Early NTRAK Comunications and the first copy of the Subscription Based Newsletter.

By Jim FitzGerald. Editor

In the beginning of NTRAK, plans and news of modules being built and changes in the specs were mailed out to anyone asking about the project. The NMRA Bulletin had printed a cover story about our proposed layout for the 1974 NMRA National convention in San Diego. The idea for a modular N Scale layout came from Ben Davis, president of the Belmont Shores Model Railroad Club. I had volunteered to help and wound up doing a Newsletter, even though I lived about 250 miles north of the club headquarters.

Ben was able to get the simple typed pages duplicated and Kadee and ConCor helped with postage costs. The San Diego Layout was a tremendous success and by the time of the 1976 NMRA National Convention in Chicago came along it was time to start charging for the Newsletter and trim the mailing list to those who were really interested. If we were going to charge for the newsletter, we needed to share modeling ideas and have other general interest N scale articles. These ideas were presented to the N scalers at the convention and the plans were firmed up.

Rick Spano and David K Smith had built a module for layout and David, then in his late teens, was a Graphic Arts Major and volunteered to do a color Newsletter as a class project. This Newsletter on the following pages.

David still models in N scale, but has added Z (1:220) and T (1:450) to his modeling stable, and has had many articles published over the years. You can read about what he’s up to starting with his N scale website, the White River and Northern (http://whiteriverandnorthern.net). From there you can follow links to his websites on Z and T, as well as his modeling blogs.

Bob Vensel (still active in NTRAK) contributed a hopper car kit-bash article. Paul Fulks is still active modeling West Virginia railroading.

It was many years before we had any color pages in the Newsletter again. Now the Electronic Version of the Newsletter has all color photos, except where only black and white photos are available.

During the 1980’s the Newsletter masters were being done with an early PageMaker program on the original Macintosh computer. The Newsletter grew to 40 or more pages and a great variety of articles furnished by the readers. Material from past issues was organized into booklets and books which brought new members up to date on many subjects.

After the start of N Scale Magazine, the NTRAK Newsletter shrunk down to just a few pages, but then in the mid 90’s started growing again. Take a look at the 1976 first subscription issue of the NTRAK Newsletter.
I had better start this with a word about this special issue. At the NTRAK meeting in Chicago during the NMRA convention when we were talking about the newsletter, Dave Smith volunteered to help out with the newsletter. Dave and Rick Spano had brought modules that worked together and showed part of their area of New Jersey. Dave is in advertising and we talked some at the convention about improvements to make in the newsletter. I had the last issue about ready to go when I got a call from Dave. He is taking an advanced course in printing and is doing this issue as part of his coursework. With the chance of full-color pictures in this issue, I cut back on the photos for the Aug-Oct issue. After this it will be back to the old printing, but with some ideas from Dave on a few improvements.

—Jim

RAILFUN '76
1976 NATIONAL MODEL RAILROAD ASSOCIATION
CONVENTION AUGUST 10 - 15

CHICAGO

*IN* FULL* COLOR!*

Well, was it worth the wait? I hope so. Was it worth the trouble? You tell me. Putting this Newsletter on the press took 14 printing plates. Anywhere but in my class it would have cost several thousand dollars. I have put that much labor into the typesetting alone. So, you can see just what this job entailed. I must give thanks to Paul, Jim, John, Rick and Bob for the use of their fine photographs. I also thank Ken, Fil & Carol, Rebecca, the A.P.P., and Mr. Nichols. I hope you enjoy the Newsletter... and don't forget to send in your $3 subscription — it will help bring you more special feature issues like this one!

—Dave
GENERAL

NTRAK NEWS

SOME REMEMBERANCES
OF RAILFUN '76
by Jim FitzGerald

I live in California, about 2,400 miles from Chicago. I had three modules that I wanted to have back there and while they could be shipped back there by Amtrak it meant building crates for them and then storing the crates afterwards. I had made racks to go in my station wagon to hold the three modules plus other elements of my "mini layout". With a bit of juggling I found I could also take along two more 6' modules made up of the rear units of my mini layout plus some quickie filler scenery and skyscrapers. So, on August 4, I headed out with four 6' modules and a 4' er in my wagon. My goal was 600 miles a day for four days and it worked out close to that. Going over Donner Pass I saw some SP freights working their way thru the snow sheds, and then later on east there were UP and WP trains in view.

I got to Chicago mid-morning on Sunday, August 8th, checked into the motel and was greeted by Paul Fulks who had driven in from Huntington, West Va. We unloaded our things at the Rosemont Convention Center that afternoon. The center is just being finished and is a huge place. We were able to drive our wagons right to the layout location and unload. O'Hare airport is close by and when the wind was in the wrong direction the planes were coming in a few hundred feet above us. The wind shifted often, so the planes weren't a steady thing. The weather was on the cool side. I had been dreading being in Chicago in August, but the radio was telling of a new record low for that date being established that morning. It warmed up some before we left but wasn't as humid as it often is, so even the weather cooperated.

Harry Steinfeld was on hand that Sunday afternoon and most any time, day & night, during the convention. Harry was our contact with the convention staff and having lived in Chicago for years he knew the who and the where when we had problems. Harry is in his 70's and still has a full-time job but devotes a great many hours to the hobby. Through some of his friends in a group called the American Society for Model Railroading Harry arranged to have a large number of flyers printed up. These went out to hobby shops and conventions earlier in the year to promote NTRAK and then we gave out over a thousand flyers during the convention. The group also printed up a new batch of manuals for us and these should cover our needs for another year at least. During the show Harry was there to worry about details and chase down an answer for us. We couldn't have done it without you, Harry!

Monday morning, after the confusion of the union carpenter help settled down, the work of assembling the layout got on in earnest. Ken Peck and I put down chalk line marks to outline the layout and the modules were placed in position. The levels were sighted in with a builders level to give us a chance at long trains later on.

Tuesday morning many of us went on the tour of the GM locomotive plant. This was one thing I had my heart set on, and, the night before, I found I had been given the wrong ticket for that day. I had some anxious moments 'till that was straightened out. But soon we were bouncing along on the school busses to La Grange. I had expected a lot more automation in the production of parts than we saw. Of course, the volume of locomotives is so small compared to automobile production that there is only a limited number of things that could be done that way... and of course there are many models of locomotives to be built... it was just one of those preconceived ideas.

Three evenings during the convention we had special N meetings. These were after we finished on the layout, so they didn't start 'till 10:30 or so. Not the best time for a tired group, but about the only time. One evening several of us made the bus trip to the Elmhurst club. Busses ran every half hour 'till midnight and then every hour. The club was open and running 24 hours a day during the convention!! That's real dedication. They have three layouts in their basement headquarters as well as a room for movies and lockers for member's equipment. Upstairs is a great restaurant and out the windows is the Chicago Northwestern mainline. Across the street is Al's Hobby Shop... an ideal sort of place. No wonder Harry spends so much time there. I hope to have a feature on the club's N layout in a future issue.
Two years ago at San Diego, George Gaskill was working on the bridge for his Canyon Diablo module. He was still soldering and gluing parts on at Railfun... but he painted it and had it in place (instead of the black painted 1x2) by the time we were operating. Some of these jobs take more time than others, George.

Dick Hait's wife Linda did a great job getting food and beverages for the crew putting the layout together and generally keeping us all on the job. Her "I" shirt slogan, "I'm his because he deserves the best", was "Right On".

Mal Harvey had quite a string of modules and was busy finishing them most of the time at the convention. The wiring was only partly done and he was busy with the wire cutters and soldering iron most of the first two days. Once that was done he placed a lot of structures on the bare plywood and coated the ply with epoxy, including some quick hills in one part. This continuing clinic in module building was one of the features of the layout.

Phil Schmucker of Detroit had his 4' module there and had driven to Chicago by himself in his VW Rabbit. Phil's module was called "Nervous Corners" and was as well done as most of the modules there. So? Well, Phil has cerebral palsy and everything that he does takes a great effort. Just soldering a connector on the end of a wire can be a half-hour project for Phil. His determination and interest overcame many, many obstacles in building his module. When we got underway with the layout, Phil was one of our most dependable operators, keeping the trains in his block running smoothly.

Several times since meeting Phil I have thought of him when I find myself complaining about not getting as much done as I want to. All the best to you, Phil.

One of the interesting parts of the convention for me was to get to meet so many of the people who have just been a name on the mailing list; not just the module builders, but also many who have written in for information but haven't built a module yet. Dave Seay from Virginia Beach was there poking around under the modules so he can help the club get their modules under way. Charles Vik who helped with one of the early N scale newsletters, introduced himself, as did Roy Brandhorst of St. Louis. Roy has been helping get a club going and so I made a detour on my way back home and stayed in St. Louis with another club member, Gary Gross. I made a quick setup of a couple of modules in Gary's basement to show several members what the modules were all about. We hope to have some of their efforts at Denver next year.

Also on the way back I stopped near Omaha to see Bill Warkenten. Bill is an Air Force type who lives in a mobile home. Three sides of the living room are a N scale layout with the TV and Hi-Fi under it and an easy chair in the middle of it all. Bill did find an extra chair from the kitchen for me to sit on... needless to say he is divorced! Bill has quite a collection of equipment and is now in the process of rebuilding his layout to accept a module in a couple of places. Another one we hope to see at Denver next July.

The October issue of the NMRA BULLETIN has a nice picture on page 13 of Al Lentz & his now-famous "Storybook Park" module. In the background looking at the camera is Ken Peck of the Detroit SONS club. Ken looks fuzzy in the picture but this is just because of the long hours and hard work he put in on the layout. In the same issue over on page 25 in a discussion of Trolley Modules is a mention of our modules and then lightning strikes a third time on page 50 with a nice plug by Bob Warren, who surveys the regional and divisional publications. Ken Peck writes on NTRAK for his regional paper and Ben Davis mentions it often in his N column in the PCR paper. Tom Sandrone in Milwaukee is the editor of the OWL CAR, the WISE Division publication. Tom is building a module and is giving a running account, with drawings from the manual, in his paper. A nice way to get the word around. Thanks for the help, fellows.

The November issue of MR has, on page 92, a picture of Jim Kelley's layout. Jim is a key member of the North Raleigh Model RR Club. They have several modules completed. If they look like the MR photo, the visitors are in for a treat.

And don't miss the December issue of MODEL RAILROADER!!! It has a six-page spread on NTRAK and the layout we had at Chicago for this year's NMRA Convention. The picture of the crowd watching the trains run is great, and there are shots of eleven of the modules and a good write-up on our group. A TV-watching gremlin snuck in somewhere and gave Peter Fulk's first-place module. Paul Fulks' module was also featured in the November issue of Railroad Model Craftsman, in color.
SOME REFLECTIONS OF A FIRST CONVENTION
by David Smith

I live in New Jersey, about 800 miles from Chicago. I wouldn’t have even tried to get out there if it weren’t for NTRAK. Some time ago, Rick Spano and I started kicking around the idea of building a pair of modules for the ’76 NTRAK meet. After literally dozens of design proposals, we settled on a plan inspired by real features in our area. Rick chose a rock quarry near the Delaware, and I settled with a lumber yard in Hopewell.

Then came the mad rush. We had but a few months in which to build our modules. After spending many nights of the week up ’till 2 or 3, we completed them to our (near) satisfaction. One of the things we did that consumed much time was hand-laying code 55 rail. Still, it looked great and functioned perfectly. I had a stub switch that got some attention plus a half-finished Shay. But the showstopper was Rick’s operating crane.

Finally, with the modules over their heads, Rick and his wife Linda left for Chicago. I rode out with John Johnson of Columbus, N.J. You should be hearing more about John in future, as he was so

CHICAGO...
NMRA’S WISE CHOICE

Above: Sunrise over the Chicago skyline.

Top Right: John says that the locos under construction at EMD look like brass.

Middle Right: Action at Elmhurst! A Chicago Northwestern commuter pulls out, around 10 PM.

Bottom Right: Who could forget the fabulous Hyatt Regency Hotel?
overwhelmed by NTRAK that he volunteered to assist in '78. He may even build a module, despite he's in HO! (John is also responsible for the EMD shot.)

John and I arrived in Chicago around 2 AM Sun. morning. We were so excited about Railfun '76 that we drove straight through. We toured around town for a few hours, and about 7 AM I caught the sunrise in Berwyn.

Then it was time for Railfun. This was my first NMRA Convention, and boy did I pick a good starter! Six prototype tours, 19 club layouts, 32 home layouts, 27 clinics, MRIA, EMD, JMC/Con-Cor, Kalmbach, Walthers, Ill. Ry. Museum, contests, raffles, slide & movie shows, and almost 100 hobby shops in the area. Plus "Oh! Elmhurst!" any time of day or night.

And NTRAK, of course, was the highlight. I didn't get to a single clinic because of it, and I didn't even regret it.

Many thanks to everyone for making it all happen!

Below Left & Right:
Bob Cosman stopped by Rick's and shot these two great B+W's of the J.C. VanDoren & Son's Lumber Yard on my half of the 8' Hopewell module Rick & I built.

If you do get to handlaying code 40 or 55 track with Pliobond, I have run into a gadget that makes putting a uniform bead of Pliobond on the bottom of the rails a simple job... and without the "strings" or thin spots that you get with a brush. A-West, 950 W. 2nd St., San Bernardino, Ca. 92410, markets "Needlepoint Applicators". These are small plastic squeeze bottles and are available with five sizes of hypodermic-like needles. The largest has a .033" hole and will spread the Pliobond very nicely. They also have a high-pressure syringe that works equally well for the job. The Pliobond shouldn't be stored in either of them, however, because the solvent slowly evaporates through the soft plastic. A few days should be OK, but I left some in one of the bottles for about three months and it was getting too thick to work with. The smallest of the "Needlepoints" has a .008" bore and is great for styrene cement. With it you can flow just a small amount along a seam and make assembling plastic structures a neat & simple job. The larger size also works well with Matte Medium in glueing shrubbery and other scenery detailing in place.

The "Needlepoint Applicators" and bottle are $1.25 for any size or $4.50 for all five sizes of needle and one bottle. The G Gun syringe is $2.00. A-West also has other items including .009" stainless steel wire that would be great for handrails in that detailing job. Send SASE for their catalog or check with your dealer.

—Jim
AND NOW PRESENTING THE LARGEST NTRAK MEET TO DATE

Top Left: “Old Elmhurst Beer” is made here on the Elmhurst Club modules.
Top Right: This wonderfully detailed logging camp is courtesy of Harl Nelson and the Village Hobby Shop.
Center: Paul Fulks made good (1st place NMRA Display) with “Krauts Creek”.
Bottom Left: “Philtha Feed” store, et. al., on Paul’s module.
Bottom Right: The engine house at Krauts Creek.
*Top Left:* The operating crane is hard at work up behind the rock crushing plant on Rick Spano's module.

*Top Right:* Jim FitzGerald's diesel service area is impeccable.

*Center:* Dick Hait & Mike Roberts had the biggest display there, complete with stereo sound.

*Bottom Left & Right:* Scenes from two of Dick's great string of modules.
NTRAK LAYOUT AT RAILFUN '76

41 Separate Modules
17 Individuals
3 Clubs

Overall Size: 94' x 24'

ELMHURST CLUB
S.O.N.S. CLUB
PAUL FULKS
BOB VENSEL
KEN PECK
LEROY GUNThER
S.O.N.S. CLUB
KARL NELSON (ONTARIO, CA., VILLAGE HOBBY SHOP)
MAL HARVEY
JIM FITZGERALD
S.O.N.S. CLUB YARD
ANN ARBOR CLUB
RICK SPANO
DAVE SMITH
PHIL SCHMUCKER
MIKE NESLEDECK
GEORGE GASKILL

"DUCK UNDER"
S.O.N.S. CLUB
TOM HOOVER

AL LENTZ
JOHN SACCO

Drawing Courtesy of Ken Peck
Left: Even the huge entrance of the Rosemont Convention Center gives little indication of its enormous interior. 20,000 square feet of model railroads was just a drop in the bucket. MRIA had 140 booths; Railfun Swap Session had 200 tables.

...AND EVEN MORE

Right, Top, Center, Bottom: Three more views of Jim FitzGerald’s neat modules. The center one is of his industrial module.

Below: Here’s Al Lentz’s well-known amusement park. Under that is an overall view of Rick Spano’s half of the 8’ Hopewell module.
AN EASY FREIGHT CAR CONVERSION for that different look  
by Bob Vensel

Several years ago I had the distinct pleasure of visiting the “South Ridge Lines” – the home layout of Dean Freytag in Ashland, Ohio. The fact that he models in HO was inconsequential to me as I like trains, period, regardless of scale, and modeling ideas and concepts are generally non-selective as to scale. I had also visited the superb layouts of the Dayton, Ohio area “lichen belt” on several occasions during this same time period but when I visited Dean I immediately discovered that he was my kind of modeler in that his layout depicts a theme of heavy industry and he likes to kitbash both freight cars and structures.

Needless to say my visit to the Freytag layout was worth every inch of the 500 mile round trip from my home, as it solidified my inclinations toward an industrial-theme railroad and also stimulated me into what has become one of my favorite aspects of model railroading: kitbashing rolling stock and structures.

Kitbashing and modification of ‘N’ gauge rolling stock is not particularly difficult and in fact it may be even easier than HO due to its size which reduces detail. The medium of kitbashing also enables us to escape from the sameness of our rolling stock rosters and thus can provide us with distinctive and eye-catching equipment.

The conversion which I am about to relate was my first real attempt and was completed about three years ago. This conversion is quite elementary and thus serves as an excellent introduction to the fascinating realm of kitbashing and modification.

In essence I modified the Atlas center-flo (#2321-2323 series) which is a 55’ four-bay hopper to a 35’ two-bay hopper. Please refer to the diagrams (at right) for orientation before starting this project. Before beginning, disassemble the car into three separate components: the roofwalk, the roof, and the body; remove the trucks. Using a Zona saw, cut the body into three sections: the first of two cuts is made about 25’ in from the left end of the car to include the detail of the #2 hopper; the second cut is made about 9½’ in from the right end and includes the same detail of the #4 hopper. Refer to figure A. The shaded portions of these figures is discarded.

Next, cut the roof to include the 4th roof hatch from the left end. This cut is made tight against the hinge detail of the 4th hatch, about 25’ from the left end. The second cut is made about 8’ from the right end of the roof. See Figure B. To do the roofwalk, I cut the right end along its inner edge and then cut the remainder of the roofwalk to fit the resulting space (about 33’; see Figure C).

Now all that remains is to sand any rough edges so that the resultant joints will be smooth and square. To do this I put a piece of Flexigrit sandpaper on my workbench top and rubbed the body joints over this a little at a time with frequent checks for proper fit. Use care to make square cuts with the Zona saw. I joined the matching pieces together with Testors’ liquid plastic cement and filled any imperfections in the joints with Testors’ plastic putty and sanded smooth. My car was finished with Polly S #PR-30 ‘refer orange’ and lettered with Instant Lettering black dry-transfers for one of my private road names: Gambrinus Steel. I filled the bottom of the hopper level with ballast and bonded it with diluted white glue to add weight and stability to the car. There was nothing really tedious involved in this project; just go slow and you can’t go wrong.

So now the Gambrinus Connecting Railroad has a distinctive piece of rolling stock which can’t be obtained by the masses off the shelf of the local hobby shelf.

One final note: Dean also has orange and black cars lettered for his Davies Steel private road (I happen to like the color combination anyway); and, yes, do save the leftovers from this car for that next project.
ATLAS CENTER-FLO HOPPER

SERIES #2321-3

FIGURE A

SIDE

FIGURE B

TOP

FIGURE C

TOP

SIDE

TOP

GAMBRINUS CONNECTING RAILROAD
SHOP DRAWING #F-1
9-16-75

BOB VESSEL
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HUNTINGTON, WEST VIRGINIA 25705
ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

NTRAK is an N scale layout system of modular units built by individuals and clubs in many parts of North America and the British Isles. Its main purpose is to display N scale model railroad in action at conventions and exhibitions. We hope to interest more people in N scale, and then the manufacturers can make a greater variety of equipment available to all N scalers. NTRAK is a non-profit, informal organization run by volunteers and amateurs.

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We would appreciate a donation of $1 for the NTRAK manual.
Subscription to the NTRAK Newsletter is $3 per year.

COMING EVENTS

The response to the $3 subscription has been quite good. One thing that I had failed to mention the last time was that club members who have all the copies sent to a single address can share the savings in postage. $3 for the first copy, and $1 for each additional copy. Just let me know how many copies to send.

The BS Lines had a special car made by Kadee for their two-day meet in Signal Hill, Ca., Nov. 20-21. It is the new refer with the club's Bull Shippers emblem on it. The cars can be ordered from Ray Galli, 3446 Wade St., Los Angeles, Ca. 90066. The price is $6 per car including shipping and handling.

The NTRAK "T" shirts are now available. They have the NTRAK Locomotive Logo on them in black on light blue or white on dark blue. The children's version is $4.50 and comes in small (6-8 yrs), medium (10-12 yrs), or large (14-16 yrs). Adults' are $5 and come in S,M,L, or X-L. Specify the size and color you want. Send your order to: Gene Tencate, 285 No. Highland, Elmhurst, Ill. 60126.