



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

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Editorial

It never ceases to amaze me when writing the NSC that subjects that you think may only have limited appeal elicit quite a lot of comments. So it is with last month's newsletter on LEGO. Fortuitously, while undertaking another exercise of which more later, I came across the articles which had been written earlier on LEGO – Volume 9 nos 4 and 5. Perhaps the most notable issue which I had forgotten was that the first plastic (there had been an earlier wooden train) LEGO train was push along without rails. Further, the first loco supplied with rails was also push along.

The North Star Chronicles website

Having re-discovered my lost round tuit, some free time enabled an exercise to be conducted which had been necessary for a long time. This was the updating of the North Star Chronicles website. Firstly, the Chronicles section was checked and a couple of mistakes in the form of duplications and an inability to access the particular edition concerned, were corrected. Secondly, the index was substantially expanded. This was done because during the time that the NSC has been published and particularly during Covid, we lost a lot of people. The NSC, albeit it did not start out with this intention, has ended up as a sort of record of the model railway/railroad hobby in Durban between the early nineteen eighties and the present day. I have tried to incorporate the names of the leading lights so to speak who were active during that time.

One prominent name is missing, that of the late Peter Schwegmann (hope I have the spelling right) who did so much to inspire and introduce the hobby to several of the people who are listed.

Now onto this month's main feature for which I am indebted to Mike Leppan. Photos are largely his.

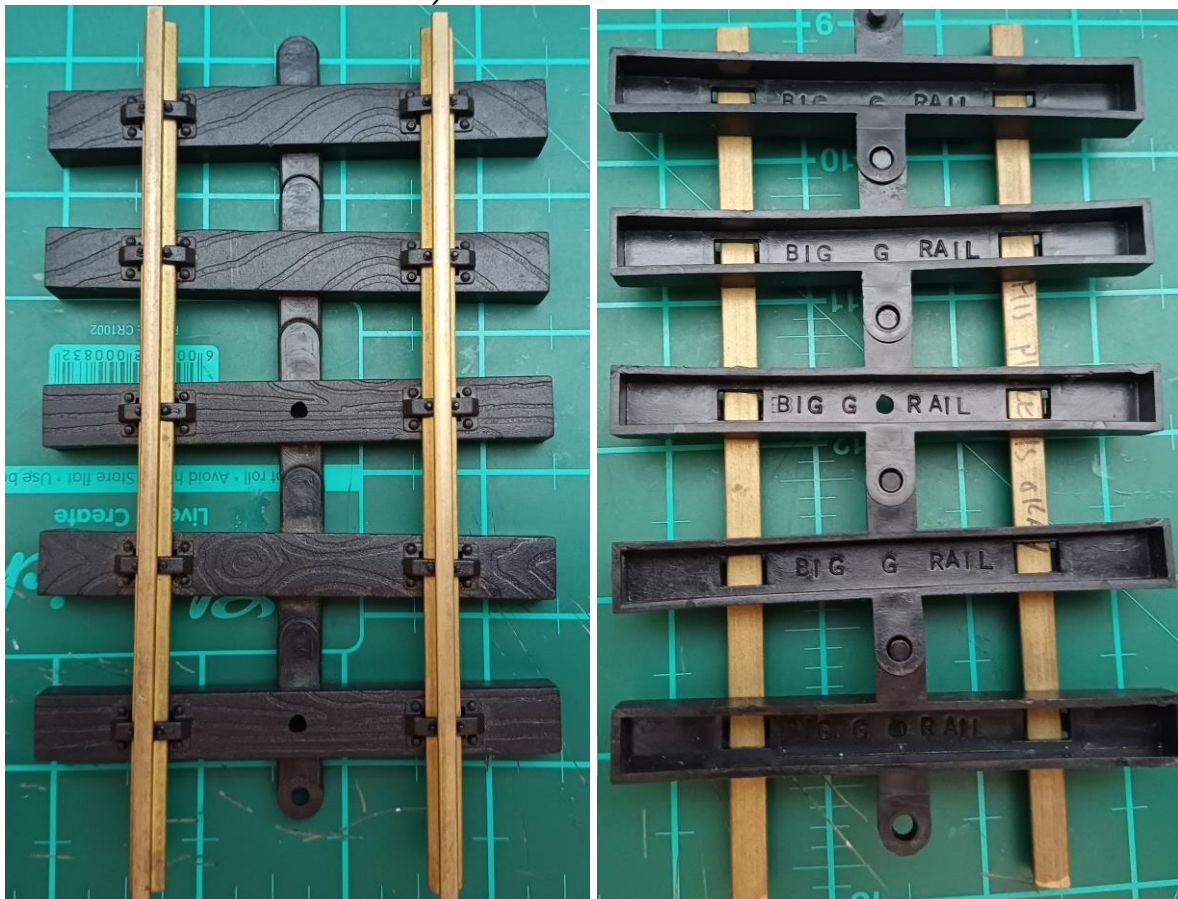
The Cape Town Society of Model Experimental Engineers

“On the weekend of 9th and 10th of November 2024, the Cape Town Society of Model Experimental Engineers held their annual exhibition to raise awareness of the hobby and to raise much needed funds for the club. The club has been in the same club house in Rondebosch, Cape Town since the sixties, and an organized club since 1907. (I believe one of the oldest clubs of its type in the world.) Harry Reeds (a fellow G scaler) and I were asked by Geoffrey de Vartek, chairman of both the Parow based WP live steamers, and the CTSMEE clubs, if we would help out by showcasing the G scale trains we own. Just 30 years of age, Geoff is passionate about all aspects of the hobby and an active member of both clubs. Geoff himself has collected an impressive collection of “Thomas the Tank Engine” trains and accessories over the years, partly in order to attract young membership to the train hobby and they are pretty neat collectibles as they are such recognizable models. Harry and I arrived almost simultaneously on Saturday morning at 6am – Just in time to wake Geoff up (He had worked through the night to help set up the show and had got to bed at around 5am.) The track was a double oval mounted on a concrete plinth in a large unused space at the rear of the club premises.



The G scale layout

Track was all local South African manufactured (produced at the instigation of the late Mike Humphries and I suspect it found its way to the CTMSEE club via former member Justin Shaw who last I heard was in wildest Philippines - ed) copper code 332 flat bottomed rail laid into plastic sleepers from a mould which David Cairns still has. (The story does not end there. Subsequently, John Everitt I think it was, commissioned Andy Anderson in Pinetown to blow a further quantity of uv treated sleepers. Brass rail extruded from a mould made by Huletts Aluminium was, with some difficulty slid through the sleepers. This could not have been done if code 332 rail had been used. Fortunately the brass rail used by John Everitt/ Murray Kyle was code 250. The result was rail which was as good as LGB but there again I am biased! What can't be denied is the locally produced rail was substantially cheaper than the imported item, so while we can blow more sleepers, the rail is a bridge too far Sadly, Huletts Aluminium destroyed the mould from which the rail was extruded – ed)



'Home made' code 250 G scale track

The concrete base the track was laid on is a bit uneven, but with a few shims quickly made from cardboard torn from a few boxes it helped us to level the track as we experimented with the first trains running on the track. LGB's track cleaner locomotive made short work of cleaning the track surface. I had brought my trusty Massoth Central Station and two navigators. We used them tethered to the central station but for future events we will definitely use a wireless module to afford better manoeuvrability to sort out issues on the line.

Harry had brought his two scratch build SAR locomotives – built from wood, scrap parts, gutter downpipe and some medicine bottles, they represented a rather credible Garret steam locomotive and a Class 35 Diesel of the SAR/SAS in orange livery.



Garratt at rear pulling SARM (Jan Gouws) built passenger combine. Model of class 35 diesel front. 'Cranky' at left.



Closer view of Harry Reeds Garratt. Photo Geoffrey de Vartek

Although both pretty crude, they are testament to the fact that where there is a will – there is a way. The Diesel, powered by two Aristocraft BO-BO bogies, and using a Massoth XLS decoder for DCC power and sound, runs flawlessly and smoothly, pulling a lovely Jan Gouws built combine passenger car painted in the old SAR red and grey, along with several home-built freight cars (also constructed from scrap wood and plastic running on commercial Aristocraft bogies / metal wheel sets) The Garret - although crude – is actually a thing of beauty. Constructed from scrap wood, plastic drain pipe and a cab stolen from an LGB Stainz loco. The two motor blocks were cannibalized from two LGB Stainz locos. I personally did the electronics of both the Diesel and the Garret using Massoths XLS decoders. Luckily, I still have the sound files for the LGB /Aster Garret which I used for this scratch built steam locomotive, while a good old Alco diesel sound file from Massoth did the diesel locomotive proud. Harry’s two locomotives and rolling stock prove that one does not need to spend a fortune on the hobby. Nor do you need to be a fine scale modeler in order to simply get involved and have fun in the hobby.



“Cameron” – a Schoema diesel

Apart from the Track cleaner, I’d taken Nicky and Frank, a lovely LGB produced, army field locomotive in Prussian Blue with red lining, a small scratch build Schoema diesel called Cameron after my first grandson, and Gustav – my digital gandy dancer who spent many hours chasing various trains trying to catch up with the train ahead. He proved to be a popular addition – and although such a small item, it provided a lot of interest to young and old alike. Video thereof can be viewed at the address below:

<https://youtu.be/xMcMDVFbmLQ>



Thomas the tank engine with Percy in front and James behind
Geoff's "Thomas" collection of course stole the show! His collection included personalities such as that iconic blue Thomas the Tank engine, Percy, James and a wonderful model of Emily – my favourite with that large Sterling Single wheel that created a wonderfully smooth mesmerizing motion as Emily glided around the track pulling a heavy consist of LGB passenger and freight cars. (The lighter Thomas stock tended to blow over all the time with the high winds that we had on both days of the show). A short video of Emily with LGB Frank S passing behind can be watched via youtube at the address below:

<https://youtu.be/C89VZkd1gKo>

Cranky the Crane, another member of the Thomas the Tank family, was also a show stealer. A video thereof and the class 35 diesel can be viewed at: <https://youtube.com/shorts/Dkejglii6t4?feature=share>

A wonderful and fully interactive toy is operated by a small hand controller. The operation included left and right slewing and the hook could be lowered and raised using a small wireless handheld controller. Best of all was the small sound module with cranky sound tracks... This caused quite a line of youngsters to form a line and await their turn to operate Cranky (some more patiently than others!!) This of course also allowed us to strike up conversations with several parents with young children. Through these interactions – it was interesting to find out that many of these youngsters had inherited and played regularly with train sets handed down from grandparents or other family members. A most satisfying bit of information that gives hope for the future of the hobby.



Marklin no 21272 modelled on RhB Thusis. This loco is based on an earlier (2006) LGB model of RhB Heidi.

The exhibition of course was not just about G scale trains. In the small pathway outside the club was a short 50m or so live steam line... raised to allow a small steam engine pulling a single car, to pull passengers of all ages up and back along the same track where it discharged and took on a fresh load of passengers.



Andre van Breda providing rides on the club's live steam loco on a temporary track set up in croquet lane. Photo Geoffrey de Vartek.

As one entered the club premises – turning left takes you into a large room housing a vintage O scale layout running an assortment of Lionel 3 rail and other two rail models.



O gauge 2 and 3 rail layout. Photo Geoffrey de Vartek



Hornby O gauge clockwork. Photo Geoffrey de Vartek

Of particular interest to me of course are the wonderful clockwork models of pre and post war Hornby/ Meccano manufacture. Most of them in perfect condition and still running as they did 70 to 80 years ago. Also in the same room was a lovely DCC HO scale layout, running mainly modern American outline trains.



HO section capable of running DC and DCC locos. Photo Geoffrey de Vartek



N Trak modular section display. Photo Geoffrey de Vartek.
In a small room just off the main room was a modern N scale layout.



Permanent N gauge U shaped dogbone layout. Photo Geoffrey de Vartek



Z scale layout displayed by Evert Loo

I did not have much opportunity to observe either of these two smaller scale layouts in operation but they appeared to be well constructed and in perfect running condition.



Marklin Z scale layout

Turning right takes you into the second large hall. Before the various exhibitors arrived, I had the chance to look at the various shelves that housed a wonderful collection of Basset-Lowke and hand built Gauge 1 models – donated by a past member of the club..



Collection of vintage Gauge 1 donated to the club by Mr McMahon. Most of the items are Basset Lowke. Photo Geoffrey de Vartek.
On other shelves are some lovely model boats and model steam engines, including stationary engines constructed by members of the club over the years



Boat and steam engine collection

Out of the corner of my eye I picked out a rather unique collection of various engineering projects including a two-wheeler constructed from a scrap motor, a VW Beetle front wing and other mechanical scrap. Thus proving that the club encourages all experimental engineers – not just model train enthusiasts!

The show was a good mix of catching up with fellow modelers, making new connections and simply unwinding and relaxing while watching the next generation who will hopefully take up the flag and carry our hobby into the future”.



A O gauge 2 rail DC Dapol Terrier and Kit built 2 Rail GWR 14XX share duties on the club Layout. Photo Geoffrey de Vartek.

Thank you Mike and Geoffrey.

The end