



***THE NORTH STAR CHRONICLES – a newsletter primarily for the model railway fraternity***

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***Editorial***

Happy New Year to everyone.

A time for reflection on where the hobby is heading particularly in the greater Durban area and if it is a blind alley what should be done about the situation?

The last time the model railway community was stirred up was over the articles on DCC. Is the following going to have the same result? Have your say!

***OPEN LETTER TO ALL MODEL RAILWAY ENTHUSIASTS FROM LAURIE DEVEREAUX***

***“I have been involved in Model Railway as a hobby for the past four years and have built a layout for own use. I was shocked to learn that there were no Model Railway Clubs in the Greater Durban area but I used to visit the East Coast Hobbies “shop” at Mike Deysel’s house for the first 2 years since starting up.***

*Many other hobbyists also gathered there on a Saturday morning to discuss model railway my and to buy what they required, if it was available. These Saturday mornings were exceptionally pleasing and I learnt a lot on these occasions. It was not a Club, no fees, just a contribution towards the many cups of coffee I enjoyed there. My thanks to Mike Deysel. Then Mike decided to open a Hobby shop and the Saturday morning gatherings stopped. There was and still is a void in my life! There is no Club to join. Those pleasant Saturday Mornings are gone now and there is a void. Nothing!!! Nowhere to meet other modellers and learn about my hobby and exchange ideas and to find out what are the new trends and where to acquire items.*

*One very bad and most noticeable fact quickly arose. There seemed to be a lot of trouble and nastiness and unnecessary squabbling in Model Railway fraternity in the Greater Durban area. I did not really find out who or was causing all this dissatisfaction, but it is rife. This person did not talk to that one, and that person was not associating with that one. Bad mouthing other hobbyists is quite usual. Slandering of a high degree. What a disgusting state of affairs and what a pity. And all being propagated by ADULTS. I call them "Mensches kinders".*

*Then I started hearing that Hobbytech was not going to keep model railway stock any more. Then Denkit was giving up Model Railway sales. Hillcrest Hobbies has giving up selling model railway goods. East Coast Hobbies was concentrating on boats and cars. Because there was no sale for model railway equipment and members were giving up the hobby. Mostly negative stories that will ultimately affect their businesses. Do you want your business to fail? Then don't be negative.*

*I visited these traders and found that Hobbytech was not giving up model railway sales, and neither was Denkit. However, stocks of all model railway equipment started "drying up" and I was told by dealers that it was not worth selling model railway goods any more. They also say that they can't get stock from*

*suppliers and offer other excuses for not having stock. And on and on they went. This did not help me at all. Modellers are leaving the hobby the Dealers say, but no reason is given. Oh so Negative. So what is going on? I needed some repairs done and guess what – I was told by some Dealers they don't do repairs but there was no offer to get it done for me.*

*No doubt Traders can tell us all sorts of stories about customers and their complaints. I don't want to hear them. They are NEGATIVE to the hobby. No attempt to dispel these stories. I would like to hear what action they are taking to counteract these problems. I want to hear some positive trends in the hobby.*

*I have got quite despondent. Then I felt that perhaps instead of just listening to all the diatribe from all and sundry that I must say something. Well this is it. A lot of people will no doubt start trying to defend themselves. Others will ask "who the hell is he to criticize us?" I don't want you to do that. I just want you to consider the hobby. Look at YOUR business. Look at your so called friends. Are you happy with the hobby? You have a very large investment in it. Do you want to lose it? Of course you don't. I have quite an investment in the hobby too. Every hobbyist has a large investment which, if he too wants to sell, he will lose a lot of money if there are no buyers. I have about R4000 invested and others will have lots more. There is a lot at stake chaps. So don't take offence at my writings, but take action to protect your investment.*

*What are the Model Railway Traders and the hobbyists doing to promote the hobby? Absolutely nothing by the sounds of all the talk I hear. I have not seen a Dealers advert in the media of any kind. They haven't got very much stock, even the basic and cheaper items. If you haven't got it you can't sell it can you?*

*I was placed on two Dealers E-Mail circular lists but one never sent out a "newsletter", probably too busy bemoaning its fate. Another sent out one e-mail and nothing further, and this over four years. An Overseas supplier, however, sends me a detailed newsletter EVERY WEEK and it costs them very little*

*to do so. Local traders would it seems rather sit in their shops and moan rather than get off their rear ends and promote sales. Chaps it is not too late to Wake Up and do something.*

*One Dealer, I am told, says the local agents take orders and then nothing happens for a considerable time. The goods take months to arrive. Why? Have they written to the Manufacturers to explain their difficulties. Oh No! One RSA agent for Model Power (now defunct) told me to order the parts I wanted from the Manufacturer direct. You don't turn business away like that. I required a new controller and went to a Dealer and bought one and then when I got home there was no transformer to reduce the mains voltage. Back to the Dealer only to be told I was told to travel some 36 Km return trip to get a transformer for it because they did not stock them. That's not the way to do business. Whatever business you are in today requires expertise and a great deal of effort and if you are not willing to put something IN you cannot get anything OUT! So go broke! Now I find that Hobbytech has closed down. Denkit is moving to Umhlanga. Hillcrest Hobbies has closed the shop and working from home. I hear all these facts in a round about way. What has happened? Well it is quite obvious. Business has dropped. The shops are not selling enough to pay the high rents, and friends, Rents are extremely high and to be successful you have to sell as much as you can. Every little sale counts. Long time model railroaders do not require much in the way of new stock. They have their layouts and just buy the odd things from time to time, if they are available. Because there are no Clubs no newcomers are being attracted to the hobby and no sales are being made.*

*What do I think needs to be done to revive the Model Railway hobby? Please don't try to tell me that the hobby is dead. You may be dead but you won't lie down it seems.*

*First a few Clubs need to be started in the Greater Durban area. Is this a difficult I ask? Yes. I am told there is too much squabbling. It seems to me that model railway organisations don't seem to do things the right way anymore. So let us all stop acting like children and leave out all our likes and dislikes*

*and stop blaming one another for inane reasons and start pulling together for the common good. And stop spreading unfounded stories about each other, both Dealers and Modellers alike. I hear from one source “why wasn’t I told about this or that”. The answer is simple there is no “organization” to do so. Don’t blame this person or that one – it is not their job to inform you personally. Clubs need to be formed NOW! The hobby needs to get organised.*

*No hobby can prosper without holding regular meetings for discussing the hobby concerned and Clubs are the only way of providing that. No discussions at meetings other than the hobby itself. No hobby politics. Eject any club member who slanders other members about the hobby and expose them but make sure of the facts without listening to unsubstantiated talk. It is the blatant lies and gossip being circulated that cause discontent. I want to go to meetings to see and learn new ideas about the hobby and I have a lot of questions to ask and get answers and in turn I can also help other newcomers where I can. I can’t see or hear things when there are no meetings. I want to enjoy the hobby. I want to leave a meeting pleased with what I have heard or seen.*

*Dealers need to become more proactive as I have said. Use E-Mail to promote your business. It is cheap! It tells customers what is available at your store and what new stock has arrived. Some dealers even tell you to go to some other store to get what are common things for the hobby, things that they should be stocking. As I have said Rents are very high so everything sold, however small, helps to pay the rent. Support local makers wherever possible. Think about it! Do you have street lights, LEDS, Switches, transformers, scenic material and a host of other small supplies. They do sell, so don’t send customers away to some other shop for them to make money that you should make. Don’t tell customers lies about future stocks and don’t offer excuses three or four months later because YOU have perhaps not ordered the goods timeously. Learn to work together with other Hobby shops to get goods imported. It’s for your joint survival.*

*Take a good look at your inventory. Are you a “specialist hobby shop”? Can you honestly call yourself a specialist? My one fear as a specialist would be that a potential customer walks in the door and walks out empty handed because I did not have the stock to sell him. I would never tell him to go somewhere else to get something I did not have. It is possible to buy wholesale in small amounts. Imagine a Pet Shop that sells tropical fish but does not sell fish food, or heaters, or other essentials. Keep a Counter Book to write in all items that have been requested but were not in stock. Your memory is not that good chaps.*

*I need transformers, switches, LEDS, wiring for layouts, train controllers, track, decals, a good repair service, Second Hand sales, a hobby shop Newsletter, and more. If business is not good you have lots of time to put out a newsletter. Is this asking or expecting too much? Dealers are in the hobby business to make money for themselves so why don't they do so?*

*Dealers could offer a “Dealers Promotion Evening” once or twice a year to promote their business (and help pay the rent). I look in the Model Railway magazines and see firms that have been selling points motors for many years at a much lower price than the shops offer at present. And these sellers have been selling their product for many years so the quality must be good. Why stick to the big guys? Look for alternative suppliers or is that too much trouble to do?*

*Model Railway exhibitions once every three or four years. This is not good enough. Organise an “exhibition” and invite, in writing, ALL the Traders to exhibit at these functions and not just your friends. Dealers need to be more friendly to one another and not be enemies. There is no reason for that. Yes you may be competitors but that is good for business. The Traders in the Greater Durban area are widespread and cater basically for customers in their area unless of course they have not got the stock to sell forcing customers to go elsewhere. This is a long read but once again don't fight me about it. Read and assimilate and to the Dealer, see how you score at running*

*your business. And you the hobbyist, what are you doing to promote your hobby? From what you have read wherever the cap fits, you wear it.*

*And Customers don't spread rumours and bad gossip about Dealers and other hobbyists. It does you and the hobby no good, and please support your local Dealers. Support them and they will in turn support us.*

*I bought from an overseas Dealer and it cost me dearly in the long run. Buy local wherever you can.*

*Lets make this a friendly hobby once again.*

*All the best*

*Laurie Devereux*

*P.S.*

*I don't really want any correspondence - if the cap fits you in anything I have said well then wear it. I just want to see a smile on your face next time I see you all at the next Model Railway Exhibition in May next year"*

### ***Gauge 1 nostalgia***

While paying my 2016 Gauge 1 Association annual subscription the Treasurer thereof brought to my attention an excerpt from edition 95 (October 1976) of the Gauge 1 Newsletter which is reproduced below.

The reason this article (published with the permission of the G1MRA) was brought to my attention is as follows:

*"I bought from a deceased member a couple of years ago, a super loco, A3 Flying Scotsman, 1938 vintage, which was made for a member in South Africa by George Layton, a famous loco builder who worked for Bonds of Euston Road, This is meths fired and so powerful. It featured in the Model Railway Constructor in 1957 and was sold to a UK member in the same year. It must have changed hands in SA as it was sold by Nick Beek who had a garden railway in Johannesburg, and he sold it to John Seabourne."*

## A SOUTH AFRICAN VISIT

If you are in search of steam, then I can recommend a visit to Durban loco shed. This is the fortunate experience I had a few weeks ago when on holiday there.

On the way from the airport I had seen the smoke of a couple of engines shunting the docks goods, so decided to see if a closer look could be obtained. The station staff at Durban told me to take a 16p return electric train journey to the first station out of town and see the loco shed foreman. Going over the bridge to the loco yard was quite a thrill as there were several engines in steam. No difficulty was placed in my way after signing the usual indemnity. In fact, I was invited to return at any time.

There were some thirty engines on shed, mostly Pacifics or 0-8-0 engines, the latter used for shunting in the docks. Two 2-6-2 tank engines were in the yard, one awaiting scrapping, the other the last of its class and looking particularly nice after running an enthusiasts special. One driver lamented the run down of the shed, saying that it was only working at a fifth of its capacity and steam was being phased out. Still, it was a real pleasure to be amongst the noise and smell of full size engines again.

Passing through Johannesburg on the return journey the opportunity was taken to contact Nick Beek, the only G '1' member on the African continent so far as I am aware.

This layout is literally built in a roundhouse, called a rondavel, based on an African type mud hut in the bush. His "hut" is of a more permanent metal nature, fully wired and watertight.

The layout has very much of a Continental flavour with Fulgurex and L.G.B. coaches and wagons in evidence. Nick told me he has bought a different wagon or truck each year throughout the existence of the line, which goes back quite a while now.

There was an LNER train of three coaches, which used to have a "Flying Scotsman" steam H.P. engine, but this was sold to John Seabourne.

Engines were varied but interesting. There was No.27, a 4-6-4 steam tank loco (as the bacon has it "Canadian style") which used to run on Victor Harris's layout. A low pressure B/L. Southern 4-6-0 tender engine was noted. A very rare Metropolitan electric with a destination board showing "Neasden" was there. The pride of the line is a Fulgurex Pacific with "two" tenders. The reason for following the real "Flying Scotsman" is that the engine has been adapted for use as an electric powered loco instead of the steam one she is in reality. Owing to the nature of the layout it is difficult to run steam at present, so Nick has built the second tender to provide the power.

A warm welcome awaits any member who might be in that part of the world. Nick has a swimming pool alongside the layout for those who want to watch the trains from the water - shades of Dawlish Warren.

Thank you Nick for the kindness shown to me during my all too brief visit.

PAUL COUNSELL

Does anyone know what happened to Nick Beek and his railway?

***Take the train!***