



NEWSLETTER

Spring Ahead

The next club meeting will be Friday, March 18 in Walnut Creek. Bill Riechmann is always willing to have the guys come over and run some trains around his layout so there is usually a good turn out. He's been honing his repainting skills so it will be interesting to see what's new on his track this month. Maybe a set of St. Patrick's Day green passenger cars?



items looking for a new home

In January, we met at Rich Lenart's home and started off the evening by watching old home movies that Rich had made at various rail outings in years gone by. When originally filmed, he probably had a video recorder that was half the size of a briefcase perched on his shoulder and another shoulder bag full of blank video tape to feed into the machine. Now there's probably a handheld digital recorder that is smaller than one of the old video cartridges and we get to store hours of movies on one DVD. Ain't technology grand? And it's transforming our model train world as well. Electronic locomotive sounds,

crew talk, tetherless tenders, remote uncoupling, multiple train control, it's a changing world for the model train operator.

Of course, most of us will still be buying, swapping, selling, cleaning, adjusting, running, fixing, and enjoying a lot of the old hardware. Partly because we can and partly because it has the look and feel and smell of what we're familiar with and fond of. I had this revelation last night when I decided to pick up an old 322 that had been staring at me from the top of a bookcase for a few years. I don't remember where I got it, I didn't pay much for it and it didn't run, but it looked like it would make a nice operating piece if I could bring it back to life. I am, by no means, an American Flyer expert but I've learned enough to realize that the unweighted thin-shank link coupler pegged it as a 1946 model. It was a heavy brute of a locomotive and when I removed the boiler shell I found out why; a previous owner had artfully crafted a big chunk



One of Jake's MiniCraft finds

of lead and screwed it to the top of the chassis. The stamp on the inside of the boiler shell did verify that the train was made in December of 1946 but I also discovered that it will be more than a simple matter to replace the lamp for the headlight since the boiler front had been glued shut. The wires from the tender to the loco were obviously not original so I removed the shell from the tender to see what form of renovation wonderment had gone on in there. For some reason, I had expected to see a motor driven bellows unit to push the smoke up to the stack so I was surprised and intrigued to see a brass cylinder and piston attached to the diminutive worm geared motor. I had a foggy recollection of someone telling me that that was the way that the earlier smoke-in-tender units were built. "Interesting", I thought. And then it hit me. That was exactly the same reaction that I had had as a kid when I took apart wristwatches, radios, alarm clocks, washing machine, bicycle coaster brakes, or anything else that had stopped working or had just aroused my curiosity. The old trains hit the same chord with me.

Do kids still do that? I think that they do, it's just that they're taking apart their laptop computers to replace the batteries or install a new hard drive or they're programming their phone so that their Tweets, Facebook and email get pushed to it. Maybe the new electronics in toy trains will be the saving grace of the model train hobby. Maybe the next generation of train buffs will be the ones who appreciate the complexity, versatility, and reliability of the newer machines. Us older dogs could probably still learn a few new tricks so I'll be willing to explore the modern trains as long as I can still put that old Hudson on the track once in a while and smoke up the place.....assuming I get it put back together!



Jake brought four MiniCraft buildings for show and tell. The two rarest are the #900 Dennistown shown on the first page and the #750 Ronaldale pictured here. They date from 1952 and were handmade, one-of-a-kinds named after the builder's sons. Jake picked these up during his maiden voyage to York and let's just say they were "pricey". In 1953, A.C. Gilbert bought out MiniCraft and some of the details.

Paul Guaraglia mentioned that he spotted Sunoco oil tanks (by Lionel) in Talbot's hobby shop in San Francisco just before Christmas and thought that they were a good fit for S gauge. He also brought some of the M2 trucks that he purchased at the same time. An update from Lionel via Paul indicated that there may be a significant shortage on the new Rio Grande passenger 3 pack.

February's meeting was at Michael Smith's home in South San Francisco and we had 16 members attending. His son Chris is an experienced operator and kept several different trains running throughout the evening. The layout uses traditional Gilbert track, switches, accessories, and transformers including an original reverse loop relay and it all works perfectly. There is rubber roadbed under all of the track to help keep the noise down.

The passenger station and yards



The control center



Michael pointed out that the new AF diesels have a round head machine screw on their underside that holds the side frames on. Unfortunately, these screws drag on the old Gilbert switches and raiilers as they pass over them and will soon carve a nice groove through them. He has replaced these screws in his new diesels with 3/56 NF x 5/8" flat head screws and solved the problem.

Speaking of problem solving, Jake brought along a REA mailbag delivery station that he purchased on eBay (also marketed by Portlines Hobbies) that is designed to corral your mailbags as they are ejected from the REA mail car. He also announced the arrival of 5 new products from Lionel: the Rio Grande baggage car, Bakelite 3 dome tank car and 3 bay hopper, GN log car, Wabash coal dump car, and Sunoco oil derrick.

Paul Guaraglia brought one of the new M2 1954 Studebaker tow trucks to pass around and also announced that Lionel is going to produce Fast Track for S gauge. Due out in July, this will be a welcome addition to the available track selections that we have now, especially if they intend to produce anywhere near the variety of turnouts, etc. that they have in O gauge.

Flyer Fest West registration forms have been emailed or postal mailed to hundreds of individuals and Jake has reported that the registrations are beginning to come in for this year's event. American Models is progressing with the commemorative long gondolas that are scheduled to be delivered at the San Francisco show on Saturday, April 30.

Reminder: Anyone who has not paid their dues is overdue, please contact Jake A.S.A.P.