

The Express

Newsletter of the *Tinplate Trackers, Austin, Texas*
November/December 2002 – 38th Edition

A newsletter will be sent out every two months to the current members, past members, and visitors of the club. Please contact Steve Wise at 512-444-3310 or E-Mail him at swise@aoot.com if you have any information you would like to have included in future newsletters. All comments/submissions welcome!

From The Editor

Hi Tinplaters!

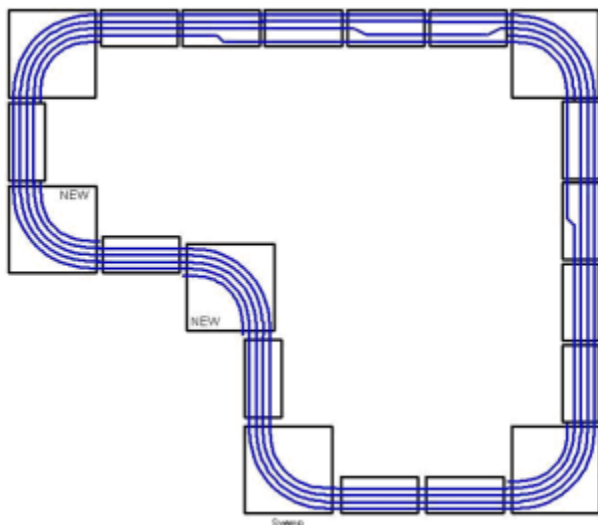
Year-end found the Tinplate Trackers enjoying the holidays with a fun run in December. Holiday layouts fill up our minds and living rooms!

Hope you enjoy this (*very late*) issue!

Stevo.

PAST CLUB EVENTS

BCE Fun-Run – December 6th/7th, 2002



The club setup at the Branch Creek Estates clubhouse on December 6th/7th for a fun run. Attendance was light, but those who did show up visited, ran some trains, and fun was had!

An L-shaped layout was created as seen here. This layout is a nice size and the straights between the L-part allow some breathing room for trains snaking through the curves!

FUTURE CLUB EVENTS

SAMRA Train Show – Feb 1 & 2, 2003

The SAMRA Show at Live Oak is our next club event. As you may recall this has been one of the most attended train shows in previous years. We have space for a 5x5 layout, possibly larger but we won't know that until setup.

The club will be compensated for our participation. There will not be raffle. There will be only a 'few' passes available. However, we haven't had a problem entering in the past and I would expect there won't be a problem this year.

Scott will tow the trailer to Live Oak on Fri, Monk Howell will bring it back on Sunday and Ed Weltens is a backup in case Scott or Monk become unavailable at the last minute.

Setup is scheduled for 6:30pm – 8:30pm Friday Jan 31st. Ira is FAT Controller for setup. Show times are Saturday 8:30am-4pm, and Sunday 10am-3pm. Teardown is 3pm Sunday.

Hope to see everyone at Live Oak!

Local Charity Event Feb 18th, 2003 – Westlake Hills Presbyterian Church

We have been invited/requested to set up a layout, the 4x8 probably, at the Westlake Hills Presbyterian Church on some Tues AM for a respite program for people with Alzheimer's disease. They meet every Tuesday from 9:30 am to 1:30 PM at Westlake Hills Presbyterian Church at 7127 Bee Cave Road. We are currently thinking about Feb 18th for this event. This date is still tentative...

The club thinks that this is something that we can and should do as part of our program to further the hobby as well as help with this cause. They will pay us \$25 if we want it. The plan is to leave the layout up until that evening to for Scott's Boy Scout Troop.

Please contact Scott or any board member if you are interested in helping put on this event. Stay tuned for more information...

Club Event Schedule

The following table shows the events and shows that the club is considering.

2003 Schedule

	DATE	SHOW	PLACE	STATUS
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	January 17, 18	Club Fun Run	Branch Creek Clubhouse	Confirmed
<input type="checkbox"/>	Feb 1, 2	SAMRA Train Show	Live Oak	Confirmed
<input type="checkbox"/>	March 29, 30	Club Fun Run	Branch Creek Clubhouse	Confirmed
<input type="checkbox"/>	May ?	TTAT Club Workday	?	Confirmed
<input type="checkbox"/>	June 7, 8	GATS	Live Oak	Pending
<input type="checkbox"/>	Aug. 15, 16	Club Fun Run	Branch Creek Clubhouse	Pending
<input type="checkbox"/>	Aug. ?	Railfair	Burnet, TX	Pending
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sep. 11	Annual Club meeting	Luby's Cafeteria #4	Pending
<input type="checkbox"/>	Oct. 25	Austin Jamboree	First United Methodist	Pending
<input type="checkbox"/>	Oct. 25, 26	Czhlispiel	Flatonia downtown	Pending
<input type="checkbox"/>	Dec. 5, 6	Club Fun Run	Branch Creek Clubhouse	Confirmed

OTHER NEWS

Keeping Power In-Phase for TMCC Setups

Scott Smiley

At times at home I have encountered a problem with Lionel Command Control. The symptoms are, the engine lights flicker and the control is erratic at best. This time I was not able to get a new command accessory to operate or to program. Occasionally, some action would start but nothing else. The engines started their sound system as soon as power was applied to the track. This is an indicator that the engine does not think that it is on a command track at all. I thought that I had a ground problem and redid my wire but no change. I changed my ZW plug to see if its polarity would change anything, nothing. Then I realized that I had plugged the whole set up into an extension cord. Because of the mix of old and new plugs, and the remote switch in the circuit, I had somehow mixed [*the polarity of*] up the base unit. When I unplugged it from the cord and plugged it straight into the wall, all my problems went away. Everything worked correctly, ending my hours of frustration. I know that I have done this before and promised myself that I would not forget the solution but obviously did since it took me several hours to work things out. Just remember that when you plug in the

Command Control units that you ensure to keep the polarity of the plug straight as if it is connected directly to the wall.

MTH Digital Command System on the Club Layout

Ira Schneider

We now have an MTH Digital Command System (DCS) controlling track 2 on the club's layout. The track 2 power pack is connected to both the Fixed Voltage In1 and Variable Voltage In1 terminals on the Track Interface Unit (TIU). This provides power to the TIU and to the Variable Out1 terminal, which is connected to track 2 of the layout. The Serial Interface of the TIU is connected to the Lionel Command Base through an adapter which allows the IC Track Power Controller (TPC) used for track 3 to share the serial port. The MTH Remote Control (RC) is used to control all engines running on track 2, either in command or conventional mode.

We ran several MTH ProtoSound 2.0 engines, Lionel TMCC engines, and conventional engines on track 2. They all appear to work, with some limitations.

At the AMRE show I ran two ProtoSound 2.0 engines on the same track simultaneously. I positioned the two trains (the Blue Comet and the AMTRAK superliner) at opposite ends of the layout and set them to the same speed. They stayed far apart for the entire time I was running them. When it was time to give up the track I just switched one of the trains onto the siding and left the other train running while the next person set up his train on the siding. We then switched trains. It is much easier to perform switching yard maneuvers when you are using two command controlled trains.

At Flatonia, I again ran two ProtoSound 2.0 engines simultaneously. However, for part of the time I had the two trains running inches apart. (I had Bob's wireless camera mounted on the back of the AMTRAK train and it was broadcasting the picture of the trailing Blue Comet steam engine.) Several times I needed to stop both trains due to an obstructed track and didn't stop them properly. I eventually learned to keep the RC set to "All engines" so I could just press the "DIR" button to stop both trains. I also noticed that when there was a sudden power loss (i.e. the circuit breaker tripped due to a derailment) the ProtoSound 2.0 engines won't start up properly unless this sequence is followed:

1. Restore power to the TIU (i.e. reset the track 2 circuit breaker).
2. Select track "Track 2 command" and set the track voltage to zero (i.e. turn the thumbwheel down one click).

3. Set the track to maximum voltage (i.e. turn the thumbwheel up one click).
4. Select an engine. Press the “Shut down” button.
5. After the “Shut down” function completes, press the “Start up” button.
6. After the “Start up” function completes, press the “Dir” button twice. This tells the controller that the engine is not moving and sets the engine to the forward direction.
7. Repeat steps 4 through 6 for each active ProtoSound 2.0 engine.
8. Select an engine (or “All” engines). Use the thumbwheel to set the engine’s speed.

I also noticed that the MTH RC has an annoying habit of turning itself off if you don’t enter any commands for ten (10) minutes. When the RC is turned back on it stops any ProtoSound 2.0 engines which are running. The moral is to press some button (maybe sound the whistle) every few minutes to stop the RC from turning itself off.

At the AMRE show we also experimented with the sound features of the DCS. I loaded a song (“The Yellow Rose of Texas”) into the TIU and played the song through my AMTRAK and Blue Comet engines several times during the day. It was rather strange hearing music coming from an engine instead of the normal engine sounds. Also, Steve used the Proto-Dispatch feature (speaking into the microphone on the RC and having his voice broadcast from his engine). Both effects worked, even though they are strange. We tried this again in Flatonia and the sound was terrible due to the poor signal quality (see below).

We also ran some TMCC engines and conventional engines on track 2. It is a slight nuisance to define a TMCC engine to the RC since you have to enter a 1-16 character name for your engine (which is a laborious procedure). However, once the engine is defined, the system will remember it until it is deleted, so this is a one-time problem for each TMCC engine. I did notice one strange quirk running a TMCC engine. I dialed the engine speed to its maximum value (31 on the display) and the engine sped up, but not to its maximum speed. When I pressed the “Boost” button, the engine run faster, then slowed back down when I released the button.

There is an emergency stop problem using the MTH DCS. If someone presses the “Halt” button on one of the Lionel CAB-1 controllers, tracks 1, 3, and 4

are shut down and a Halt command is sent to all TMCC engines running on track 2, but the power to track 2 is not interrupted. If someone presses the “e-stop” button on the MTH RC, it shuts down track 2 and sends a Halt command to all TMCC engines running on the layout. Neither emergency stop button (Halt or e-stop) shuts down the entire layout. We have to be careful that when an emergency stop is required (i.e. a train wreck crossing multiple tracks) we communicate verbally so both parts of the system can be shut down.

I tested the DCS signal level at the AMRE show. On a scale of 1 to 10 (where 10 is the best), the system reported a signal level of 9 or 10 most of the time. It showed a low signal when crossing one module and a complete loss of signal on the track 2 siding. However, I retested the signal level at Flatonia and got completely different results. In Flatonia, the system reported signal levels of 1 to 5 most of the time, again showing a complete loss of signal on the siding. We didn’t appear to have any problems controlling the ProtoSound 2.0 engines even though the signal level was poor. The loss of signal on the siding stops the DCS from recognizing the presence of a ProtoSound 2.0 engine on the siding. You cannot add the engine to the system or have the system detect an engine on the siding. However, once the system understands that the engine is active (i.e. it is detected when on the mainline track), the engine can be controlled when it is on the siding. It appears that the signal loss is mainly from the engine to the TIU, not from the TIU to the engine. I will try to figure out what is causing this signal loss and correct it. At the next run I will try MTH’s suggestion of connecting an 18-volt light bulb across the output terminals and see if the signal level improves.

After our experience at the AMRE show I added two track definitions to the RC. “Track 2 command” is defined with a minimum voltage of 22.0. To run a command mode train (either ProtoSound 2.0 or TMCC), you now just have to press the “TR” button, select “Track 2 command”, and click the thumbwheel once to have the track voltage set to its maximum value. You can then select the engine you want to control and you are off and running. The second definition “Track 2 conv” is defined with a minimum voltage of 5.0. This setting is for running conventional mode trains. You just press the “TR” button, select “Track 2 conv”, and use the thumbwheel to set the track voltage (i.e. engine speed) as desired. You can use the “TZV” softkey to quickly set the track voltage to zero.

We had some problems with the TIU at the AMRE show. Several times during the weekend I noticed that the RC lost control of the engine. One time the RC displayed a message “Out of RF range.” In all of these cases, resetting the TIU (by turning the transformer off then on) cleared the

problem. These problems didn't appear at Flatonia. (I loaded a new level of the control code into the TIU and the RC at Flatonia which might account for the elimination of this problem.)

Overall, our experience with the MTH DCS system is positive. It works as designed, controlling MTH ProtoSound 2.0 engines, TMCC engines, and any engine in conventional mode. There are some quirks in the design which we have to get used to. If we were building the layout from scratch, I would certainly recommend using the MTH DCS system instead of the Lionel TMCC system since the user interface is much better and it can operate both ProtoSound 2.0 and TMCC engines in command mode. However, we aren't building the layout from scratch – we already have TMCC running and are used to the CAB-1 controllers. I suggest that we continue to use the DCS on track 2 and have more of our members get experience in using the MTH RC. Once we have more experience with the system we can decide whether or not we want to expand our use of the system to a second track or (perish the thought) go back to TMCC control of track 2.
