The Derail

The Official Monthly Publication of the San Jacinto Model Railroad Club, Inc.

February 2026 Volume 57 Issue 2

Greater Houston Train Show

Presented by San Jacinto Model Railroad Club
Pasadena Convention Center
7902 Fairmont Parkway, Pasadena
February 21, 2026

This show is the reason our club does not have dues!
We will need all hands-on deck to help make this show a success.
If you were not at the January meeting or you did not sign up, please contact Steve Sandifer at steve.sandifer@sbcglobal.net and volunteer to help. He will find an area for you to help.

Thanks,

Chuck Lind MMR

The San Jacinto Model RR club in association with NMRA/LSR/Div-8 will once again host a Celebration of Models (contest room) at the annual Greater Houston Train Show. There are several modeling categories like Locomotives, Rail cars and structures. We will follow the NMRA Judging guidelines to award points that can be used for qualifications for the NMRA AP program. The modeler can enter their models in the contest or simply present them for judges evaluation.

Please bring these two completed forms available on the NMRA website:
https://www.nmra.org/celebration-contests-3

- Contest Entry form #901
- Model Contest Judge's Score Sheet #902

If you have any questions contact Kelly Russell - Contest Chair. If you would like to participate as a judge or learn to be a judge, let me know as well. Let's see who wins the Blue Ribbons...

Thanks,

Kelly Russell MMR

The Greater Houston Train Show

GREATER HOUSTON TRAIN SHOW

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2026 10:00 – 4:00

Pasadena Convention Center

7902 Fairmont Parkway
Pasadena, TX 77504

East of Beltway 8 on
Fairmont Parkway

Adult $10
Youth $5
Maximum $15 per household

Operating Layouts, Classes on Railroads and Modeling subjects, National Model Railroad Association Contest, and Vendors from across the Southwest.

Sponsored by the **San Jacinto Model Railroad Club**, Inc.
501(c)3
Chairman: Steve Sandifer; steve.sandifer@sbcglobal.net
Table Sales: Robert Ashcraft: crash8473@comcast.net

http://sanjacmodeltrains.org

Improving Depth of Field on Cell Phone Photos

By Carl Brainerd

I've been taking photos on my Clear Lake Timber Company railroad for a few years now, using a "point & shoot" digital camera (back when) and more recently a cell phone camera (iPhone). Years ago I had let my old film-based SLR camera go as the transition to digital progressed. My digital photos were "OK" but I was always bothered by the fact that their depth of field was noticeably shallow, i.e. typically the foreground and background were out of focus. I was really interested in a letter to the editor that appeared in the January/ February 2025 issue of Narrow Gauge & Shortline Gazette. The writer explained how to fix this problem, and it was a real revelation to me. The "fix" involved two things-

1. Unbeknownst to me, when taking a photo with an iPhone using the Camera app, if you tap the screen before taking the photo a small square appears on the screen and the camera will focus on whatever is in that small square. I sure wish I had known about this sooner! A similar feature may exist on Android phones, but I don't know about them.

2. Software is available for the computer (Mac and Windows) that can take a number of images of the same scene that are focused on different distances and combine them into a single image that takes the "best" of each image, resulting in a combined image that is in focus everywhere, at least everywhere that you focused an image on.

These software programs are classed as "focus stacking" applications. The one recommended by the letter writer was Helicon Focus (available at www.heliconsoft.com). I took the plunge and downloaded the software and tried it out. It worked out beautifully, just as advertised, and it was not difficult. I had a number of "reference" photos taken over the last few years. When I saw that this process really worked, I went back and reshot the photos with this new technique. Here (Figure 1) is one of the old photos, in which you can hopefully see how the background trees and the foreground (especially) are fuzzy and out of focus.

Figure 1 Old Photo with Shallow Depth of Field

The image below (Figure 2) shows how this scene came out when I reshot the image using my iPhone and the focus stacking technique. Everything, including the background and foreground, is now in focus. It was like magic.

Figure 2 Image Updated Using Focus Stacking

Here are the details on how the process works. These steps are how it goes with my iPhone and Mac computer, but I assume the steps would be essentially the same for an Android phone or on a Windows computer.

- Use a tripod to hold the phone in one position for the series of shots.
- Take a series of shots using the "tap the screen" feature to get the shots focused all over the image. I used 15-25 shots to cover the whole image and make sure I had tapped on everything at every distance from the camera, especially the primary subject of the photo.
- I found that I had to be very careful not to disturb the tripod positioning when tapping the screen. My tripod is a somewhat lightweight one that jiggles a little bit when disturbed. I made sure to wait a couple of seconds between tapping and image-taking for the jiggling to damp out. The camera's built-in time delay can be used for this, or a remote shutter release (as I used) is perhaps even better as there is less tapping on the phone needed.
- Select the group of images in the Photo app on the phone and send them to the computer via AirDrop (which, on the Mac, puts them into the Downloads folder), or use your alternate favorite method of transferring photos to your computer.
- Open the Helicon Focus app. You only need to work with one screen as shown in the following screen shots. It takes longer to read through these steps than it does to actually do them.
- On the File menu at the top, select "Open Images". Reference Figure 3.

Figure 3 File Menu and Open Images

- The "Open Images" command will open up a familiar Finder window where you can navigate to wherever the images you just uploaded reside. Then select all of them and click "Open". This will cause thumbnails of the images to appear on the right side of the Helicon Focus screen, and one of the images (maybe the first one?) will appear large on the screen. Reference Figure 4. In this example image the tree at left is in focus and most of the rest of the image is not.

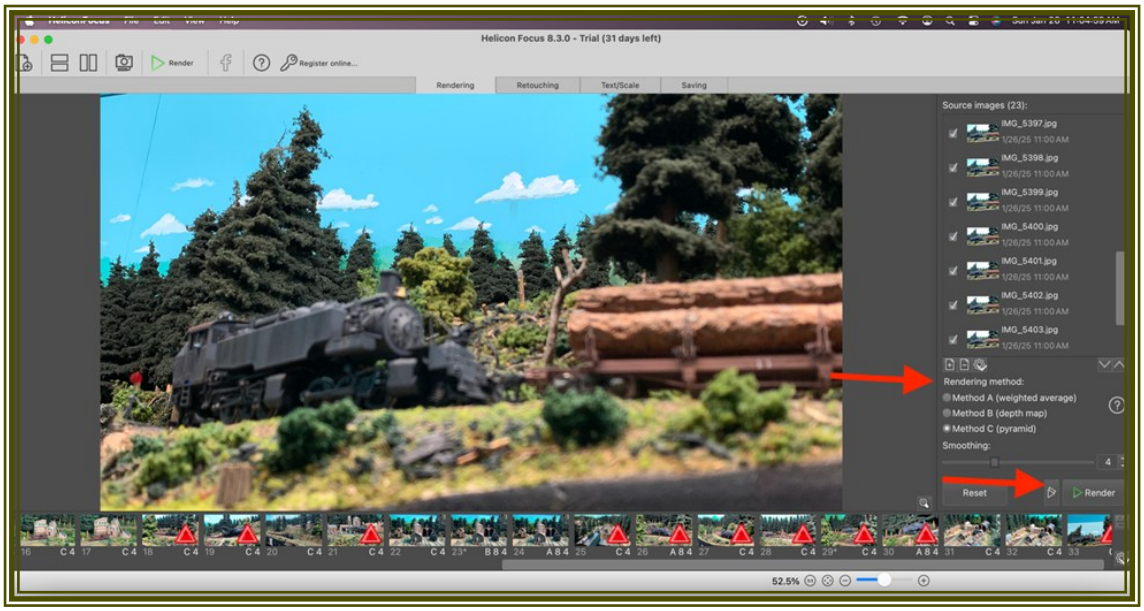


Figure 4 Images Loaded in Helicon Focus

- Then it's time for the "magic". In Figure 4 note the "Render" button at lower right. Clicking this button will cause the program to do the stacking and produce one integrated image from the 15-25 or so images that were loaded. Note the "Rendering method" selection right above the "Render" button. There are three ways to do the rendering: (A) weighted average, (B) depth map, and (C) pyramid. I don't know what they mean, but I found that they can make a difference. I found that the default Method B gave me strange gray borders around the clouds when my backdrop with its painted clouds appeared in an image, but that the unwanted stuff disappeared when I selected Method C. So if the result isn't perfect, try a different rendering method. The rendering process only takes a few seconds.

- After the "Render" button is clicked, the screen will show one of the original images next to the final rendered image with everything in focus. Reference Figure 5.

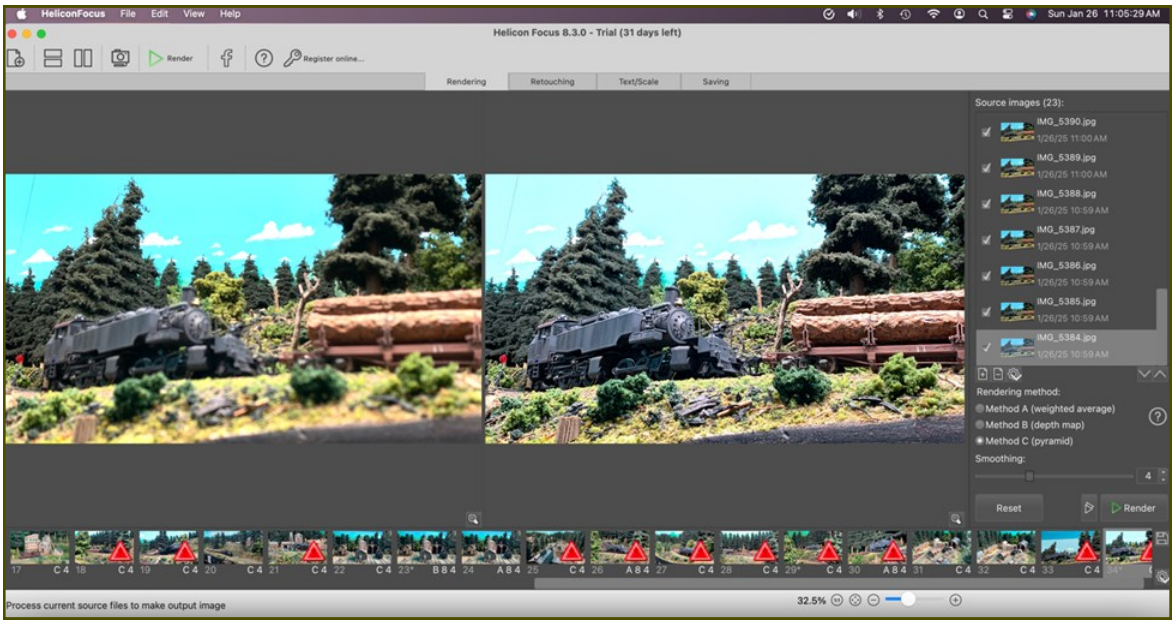


Figure 5 Rendering Complete

- Finally, if the rendered image looks OK, click on the "Saving" tab at the top (reference Figure 6), and then the "Save" button on the right. This will give you a standard file "save as" window and you can save the rendered file wherever you wish. You'll also see a "save image quality" slider as part of the saving process. I used 90% and that seemed good enough. The 100% setting makes the file size twice as big.

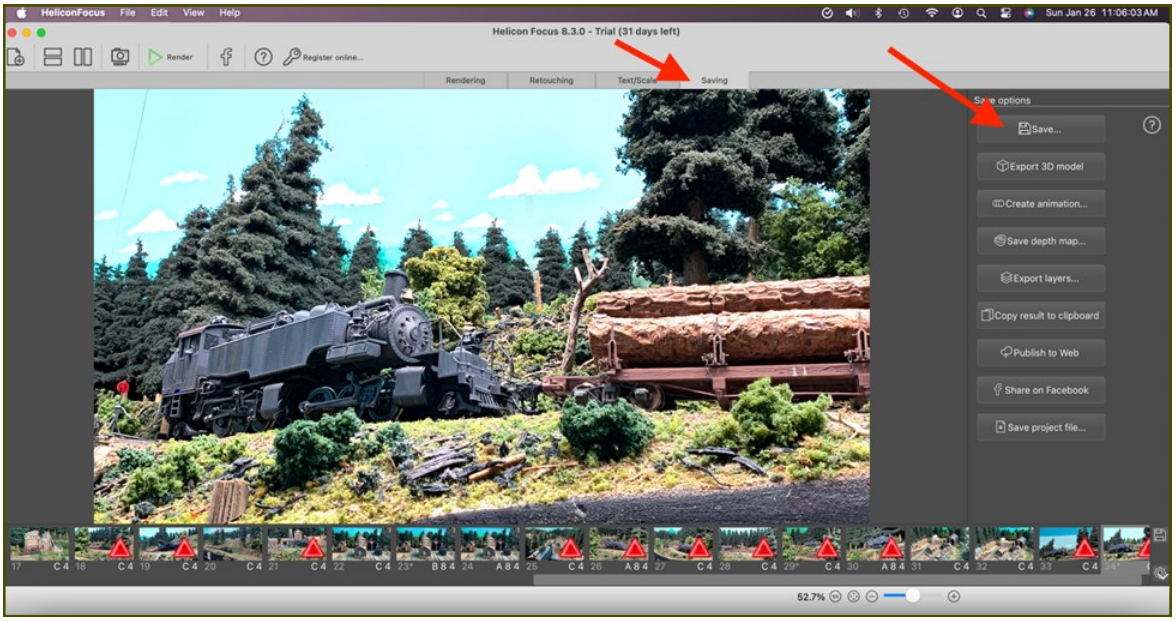


Figure 6 Saving the File

That's all there is to it. The results are really gratifying, like "magic". The software license costs a little money, but it's not too bad if you plan on doing layout photography on an ongoing basis. I guess it's like a hobby within a hobby. This is a product that works well, as advertised. The real breakthrough for me was learning about the "tap to focus" feature on the iPhone. That took the place of using (or buying, in my case!) a digital SLR with manual focus or a pinhole lens. Now my phone is all I need. Happy picture-taking!

A Freelanced On30 Diesel Center Cab Model – Part 2

By Pete Leach MMR

In the last installment, I completed building the truck side frames and the deck on my freelanced On30 locomotive. The shell was the next area to tackle. I wanted the model to have a center cab between the 2 hoods. Styrene would be the material used for its construction.

The design included a set of louvers at the end to each hood. There were also vents on the top of the hood and on the set of hood doors.

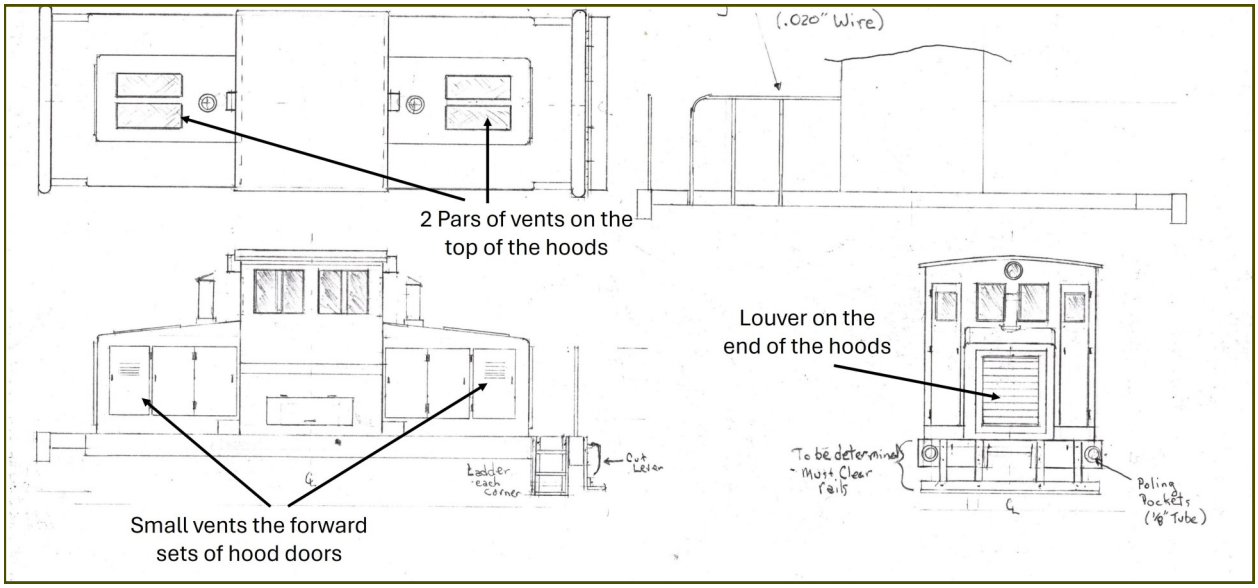


Figure 1 - The louvers and vents are noted on the above sketch.

Construction started with the louvers on the front of the hood. Using a base of .040” styrene, a rectangle was marked and framed with .060” square strips. The inside was painted black before installing thin strips at a 45° angle, each cut to fit. Once the louvers were completed, the rest of the shell could proceed.

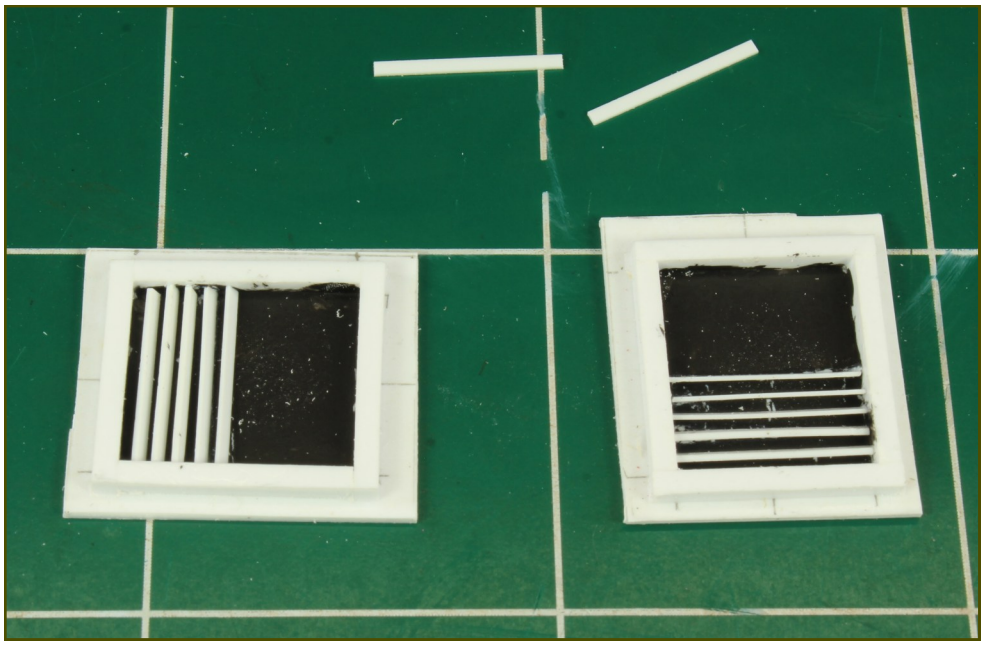


Figure 2 - Strips of styrene were attached to the "opening" using solvent. The black will help hide the fact there is no opening.

The shell consists of 3 major components: the cab and a pair of identical hoods. Once again, styrene sheets of various thicknesses were used to scratch-build them. The cab was constructed, making sure it cleared the mechanism. Then the short hoods were built, once again making sure they cleared the mechanism.

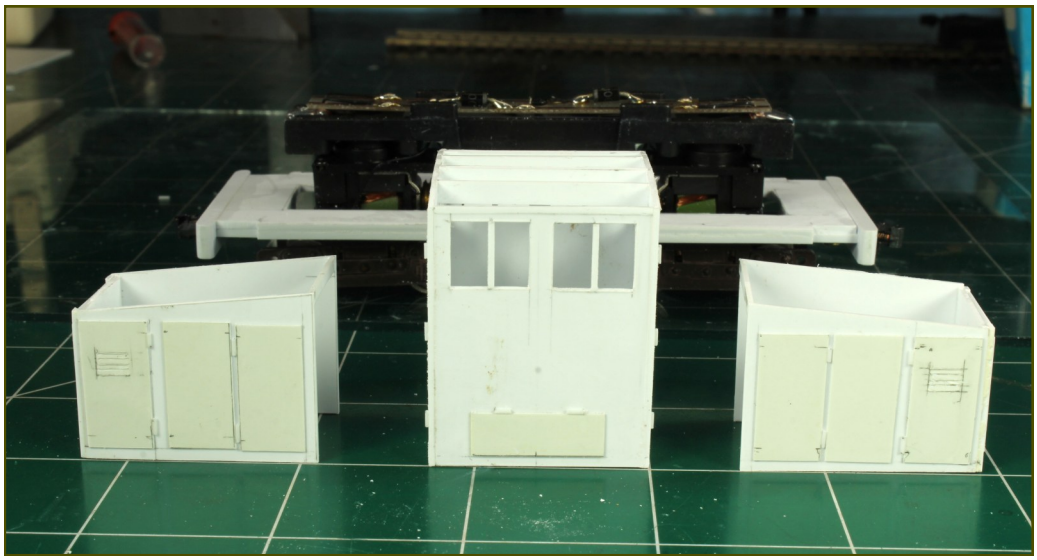


Figure 3 - The cab and 2 hoods are awaiting roofs and final assembly

The shell components were "dry fit" onto the deck and mechanism to ensure they fit and did not interfere with the stock mechanism.

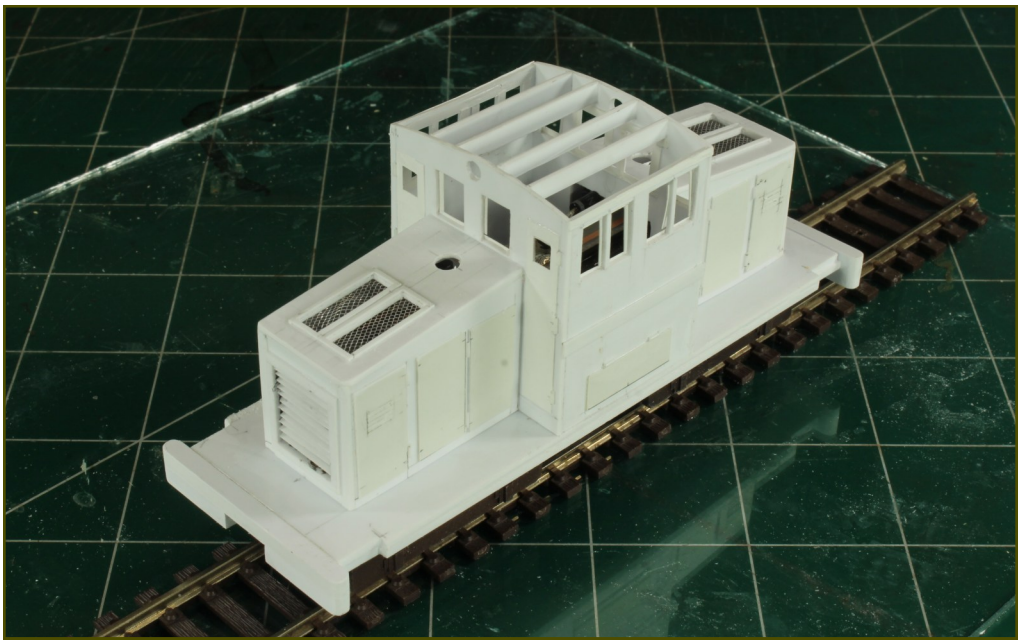


Figure 4 - The cab and 2 hoods are placed on the deck temporarily. This was done before the railings were installed. Note the vents on the top of the hoods with wire mesh.

At this point, it was time to add the cab roof, deck railings, and other details. The cab roof consists of a .040" thick sheet of styrene cut to fit. The windows were framed on the inside with .010" styrene. Vents were cut into the first hood doors using an EXACTO® chisel blade. Brass tubing of various diameters was fashioned into headlights and exhaust stacks.

Figure 5 – The locomotive shell is complete and waiting for the paint shop.

Now it is off to the paint shop. After a coat of Tamiya Fine Surface Primer spray, I brush painted the model with Poly-S Reading Green (main body) and Flat Black (deck and pilot.) An old set of N Scale decals (Microscale 60-4182 Masscentral Locomotive) provided the yellow the striping and numbers. Some Polys S E/L yellow paint was applied to the steps and railings.

Figure 6 – The locomotive has been painted and decals added. Uncoupler levers and air hoses were added to the pilots. The bell on the hood came from an old steam locomotive.

This completed the kitbash. It met my plan of spending little or no money on it. But wait, what about DCC sound? I'll finish off the project next time!

Modeling with a Purpose-Chapter 4

By Bob Barnett MMR

Author's note:
Assembling this article on the lone-gone Houston Model Railroad Club was only possible by the contributions of the following:
John Frank
Harvey Phillips
Al Partlow
Steve Sandifer
Chuck Lind

In previous additions of "Modeling with a Purpose" I have concentrated primarily on modelers who built their railroad, rolling stock, structures, and scenery to portray a specific time and place. I followed up with a railroad built specifically for operation with a large group of operators, The railroad we will look at today was built for the purpose most of us have in mind when we start out new in the hobby and visit beautiful railroads during an open house, to display to visitors (aka the public).

In doing some research on early car-card articles for our recent round table clinic I ran across the 1957 Model Railroader article on the Houston Model Railroad Club. About this same time Al Partlow told me that he had a notebook filled with black and white photos of the club. From notes in the notebook it appears that the notebook was from Harvey Phillips collection, more on that later.

The Houston Model Railroad Club dates back to at least 1946-1947, making it the earliest known model railroad club in Houston. There may have been an earlier version possibly bearing the same name. But I have been told they began construction on the famed layout in the downtown Houston Southern Pacific station in 1946 or 1947.

The club constructed a beautiful fully-scenicked O-Scale Layout on the third floor of Grand Central Station. Yes, that's correct: Grand Central Station. Many years ago there was an article in Trains magazine stating if you want to visit Grand Central Station, go to Houston. The giant edifice in Manhattan built by the New York Central and the Vanderbilt's is technically named Grand Central Terminal. (To be fair the public and rail-fans call it Grand Central Station.) The club held annual open houses and the railroad was visited by thousands over the 15 years of its existence. Two of our club members remember visiting the layout, Al Partlow and Chuck Lind. A relative of Chuck's took him to see the layout when he was visiting Houston in the 1950s and Al's father worked for the SP and took him to see the railroad. To the sorrow of many the railroad was dismantled in 1960 when the Southern Pacific's beautiful art-deco station was torn down to make room for the new Houston Post Office.

The View of the Layout from the Operators' Loft. Note the glass panels on the extreme left and right to separate the viewing area from the layout.

Modeling with a Purpose-Chapter 4

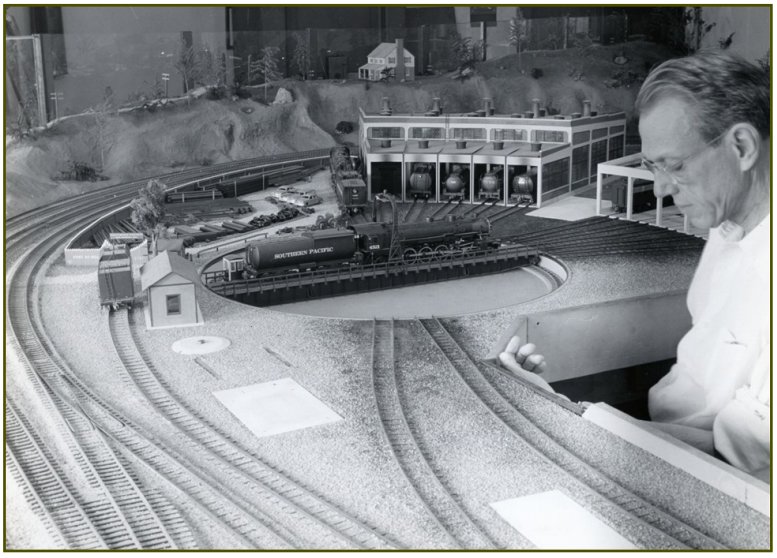
By Bob Barnett MMR

Fast forward about 30 years and the author was president of the San Jac Club. John Frank, a long-time member of the San Jac, had rail-fan friends that had been members of the HMRRC, and knew all about the layout. An informal group known locally as the Thursday Night Bunch met regularly in members' homes. These were hard core Southern Pacific fans and modelers and a few were former members of the downtown club. I attended a meeting with John and invited them to come to the San Jac and give a program on the Houston Model Railroad Club and the layout. Fortunately John had collected some old 8 mm and 16 mm films of the club in operation, some news reels from the local station and some just shot by rail-fans. He had them converted to DVD and we used them as the basis of the presentation.

So, on the appointed night we made the presentation, Fred Stubs who had an O-scale layout in the Westbury area and owned several of the pieces from the original layout attended along with Harvey Phillips. Harvey had been the youngest member of the HMRRC and took a lot of kidding from the others as being "The Kid". These guys knew other surviving members of the club, and to our surprise, around a dozen attend the San Jac meeting. That was amazing for a club that had disbanded 30 years earlier. They filled us in with many stories and otherwise tall tales about the construction, maintenance and open houses of the HMRRC.

Several years ago Steve Sandifer helped Harvey Phillips dispose of his railroad book collection and evidently gave the note book filled with HMRRC photos to Al as he is the local expert on the H&TC/T&NO and actually models the SP Houston Station. Al has now loaned them to the author for scanning and inclusion into the digital museum of Houston and Texas (LSR) Layouts.

Now fast forward another 30 years. On one of our many long drives into Houston for the San Jac meetings, Chuck Lind told me about on older gentlemen who lived in the Lake Somerville area. He had on O-scale SP steam locomotive that he said had run on the HMRRC layout. It was set up for O-scale three rail operation, and he was inquiring if there was any way to convert it to Two-rail operation. The short answer was no, unless you replace the drivers and all wheels, or find someone who can insulate them. For those not familiar with O-scale three rail track and operations this is not the Lionel with the third rail in the center of the track. Pre-World War II many O-Scale layouts were built by using an outside third rail. The wheel sets were not insulated and like Lionel the two track rails carried one charge (say positive) and the opposite charge was picked up from a small third rail installed just outside of the ties. The locomotive had a small outrigger usually around the pilot that extended out with a wheel or wiper to contact the third rail. The pictures I had seen and the engines on Fred Stubs layout were all two-rail. But from examining the 8 x 10 B&W photos in the Harvey Phillips collection it shows that there was some three-rail track in the layout. Look closely at the photo showing the roundhouse and you can see the third rail on the right hand main track. Evidently this was a favorite location to photograph the engines as there are several photos from this spot and that all clearly show the third rail.



This view of the Roundhouse clearly shows the outside third rail on one of the main line tracks.

Well, there you have it: a brief history of the oldest known model railroad club and perhaps the most widely viewed layout by the public.

Modeling with a Purpose-Chapter 4

By Bob Barnett MMR

The Main Passenger Station on the HMRRC:
The passenger trains shown at the station are models of (From Lt to RT)
the Sunbeam, the Daylight, the heavyweight Argonaut, and the streamlined Sunset Limited.

Congratulations to Carl Brainerd—NMRA Calendar Cover Photo

Editor's Note: Please see the August 2024 Derail for detailed background on this series.

Published: 1944

Grain Goes to Market

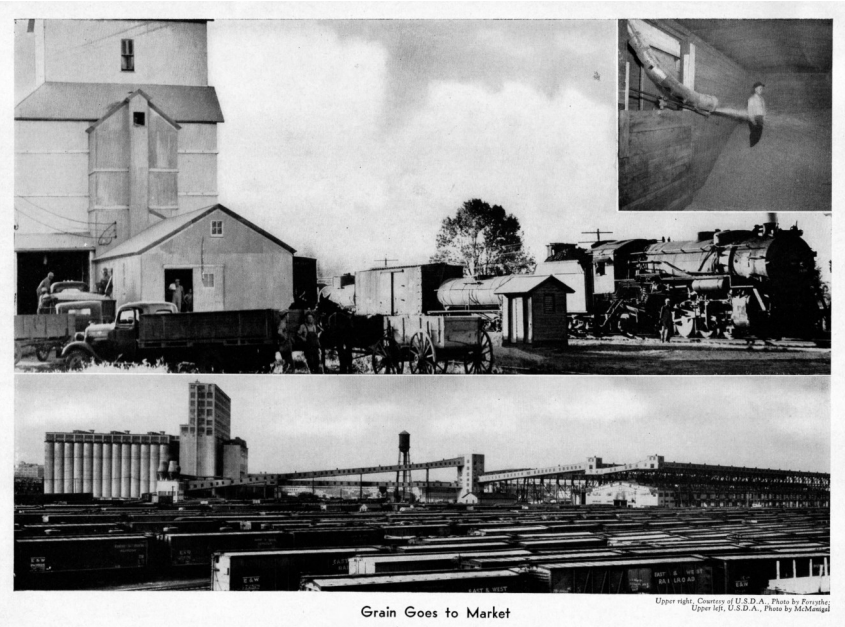
Behind every slice of bread, every biscuit, and every muffin that we eat is an interesting story of transportation. The story may start in the wheat fields of Kansas, Oklahoma, Nebraska, Montana, the Dakotas, or any one of a score of states in the grain belt. It may run through a dozen states, and it is certain to be replete with travel adventures before it finally ends up at our table at home.

This is true whether the bread is made of wheat, corn, rye, or barley. In every part of the United States, every day, freight cars bearing grains or their products are rolling toward American homes. If we could see them all at once, we would be tremendously impressed!

In 1942, the railroads of the United States transported 1,121,000 carloads of wheat, corn, and other grains, chiefly from country storage elevators to terminal elevators, cleaning houses, mills and seaports, and they carried an additional 799,000 carloads of four, breakfast cereals, meal, malt, and other grain products to distributing and consuming centers throughout the country and to our seaports for shipment to foreign countries. Put all these cars together and you have a train 15,600 miles in length!

In pioneer days, before railroads and large grain elevators were introduced, many farmers carried their grain to the nearest grist mill. The miller received a part of the grain in payment for grinding the rest into four for the farmer's use. The cost of hauling grain long distances by wagon was often prohibitive. Some grain and flour moved from the Middle West to Eastern markets by lakes and canal, and to New Orleans by the Ohio and Mississippi rivers.

With the coming of railroads, many millions of acres of land were settled and put under cultivation; country elevators sprang up along the rail routes; large terminal elevators and flour mills were established at transportation centers like Chicago, St. Louis, Minneapolis, Milwaukee, Omaha, Kansas City, Duluth, and Buffalo. And in time, the United States became not only the world's greatest grain-producing country but also the world's greatest exporter of grain and grain products.



Grain Goes to Market

Upper right, Courtesy of U.S.D.A., Photo by Forsythe; Upper left, U.S.D.A., Photo by McMonigal

The farmer's immediate market for his wheat is the country grain elevator, as shown in the large picture at the top. Elevators are located at numerous railway stations throughout the wheat belt. Wheat is unloaded from the farmers' trucks and wagons and lifted into the elevator bins by means of a conveyor belt or a blower. Here it is held until the owner of the wheat decides it is time to sell. He then calls up the local railroad agent and orders the required number of empty box cars to be placed at the elevator for loading. The cars are delivered and the loading begins. This is done by means of grain spouts or chutes, as shown in the small picture at the upper right. An average carload of wheat is around 1,653 bushels, or 49.6 tons.

From the country elevator, the wheat may be shipped to one of the big terminal elevators, like the one in the lower picture. Sometimes a railroad picks up enough cars of wheat at the country elevators to form a solid trainload destined to one of the big wheat marketing centers. Terminal elevators are usually equipped for cleaning, clipping, drying, grading, and mixing the grain, as well as storing and sacking it.

The long slender structures leading from the big elevator in the lower picture are equipped with conveyor machinery by which the grain is transferred to loading or unloading chutes.

At the terminal elevator, the wheat finally goes into a large bin containing wheat of a corresponding grade. From here it may be reloaded into cars and shipped to a mill where it is ground into flour. The flour is placed in barrels (or sacks), each bearing the name of the brand and the name of the milling company.

There are more than 2,000 flour mills and other mills producing grain products in the United States. Principal flour-milling states are Minnesota, New York, Kansas, Missouri, Texas, and Illinois.

Since every individual is a consumer of bread and other grain products, the distribution of these commodities extends to every city and town and farming community in the United States. This country also ships large quantities of flour, meal, and breakfast cereals to foreign countries.

Icing the Refrigerator Cars

One of the miracles of modern railway transportation is that fruits, berries, vegetables, meats, fish, eggs, and dairy products are delivered at hotels, restaurants, and homes throughout America as fresh and in as perfect condition as they were on the day they were shipped, even though they have crossed the continent in the meantime. Of course, this did not all "just happen". The science of refrigeration gradually advanced from crude beginnings. Many years of experimentation and experience in the handling of perishable commodities were necessary before the care of perishables in transit was reduced to a science.

From the outside, the refrigerator car does not look much different from an ordinary box car, but its construction differs in several particulars. For one thing, it has thicker floor, walls, and roof. It is insulated so as to keep the proper temperature within the car regardless of weather conditions outside.

Inside the car, at each end, are compartments known as “bunkers”, in which ice is carried to keep the interior of the car cold or in which heaters are placed to keep the interior warm. The ice is dropped into the bunkers through openings, called hatches, in the roof of the car, as shown in the picture. The hatches are equipped with adjustable ventilators to permit a continuous circulation of air through the car when it is not iced or heated but is carrying a shipment under what is called "ventilation". In this service, the ventilators are closed for most commodities when the temperature outside falls below freezing (32 degrees above zero) and are opened when it rises above that.

The temperature requirements depend upon the commodity with which the car is loaded. For instance, meats and fish require substantially lower temperatures than lettuce and peaches. Apples and potatoes do not usually require refrigeration, at least for short distances, but they must be protected against freezing in cold weather. This is done by the use of charcoal heaters placed in the car bunkers.

Icing the Refrigerator Cars

Courtesy of Fruit Growers Express Co.

In this picture we see refrigerator cars being iced at an icing station. The fully equipped icing station contains ice-making machinery and storage rooms for ice. A long icing platform, slightly higher than the tops of the cars, is connected with the station and extends along the railroad tracks. A chain belt conveyor moves blocks of ice along the icing platform. Men remove the ice blocks at the cars to be iced, break them into smaller pieces and drop the pieces into the bunkers as shown in the picture. By this method, an entire train of refrigerator cars can be iced or re-iced in a very short time.

Railroads which handle considerable quantities of perishable products may have several stations along their lines for icing and re-icing refrigerator cars.

Caretakers or inspectors examine the cars at intervals en-route to make sure that they are given the right kind of service to regulate the temperatures inside of the cars. On some shipments at certain seasons, frequent temperature adjustments are necessary. For instance, a shipment from Florida, southern California, or southern Texas to northern cities during the winter season may start out under low temperature, require several temperature adjustments en-route, and arrive at destination without refrigeration or even with charcoal heaters in operation.

Refrigerator cars are often used in cold weather to transport canned goods, potatoes, apples, pears, and other commodities which might freeze in ordinary freight cars. This is because the refrigerator cars have insulated walls, floors, and ceilings, which, like a thermos bottle, have the effect of shutting out cold and retaining the desired temperatures.

Small refrigerator containers, shipped in express cars and freight package cars, are extensively used for less-than-carload lots of oysters, fresh and frozen fish, fruits, vegetables, berries, fresh orange juice, cheese, meats, eggs, poultry, yeast, serums, vaccines, and films.

These specially constructed, hermetically sealed containers correspond in some ways to the ordinary kitchen ice-box or refrigerator. They may be shipped for hundreds of miles without re-icing.

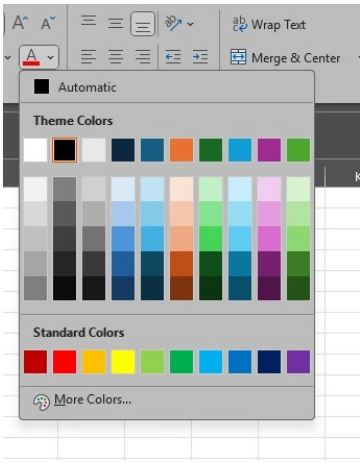
Color Matching Using Excel

By David Paul

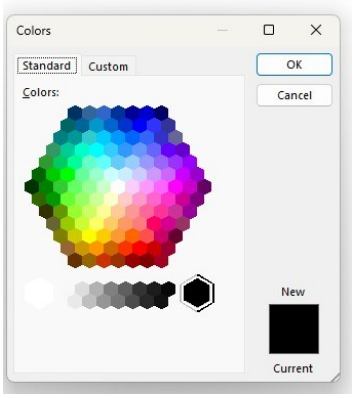
While modelling, I have found there are times when I need to make a decal or some other printable item that has a very specific color. For instance, I might have two identical freight cars, and they both have the same number. I would like to be able to print something that would change one or more of the digits on that number, but the background color would not match the paint on the car. In some cases, you could find paint that matches the car color exactly, and then paint out the digit and use a decal with the correct number in place of the old digit. One other technique would be to have a heavily weathered car and then replace the entire number with a clean patch, as seen in the prototype on older freight cars. In the project I describe at the end of this article, I wanted to print a number on a piece of paper and put it on the side of the car, but I needed the correct background color. That is where I got the idea to try color matching in Microsoft Excel.

Colors In Excel

It is a simple matter to change either the font color or the background color using Excel, as shown in the diagram below.



However, the selection given is very limited. “More Colors” can be selected at the bottom of this drop-down menu, and the following appears, which gives more selection.



Even this color selection is limited. However, it is possible to unlock many more colors in Excel.

Excel uses 3 bytes, or 24 bits to represent a color. Red is described as 1 byte, or 8 bits. Green and blue the same way. Taken together, 24 bits can represent 16,277,216 colors. This single number can also be thought of as (x,y,z), where x is red, y is green and z is blue; x, y and z are all between 0 and 255. However, even though any value between 0 and 16,277,215 is valid to describe a color, the reality is that not each will show up as a visually distinct color, since the differences can be very subtle. But enough different colors can be represented in 16,277,216 values to pretty much match any color desired.

Color Matching Using Excel

By David Paul

For instance, the following numbers represent certain colors in Excel:

- Black is 0 (lowest number)
- Red is 255
- Green is 65,280
- Yellow is 65,535
- Magenta is 16,711,935
- Blue is 16,711,680
- Cyan is 16,776,960
- White is 16,277,215 (highest number)

Since these colors are represented by an (x,y,z) set, they are not continuous through all 16,277,216 values. As you might expect, they are continuous for 256 consecutive values and then a color jump. For instance, 0-255 goes from pure black to bright red. However, 256 goes back to black, but very slightly less black than 0. 256-511 goes from this slightly less black to a slightly less red. And this pattern continues.

Color Matching Using Excel Macro

It will require some trial and error to find the exact color you want. This can be done using Excel Macro. A macro-enabled Excel file with a XLSM extension. You may need to enable macros on your computer to allow this functionality, since running a macro from a non-trusted source can compromise your computer, and Windows leaves this capability turned off by default.

The first thing you will need to do after opening Excel is to change the name of the default sheet from “Sheet1” to “Color” . Then, get into macro mode with ALT-F8, and then type something into the “Macro Name:” field. You could just type “x”. Then, hit the “Create” button. Replace the “Sub x() End Sub” with the code in the diagram below:

```
Sub Color()
Dim iColor As Long
Dim iRow As Long
iColor = 0
For iRow = 1 To 256
    Worksheets("Color").Cells(iRow, 1).Interior.Color = iColor
    Worksheets("Color").Cells(iRow, 1) = iColor
    iColor = iColor + 256
Next iRow
End Sub
```

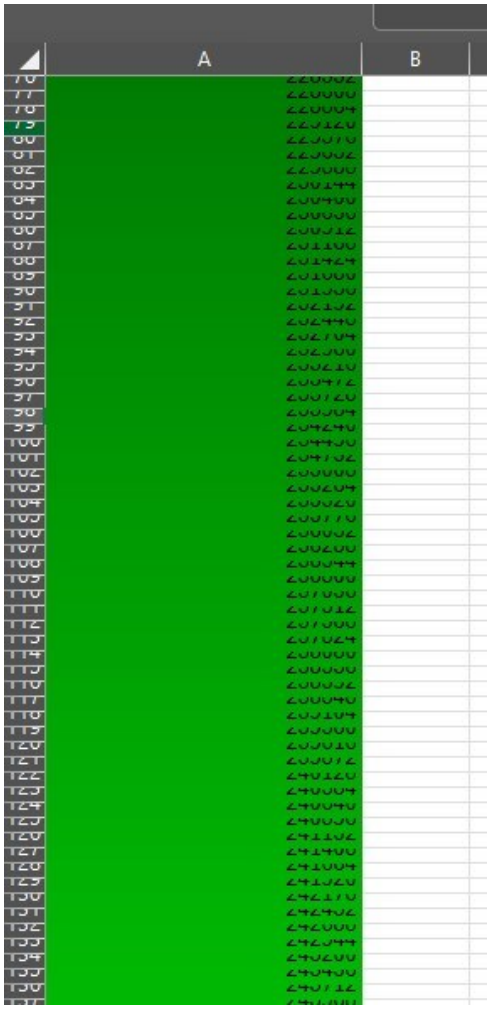
This procedure will change the background color of the cells in the first column for the first 256 rows to the value specified iColor, and put the exact number representing the background color into the cell. I would suggest widening the first column and first 256 rows so you can see the color displays here more clearly. The macro can be run from the spreadsheet by typing ALT-F8 and double clicking the “Color” procedure.

In this example above, iColor = 0 in the fourth line, so the first 256 rows will run from pitch black to bright red. The key to making this work is playing with the initial value of iColor. It can be anything from 0 to 16,276,960. The easiest thing to do is just guess at initial values for iColor until you home in on the color you want. You will eventually see patterns start to emerge has you home in on the color you want.

Color Matching Using Excel

By David Paul

In the example below, iColor = 209,152, for no other reason except it is a multiple of 256. It is best to use multiples of 256 for this to keep the color from suddenly changing in the middle of the 256 color run. The two side by side pictures show the gradual transition from 209,152 over the next 130 or so colors. The Excel rows are very short here in order to get it all on the page and to show that gradual color transition easily.

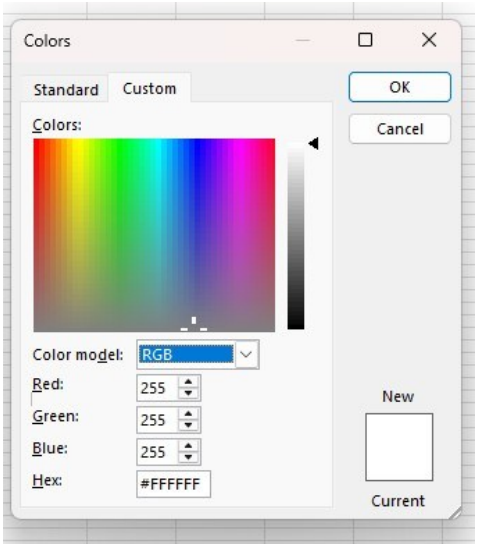


Finding the correct color match is trial and error to some degree. If you are familiar with coding, you can modify the sub Color() above to display the colors as you desire. Once you find the colors that seem to fit your application, go ahead and print out the page and make sure the printer color is faithful to what is on the screen. Best of all, the value that represents that color is written right into the cell.

Once you have an exact color value, you can set the background color on a cell on any spreadsheet by going into macro mode and using the statement “Worksheets("Color").Cells(iRow, 1).Interior.Color = iColor”, where iColor is the exact color you want. From here you can make the cell or cells any size you want and insert any kind of writing using any color into the cell using the standard Excel interface. You only use the macro to set the background color for the cell. The change to the background color can also be accomplished by going to the color palette on the standard Excel interface, clicking “More Colors” and then “Custom”, as shown below, but this requires a conversion from decimal to hexadecimal, and it only allows you to examine one color at a time. However, once you determine the color value you want, you could do the hexadecimal arithmetic and get 3 values for red, green and blue and enter them in this dialogue to get the same effect.

Color Matching Using Excel

By David Paul



My Application

My daughter-in-law picked up the tank car shown in the photo below at a garage sale. Suffice to say, it was not a top-of-the-line car! No reporting marks or writing of any kind, except "Shell", plastic wheels on a talgo truck and horn hook couplers. I'm not even sure who manufactured it and it was unlike the normal cars I see of this quality and era.

Since I wanted to show I appreciated her gift, I was determined to get this car into operating status, and that meant metal wheels, knuckle couplers and reporting marks. I changed the trucks and couplers, but that left the reporting marks. I wanted to create my own decal and put it on there, but I didn't have any decal paper and recent efforts with purchased decal paper have been unsatisfactory. That's when I decided to figure out how to color match the background using Excel. The color matching took several tries as I homed in on the correct value for iColor and printed out several different pages to determine which was the closest. I settled on a color and printed the SCCX 0405 reporting mark (her birthday!) on standard white paper. I sanded down the back of the paper to make it thinner and glued it on using white glue. The color matches closely and I can hardly tell the color difference from a distance. I do wish the white edge of the paper didn't show, but I'll accept that compromise on a car of this kind of quality. There are probably additional steps I could take to reduce the visibility of that edge.

This technique could be used to match color for any number of applications. I have already done some additional color matching on other cars that need a single digit changed. But this could be used on buildings, backdrops or anywhere else the correct color on paper is required.

Mark's Minute

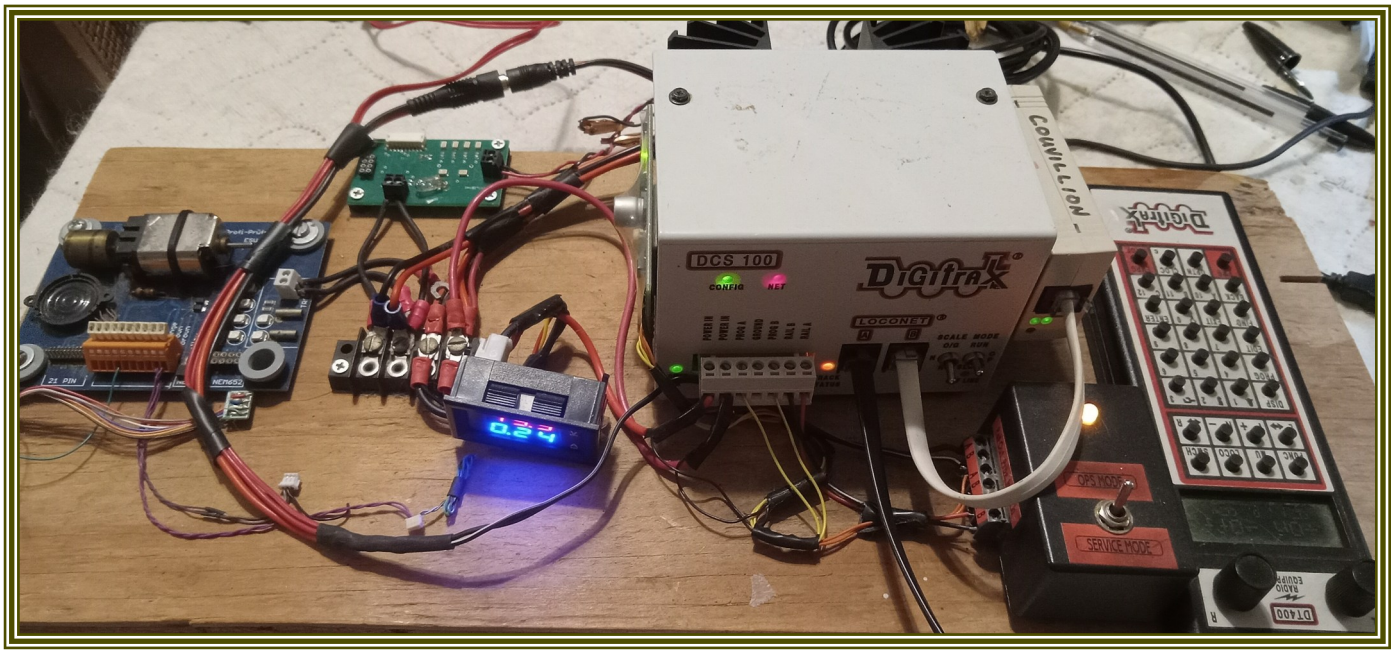
By Mark Couvillion

More on Using DecoderPro

Programming decoders can be done on a dedicated programming track, on the Main, on a track that can be switched from one to the other, or on a dedicated test setup. Each has its advantages and shortcomings. I have a dedicated test setup with two decoder testers, a programming booster, command station, handheld throttle, and a short section of track. I can use my throttle or one of the virtual throttles in DecoderPro to run the decoder / engine after programming. I have had each of the other programming variations. I once programmed "on the Main" on our layout and got ALL of my engines to the same address just before the layout tour! OOPS!

Decoder testers help me quickly resolve issues when I don't know where to start. One is for sound decoders (the blue one to the left of the picture), the other one (the small green one top-center) is for basic motor or lighting decoders. Wiring harnesses are already hooked up (lower right) so I just need to plug the decoder in. I have a basic procedure for programming a decoder that helps assure that I don't make a mistake.

There is a slight difference between programming a new decoder installed in a non-DCC engine than changing the program in a factory-programmed engine. More on that next month.



Next Month - Changing the Programming on a Factory-Programmed Engine

Happy February Birthdays!

Ray Thompson

(February 19)

Bob Sandhaas

(February 6) with wife, Anne, during a vacation in Chicago

JayC Williams

with Shane and their nieces

Don Formanek

(February 26) Don with wife, Sidney, taken on Madeira Island (Portugal) in October 2022. The toboggan is guided down the steep street by the two Carreiros Do Monte as they have been doing for over 100 years. A long time ago they used to have a steam cog locomotive to haul the passengers and toboggans up the hill.

Pete Leach MMR

Pete catching his first fish in San Diego after a 40-year hiatus.

Ken Krueger

NOTE: To share your birthdays, anniversaries, weddings, retirements, and other celebrations with your San Jac family, please email d.gatohogno@gmail.com before the 9th of the month to be included in the next Derail edition.

December's Treasurer's Report

By Richard Louvet

Banking Summary - Last month

12/1/2025 through 12/31/2025

Category	
INCOME	
Train Show Income	
Vendor Table Receipts	355.00
TOTAL Train Show Income	355.00
TOTAL INCOME	**355.00**
EXPENSES	
Christmas Party Catering	1,400.00
Meeting Rental	200.00
Software (Acrobat, Quicken)	153.57
Train Show Expense	
Advertising Handouts	131.77
Venue Rental for 2027 GHTS	3,250.00
TOTAL Train Show Expense	3,381.77
TOTAL EXPENSES	**5,135.34**
OVERALL TOTAL	**-4,780.34**

Account Balances - As of 11/30/2025

Account	Balance
Bank Accounts	
Chase Checking	13,888.55
Frost CD	5,541.05
TOTAL Bank Accounts	**19,429.60**
OVERALL TOTAL	**19,429.60**

Account Balances - As of 12/31/2025

Account	Balance
Bank Accounts	
Chase Checking	9,108.21
Frost CD	5,541.05
TOTAL Bank Accounts	**14,649.26**
OVERALL TOTAL	**14,649.26**

January 6, 2026 Meeting Minutes

By David Paul

The presentation was a panel discussion on “Car Forwarding Systems”.

Car Cards: Al Partlow, Steve Sandifer, and Bob Barnett

Rail Ops: Robert Ashcraft

JMRI: Larry Daughtry and Randall Wilson

Tabs on Cars: Gordon Bliss

Chuck Lind called the business meeting to order at 8:46.

47 members were present with 11 online. There were no guests.

Phil reminded us that the mid-year LSR meeting is in Austin on January 31, at the Wyndham Center. The LSR convention is June 18-21. The NMRA National Show is in Chattanooga TN.

Steve gave us an update on the 2027 San Jacinto Show:

- Will be at the Fort Bend County Fairgrounds. Deposit has been made.
- No clinic or contest space yet, but there are options.
- We can set up Friday. We have until 2:00 AM Sunday to clear out.
- Need to clean up completely, including trash removal.
- Need additional signage to make sure visitors know where to go.
- We need to take a group to scout it out so we can plan the space. We should do this after the 2026 show is completed.

Jim Lemmond wants to make a donation to the San Jacinto Club for an award named after Loren Neufeld. This award will be given at the LSR convention. The current Square Footer award will be renamed for Loren. The only expense is a plaque. Chuck Lind made a motion to do this. The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 9:02. Next meeting is February 3, 2026.

San Jac Operations Panel from the January Meeting

San Jac Officers

President: Chuck Lind MMR
president@sanjacmodeltrains.org
Vice President: Bob Barnett MMR
vice-president@sanjacmodeltrains.org
Secretary: David Paul
dbpaul32@yahoo.com
Treasurer: Richard (Dick) Louvet
secretary@sanjacmodeltrains.org
Past President: Kelly Russell MMR
krussl@yahoo.com

Division 8
Texas Gulf Division Officers

Director: Phil Stewart
pstewart1225@yahoo.com
Secretary/ Treasury: Tom Marsh
txtr7@yahoo.com

Derail Staff

Conductor: Bob Sabol
bsabol@stillmeadow.com
Engineer: Terri Sabol
terri74@gmail.com

Brakemen:
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Brian Jansky
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Richard Louvet
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Kelly Russell MMR
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Steve Sandifer MMR
steve.sandifer@sbcglobal.net

San Jac RR Club Meetings take place the first Tuesday of each month at 7pm

Now In-Person and ONLINE

Southwest Central Church of Christ
4011 W. Bellfort, Houston, TX 77025

Visitors are always welcome!

www.sanjacmodeltrains.org
Webmaster: Brian Jansky

Next Meeting

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 3RD

AT 7:00PM

HYBRID MEETING: ONLINE AND IN-PERSON

‘Miniature Wonderland in Hamburg, Germany’

BY GEOFF HOGNO

Refreshments:

Bob Barnett

Video Corner

David Currey found this song, “Texas 1947”, about the *Texas Special*.