



THE BRASS POUNDER

Newsletter of the Carolina Southern Div, Mid-Eastern Region, National Model Railroad Assoc
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OPERATING SESSION LESONS

By Rick Knight

I've been holding Operating Sessions on my Knight Bros. & Dad Railroad for just about a year now. The 'Monday Night Irregulars' operate twice a month, on the second and fourth Mondays. It's been a LOT of fun and it's been a REAL learning experience. Let me share some lessons learned – and some thoughts – with you.

FIRST: Standards are critical.

On my layout, I've got two grades that would make Saluda look like a walk in the park. It was either that or a whole bunch of real estate tied up with a helix. I opted for the steep grades, recognizing that there would be a "price" to pay – that I'd have to adhere to a set of strict standards. Since I'm operating in "the modern era" with two and three large diesels heading up each train, power is not an issue. But most of my sweeping curves are super elevated, keeping the cars on the track is a challenge – and it's all about standards.

- All of my cars are fitted with metal wheels; they run better and add to the weight of the car.
- All of my equipment has Kadee cou-

plers. With long trains there is a LOT of stress on the couplers on the grades, both going up or down. When I've purchased rolling stock that comes equipped with other brands of couplers, I've left them on as a test. Every one of them flunked. There's nothing quite like a dozen or more cars screaming down a steep grade.



Rick briefs potential Knight Bros. & Dad RR operators

- Coupler height is uniform. The couplers need to be strong; they also need to be evenly matched.
 - All of the rolling stock is weighted to the NMRA standards.
- Individually each of these standards is important. Together they make it possible for near flawless operation.

The Division Brass

Superintendent	Rick Knight
Asst. Superintendent	Jack Parker
Clerk	Fred Miller, MMR
Paymaster	Dick Bronson
Director 2005	Dave Chance
Director 2006	Bill Jennings
Director 2007	Michele Chance
Membership Chair	Jack Parker
Fund Raising Chair	Bob Johnson
AP Chair	Fred Miller, MMR
Newsletter/Web	Fred Miller, MMR

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SECOND: *You never have enough passing sidings.*

My original track plan had several sidings at key locations, but when we began operating it was quickly evident that they were too few and far between. Which brings me to the third key observation.

THIRD: *Your original track plan should be fluid, not cut in stone.*

I've done a bunch of modifications since our first operating session, moving track and turnouts, adding track, and adding more track. It helped somewhat that the layout was only about 60% sceniced when we first started the operating session there was less scenery to have to tear out and redo. If you're debating on whether to wait until your pike is 100% done before you open it to operating sessions, I'd strongly encourage you to start operating now! Let the flow of the Operating session determine what improvements should be made, before you lay down a whole bunch of scenery. Your operators won't see the expanses of naked homosote or foam as a major obstacle to running the railroad.

FOURTH: *Simple is better.*

You've spend a good deal of time – months and years – working on your layout. You understand the flow of traffic and know where all of the destinations are. You can place the sidings and spurs on a map in your sleep. On the other hand, your operators come to the table as complete strangers. This, for me, was a tough lesson to learn. I

- TIMETABLE FOR 2005
(See Web Site for details)
- CSDiv Meeting, September 17, 1PM, Annual Picnic at Jack Parker's house
 - Thomas The Tank Engine, Sept 30-Oct 2 and Oct 7-9 at Spencer
 - Autumn Rails 2005 Oct 8, Hendersonville, NC
 - Great Scale Model Train Show October 8-9, Timonium, MD
 - MER Annual Convention October 28-30 Raleigh, NC
 - National Model Railroad Month - November
 - BSA Rail Days at Spencer, Nov 4-6 (The CSDivision will be helping with some of these activities on Saturday afternoon, following a short business meeting.)
 - Charlotte Southern Christmas Show, Nov 10-20 (The Belmont Club needs help running trains at the show!!)
 - Open House at the Knight Bros. & Dad Railroad, Dec 18, 3-7 PM
 - CSDiv Meeting, November TBD

Meeting Notes

(As reported by Clerk—Fred Miller)

- The June 16th CSD meeting at Martin Oakes' home had 16 attendees including 5 guests present.
- Some discussion was conducted about possible RR exhibits at a local Mall in celebration of Model RR Month in November. No specific plans resulted.
- Rick described the special Annual Business meeting in Hickory planned for January.
- Additional dialog took place about the role CSDiv can play in promoting model railroading. Some agreement was reached that one way the division could make a contribution was to make model RR opportunities (meets, shows, conventions, clubs) known to all modelers in the community served by the division. This could be accomplished through our website and newsletter and special mailings.
- To that end, Fred Miller asked for more participation by the membership in providing information. To date, ar-



CSDiv Discussions at Martin Oakes

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Wizard Martin at his clinic

Meeting Notes

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ticles and postings have come only from Fred and Rick.

- Rick Knight has prepared several different flyers announcing CSDiv activities and sent these out to known modelers in the community.

- Dave and Michele Chance and Dick and Karen Bronson gave us a review of the recent NMRA National Cincinnati convention.
- After the “meeting” portion of the agenda, Martin Oakes presented two informative clinics:

- (1) Making custom track switches and crossings using flex track as the starting ingredient, and,
- (2) Making custom control panels using clear acrylic painted & masked with multiple colors.

PLANNED 2006 CALENDAR OF TRAIN EVENTS

By Rick Knight

This is a sketch of the activities that I have (to date) identified for 2006. There will be more! Our website will keep you right up to date with all of the railroad-related happenings we can collect. And any additions that you might contribute will be most welcome.

The format for the Division Meetings will include a short business meeting, clinics/presentations and tours of layouts in the general geographic area of the meeting.

JANUARY 21 - Carolina Southern Division Meet at Hickory:

- Meeting/clinics
- Lunch at the Box Car Grill
- Layout Tours: Scott Teague, Gil Brauch

& Bob Weaver

FEBRUARY 18 - Carolina Southern Division Meet at LANCASTER & CHESTER RR

- Lunch on dining car
- tour of museum, shops, etc.

FEBRUARY 4-5 - Timonium (MD) Show

MARCH 18 - Carolina Southern Division Meet at Albemarle Music Store

- tour of old Albemarle station

MARCH 4-5 - Train show in Asheville

APRIL - Carolina Southern Division Meet at Alexander Railroad

APRIL 1-2 - Train show in Hickory

MAY - Carolina Southern Division Meet TBD

JUNE - Railroadiana & Train Show, Concord

JULY - Carolina Southern Division Meet at Martin Oakes

JULY 2-9 - NMRA National At Philadelphia

AUGUST - Piedmont & Western Open House at Valdese

SEPTEMBER - Carolina Southern Division Annual Picnic Meet at Jack Parkers

OCTOBER - Carolina Southern Division Meet at Cherryville

OCTOBER 2nd weekend - Autumn Rails in Hendersonville

NOVEMBER - National Model Railroad Month

NOVEMBER - Carolina Southern Division Meet at TBD

NOVEMBER - Charlotte's Southern Christmas Show

DECEMBER - Open House at KBD RR

OPERATING SESSION LESONS

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model the Norfolk Southern's "S Line" running between Spencer (on my layout; Salisbury in reality) and Asheville. It's a major bridge route from Tennessee (and points

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OPERATING SESSION LESONS

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West) to the Linwood Yard (and points East). It's nearby – in 40 minutes I can be standing next to the tracks. So I took it for granted that everyone would understand that: Hickory is west of Statesville; traffic going to Charleston will be routed through Linwood (in the off-line staging tracks) and not the yard at Spencer; and such. I quickly found out that my passion for the operations and the nuances of the "S Line" was not as widespread as I imagined. My operators each have their own passions for particular railroads, geography and eras; they're not necessarily paying attention to my beloved "S line."

I have a car card for every car on the layout, with ten destinations. It's a very simple system, created using Microsoft Word. But there's a limited amount of space on each card, so the destinations needed to be clear and concise. In the beginning, the cars routed to the Alexander Railroad (which meets the "S Line" in Statesville) had a notation of "ARC" followed by the industry name. ARC / Alexander Railroad Company. It sure made sense to me. By the third Operating session I had revised and reprinted all of my cards, changing the "ARC" to "AlexRR." It was a valuable lesson – I needed to make it as simple and as clear as possible.

To help orient my operators, I made a map of my version "S Line" with all of the yards, sidings and interchanges identified. There is a map at each of the four yards, with a red circle "you are here" marked on each. I slip these into a plastic page protector and hang them below the fascia. If the yard operator has a car in the yard which is being routed to a destination in Tennessee, he might wonder if that is that west or east. Often times it can be answered by a glance at the map.

There is a Consist Card for each of the trains that we run. It's printed (again from MS Word) on a different color card stock, so that it stands out. It describes the general information about the train (train number, depar-

NEXT MEETING

Date: September 17th 2005, 2 PM

Place: Jack Parker's House for our Annual Picnic meeting.

Clinics: NMRA AP Paperwork

Check our website for further details, maps, etc. <http://www.bytedesign.com/CSDiv/>

ture point, destination, mixed freight, etc.), how many cars are permitted, and, in order, what stops it will make and what work it will perform.

I have a Digitrax system. When we started operating, all of the locomotives were on 2 digit addresses. That required creating a list of loco addresses, listing the locomotive's number and the decoder number (4805 = 05; 4816 = 16; etc.). Four months in, I realized that I'd created another level of bother. I changed over to four digit addresses. Whatever number is on the cab is what's in the decoder. It simplified matters.

There 's a system manual at each of the four yards, with a few rules and a general description of the layout. When modifications and improvements are made, the manuals have been updated. It's important to keep current.

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MODELER'S TIDBITS

NMRA MEETINGS:

- 2007 at DETROIT
- 2008 at ANAHEIM, CA
- 2009 at HARTFORD, CT
- 2010 at MILWAUKEE

PLACES TO WATCH TRAINS INDOORS:

- The Woodshed Restaurant (downtown Stanley)
- Hotel Charlotte (Charlotte)
- Carolina BBQ (Statesville)
- Carolina Cones (Cornelius)
- Albemarle Music Store (Albemarle)
- Cherryville Depot (Cherryville)

OPERATING SESSION LESSONS

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Maybe **THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSON** is: *listen to your operators.* Tom Peters, several decades back, popularized the concept of “management by walking around.” He advocated getting up from your desk and wandering around, talking to everyone everywhere. I keep a yellow legal pad close at hand – and a stack of index cards. Any time anyone mentions a problem (“a switch stand isn’t functioning”) or offers a suggestion (“we could use another Loconet plug here”), I’m making notes. From the beginning, I’ve tried to create an atmosphere where comments and constructive criticism are welcome. Yep – it’s tough. Especially when someone points out a flaw and/or implies that your pike isn’t perfect. But the payoff is all of the great suggestions that really add to the layout.

I started out to design and build a layout that I could operate on a regular basis with a group of friends. It was the reason for the layout, and governed many of the initial design decisions. Today, five years later, it’s a much better layout

because I’ve listened to others and have incorporated many of their suggestions.

IN CONCLUSION: *Everyone can be an operator.*

There’s a big difference between running trains in circles, round and round, on a large modular layout and running trains “with a purpose” as part of an operating session. Most folks are scared or intimidated when they start. “Suppose I make a mistake?” is always at the back of their minds. I work hard to keep an atmosphere where no ‘mistake’ will ever be a problem. So the boxcar got delivered to the wrong siding. So the empty covered hopper routed to a grain elevator in Kansas went east. Gee – it’s not a perfect world. We came together to have some fun. And nothing is going to happen that I can’t fix. Relax! Create a relaxing atmosphere. Encourage and support the new operators. Pair them up with a more experienced engineer or yardmaster.

So – go forth and operate! And have FUN!

-Rick Knight

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