuning, (like cutting opening for doors or windows).can be done later in the "Canvas".

When you are done with the basic image cleanup, it needs to be saved in one of two formats, "Cut | Print" or "Cut". I suggest saving it as "Cut | Print", you can convert it to "Cut" when you make it (and save that as a different project), but you can not go the other way.

The next step is to go to the "Canvas" in Design Space and import the images. Once they are imported there are numerous tools to size the images to the correct scale, both locking or unlocking the aspect ratio as required. You can also duplicate images and rotate them as appropriate. When you are happy, save the project. The Canvas window is below.

To the right Bob Fallier's new module.

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To test the current, a constant load should be used. An automotive light bulb (912 - 1A, 1141 - 1.5A, 1156- 2.25A) with clip leads soldered to the base can be clipped to one end of the meter. The other end of the meter is placed across the track. An engine(s) on the track will present a varying load while running. Connecting the meter near the Booster and observing if or where the current changes significantly will indicate a bad connection or dirty track.

For any other info: www.DCCSpecialties.com

The only inexpensive device that accurately measures DCC Volts/Amps.

Also measures AC and DC Volts/Amps.

Costs less than DVMs that cannot measure DCC. Ver I, II, & III rated at 6 Amps and Ver IV rated at 20 Amps.

Measures true RMS Volts/Amps, +/- 2%.

Suitable for all scales.

No batteries required.

Designed for Left/Right-hand use.

PCB length 5.63"; Enclosure length 4", width 2", height 1.25"

4 Styles Available:

Version I RRampMeter Circuit Module without enclosure (Fig. 2)

Version II RRampMeter with Enclosure and Clip Leads (Fig. 3)

Version III RRampmeter Same as II. with Battery backup for measurements below 7 Volts

Version IV RRampmeterHP

Same as III but for large scale high voltage and current applications:

DCC: 38.6 v and 18-20 Amps

AC: 27.6 v and 18-20 Amps

DC: 38.6 v and 18-20 Amps

Adjustable contacts permit direct track voltage measurements for all scales.

Test or Clip Leads (Ver. 3) can also be used for other applications. Test Leads or Layout Wiring can be conveniently connected to the rear screw/socket terminals. Designed as a portable troubleshooting tool or as a panel-mount meter.