



The Dispatcher's Log

JUNE 2005

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A Word From the President

It has been quite a busy year for the Board of Directors. Upon formation of this year's Board a decision was made to have regularly scheduled Board Meetings. Thus the Board has met on a regular basis, at least once a month. This has been a good thing as there have been several difficult issues to discuss. I am sure several of you have heard snippets and rumors relating to some of our decisions. I will attempt to explain those decisions and the reasons for those decisions in this newsletter.

First, a little about our Board of Directors. The Board is composed of active members who volunteer or are volunteered by the membership at the Annual

Club Meeting in September. Each Board member serves a three year term. The terms are staggered so there will never be a completely new Board. Once a Board member has completed their three year term they remain on the Board in an advisory capacity for one year. The Advisory positions are non-voting positions. There are five board members with a quorum of three required for action (vote) on an item. This year we have two advisors so there is a total of seven persons at our Board meetings. During a person's term on the Board they are eligible to be elected Club President. The Board members decide among themselves who will be the President. Each year we jokingly offer to double the Presi-

dent's salary. This is because the Board positions as well as the President position are all non-paid volunteer positions.

As a Board member I take pride in the fact that I am taking an active role in the operation of this club and to be called upon to be President this year has been an honor.

So What About the Trailer?

I am sure everybody is aware that the club owns a trailer. However, what you may not know is that we didn't always have a trailer. When the club started it didn't own a trailer.

The club was set up as a modular club (which we still are) and each member would build a module

upon joining the club. Every time the club met for a Train Show each member would bring their own module to set up and after the show each member would then take their module back home. If someone didn't show up for the set up the club couldn't use their module. This was how it was done until the club

purchased the trailer.

The trailer started out as a homemade trailer that the club purchased used. It didn't have a roof and the sides weren't enclosed. Before the club could use the "new" trailer club members

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Trailer: continued

worked to raise the sides, add a roof, and enclose the trailer to make it weatherproof.

The trailer has served the club well over the years and the continuing maintenance of the trailer has remained high in the list of club priorities.

Despite the trailer's excellent track record there has been one issue looming in the background, something that goes all the way back to the initial purchase of the trailer. That issue is the question of the trailer's weight carrying capacity. As a home made trailer the club has no way of knowing what weight the axles are rated to carry or even if the frame of the trailer can handle that weight.

The Problem Begins: During the last few years the club has enjoyed growth in the amount of modules and associated equipment. We built the yard, made trolley modules, added bollards, added more corner modules, increased the amount of legs and C-clamps, added new power supplies, and other items. All this stuff is stored and transported in the trailer.

We first noticed the problem when the tow vehicle drivers began complaining that the trailer would start swerving side to side. At first it was subtle and easily corrected but as time went on and we added more stuff to the trailer the problem became worse, much worse. We have attempted to correct this by redistributing the weight more evenly in the trailer and we have also put a set of new tires on the trailer. Unfortunately, the problem continued to worsen.

A few years ago, before we added the additional equipment we weighed the trailer and found that it weighed 1750 pounds. At this

time we could pull the trailer at 75 miles an hour with no problems. Recently the maximum speed of the trailer is 45 miles an hour and if a semi-truck passed you the trailer would start swerving side to side violently requiring you to slow down to 20-30 miles per hour before it would stop. The tow vehicle drivers were also complaining that the trailer had become so heavy that some were having difficulty stopping the trailer and that when the trailer would start swerving it was noticeably trying to steer the tow vehicle. We have also noticed that the Jack stand mount on the tongue of the trailer has begun to bend from the weight in the trailer.

A Decision is Made: At the first meeting of this year's Board the trailer was the primary issue. There were a lot of things discussed concerning the trailer. The weight is just scratching the surface of the issue. There are other things that must be considered such as the lack of trailer brakes, overloading, insurance levels, liability, the club's status (or lack of) as a official entity or non-profit organization and how that would affect the liability and insurance. There were several other items discussed over the course of several board meetings and in-between meetings via the phone or E-mail. Ultimately the board made the right decision:

In the interest of safety the trailer in its current condition must be parked.

This does not mean the club cannot attend shows or Fun Runs. It just means that we will not use the trailer and must find alternate ways to transport our modules, etc.

In addition, the club's needs have surpassed the ability of our current trailer. **The club will pursue the purchase of a new trailer.** The new trailer must meet some mini-

mum specifications as set out by the Board: minimum length is 14 feet, minimum interior height is 6 feet 6 inches, prefer a rear drop gate like current trailer, front side access door, must have brakes-surge brakes preferred, trailer construction should be metal not wood like current trailer. Cost is always a big issue so keep your eyes open and if you find something similar for sale let us know please.

The Current Working Alternative: The Board realized that without a working trailer there would be little likelihood of the club attending any train shows. So free space was offered and the Board accepted to unload the trailer and return it to the same condition it was in before the swerving problem began. This has been done and the Board is pleased to report that the trip to Bertram was uneventful. As such the Board has released the trailer to return to active service in its current partially-loaded condition as long as the swerving issue does not return. What this means is that we can use the trailer again but that we will only have modules available for a plain layout unless the additional modules are transported in member's vehicles.

We're Going to be Rich!

Well, not really. Unfortunately, money is a required part of our organization. All the money collected by TTAT is returned to the club in some way. The majority of it goes directly to the maintenance of the trailer or the layout. The rest is paid to members who tow the trailer for the club in an attempt to defray the cost of towing the trailer (the current tow payment doesn't cover the cost of fuel to out of town venues). While annual membership dues account for a large portion of the club's annual income, the biggest income is from the train shows. The trend lately has been for the train shows to offer smaller and smaller payouts to clubs for displaying their layout. Now I will remind everyone: **The club's purpose is not to make money, and thus the club does not require any form of compensation to attend an event, all we need is member interest to attend.** And that stance continues. However the club does like to receive some form of payment as we rely on this money for main-

tenance of the layout and to defray the payment to the trailer tow person. If we receive no money from a show we still pay \$50.00 to the trailer tow person. Now consider that the club must start saving to purchase a new trailer and is also considering insurance. Our month-to-month cost just went way up. For these reasons the Board decided (after much discussion) to change the dues for the club. Starting with the year 2006 the dues structure will change. The new dues structure will be:

\$50.00 Household Membership
\$250.00 Lifetime Membership

The Household Membership will be just like the current Annual Membership in that it covers the whole family living in a home (parents and children under 18). In addition the Board has added a Lifetime Membership. This was added to try and raise funds for a new trailer. The Lifetime Membership will be on an Individual basis and once purchased that person will not have to pay

dues to the club again. This membership is not transferable and does not include children or other family members.

I realize that is quite an increase but allow me to offer this reasoning: In our hobby, a scale-sized boxcar or caboose is usually priced around \$50.00. It is not uncommon for a person to purchase several of these cars in a year. So at the cost of one boxcar or caboose the club dues aren't really that much. In addition, the club gives a return. You get to operate your trains on a large layout with large radius curves that most people don't have room for in their home. The club participates at several events each year where you get to meet and socialize with fellow train-minded individuals. The members of the club offer a wealth of knowledge on everything from repairing trains to collecting to layout design. I believe that even at \$50.00 the membership in this club is well worth it.

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A Call for Coordinators

We need your help! Picture that well used poster of Uncle Sam pointing at you but this time he is dressed as a train Conductor. Now that we have the trailer back on the road, there are several Central Texas train shows that the club would consider attending. All we need is show Coordinators. A show Coordinator is a club member who takes on the coordination responsibility for a particular event.

Basically the person will make contact with the train show, get all the details for the show, see if the show would be interested in having us, and work out the details of setup, layout location, reimbursement if any, and then coordinate with the membership for trailer tow and setup crew. It really is easier than it sounds and without a Coordinator we don't attend the show. And you are not alone, the

Board and membership is always there to help you out if you get in a pinch. Just check out the club schedule for events or recommend a event to be added, then let the Board know your interest in Coordinating a event. It can be a Train Show, Layout Tour, Fun Run, Club Social, anything you want.



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The Tinsplate Trackers—Austin, Texas is a 3-Rail O-Gauge Model Train Club located in the Austin area. The club participates in a number of model railroading activities and events in Central Texas.

Our club's purpose is to have fun enjoying 3-Rail trains.

Whether your interests are in toy trains or ultra realistic scale trains (or anywhere in-between) you are welcome with us.