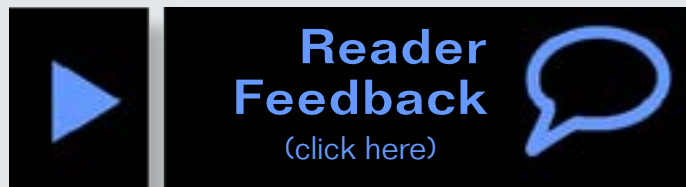
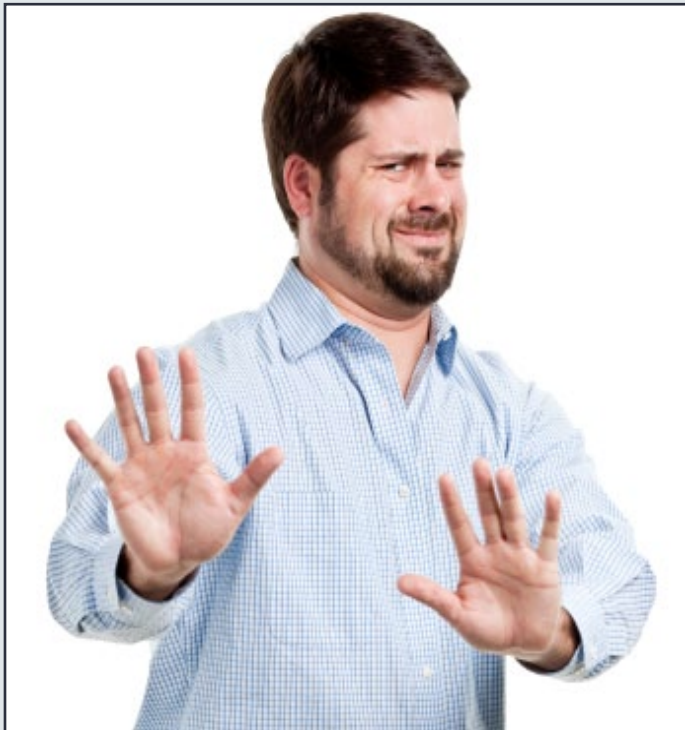


REVERSE RUNNING: Has the hobby gotten too serious?

Stepping outside the box with a contrary view



— by *Joe Fugate*

I remember when I got into the hobby back in the 1960s how most modelers saw their layout as their own little empire. This viewpoint gave you a lot of freedom as to how you approached the hobby.

For instance, when I'd look at articles in the hobby magazines, almost anything was potentially useful. If there was an article on modeling a gas station, for example, I'd start considering where I could put this gas station on my layout.

But with today's trend of modeling a prototype accurately, this has all changed. Like many of you, I too now model a prototype – in my case the Southern Pacific of the 1980s in southern Oregon.

When I look at that same article today, if it's not a 1980s gas station typical of what I'd see in Oregon, with the proper gas brand, then the article's not interesting and I move on. If the article doesn't suit my prototype and era, I often consider it a waste.

What is this serious prototype modeling mindset is doing to the hobby? Might it be a total turnoff to potential hobby newcomers?

Back in the 1960s when I got into the hobby, modelers like John Allen (Gorre & Daphetid), Whit Towers (Alturas & Lone Pine), and Bill McClanahan (Texas & Rio Grande Western) set the pace. Their layouts appeared in the hobby press with some regularity, and they were *all freelanced*.

On some forum discussions recently, I've seen some from the prototype crowd refer to this more loose freelance approach to model railroading as "cartoon modeling". While there certainly can be a tongue-in-cheek

element to wide-open freelancing, taking a holier-than-thou stance toward other modelers who don't do the hobby the same as you can't be healthy for the hobby.

If model railroading is to have a strong future, there's one core value that must remain true: model railroading needs to be fun! When wide open freelancing was mainstream a few decades ago, I don't think any would question the hobby saw having fun as a core value.

I don't recall freelancers during those days ever taking a holier-than-thou attitude toward the prototype modelers. Maybe it's time for us (and I include myself) prototype modelers to lighten up a little when we comment on the work of the freelancing modelers?

That's one reason why we made Tom Hokel's Pine Ridge Railroad the cover story this issue. If such freelance modeling isn't your cup of tea, then at least recall the hobby is first about having fun with trains (hey, now there's a great slogan) and appreciate the museum-quality work that Tom and his cohorts have done.

We should appreciate the artistry and creativity needed to model trains in any form, no matter how

fanciful or serious, because that's the truth!

I mean come on now, fellas. How much sheer artistic skill and creative genius does it take to model a "believable copy" of the Gorre & Daphetid, so that it evokes déjà vu when you look at it? Do you think Tom Hokel's having fun with trains?

Why can't we all share and join in this fun of model railroading with the other guy, even if he's not modeling the 1952 Clinchfield like we are?

As always, we look forward to hearing your comments on the feedback thread to this commentary. But let me add that if you're a hard-nosed prototype modeler who feels freelance modelers aren't in the same hobby as you, then before you comment, please remember back to why you got into this hobby.

Wasn't your entry into the hobby originally motivated by having fun with trains, a value we all share? Isn't it about time we reestablish the pre-eminence of this core hobby value?

By refocusing on this core value as the primary motivation for the hobby, don't you think our hobby will appeal more to the general public once again? ☒

REVERSE RUNNING: Hobby of model railroading – beginners need not apply

Stepping outside the box with a contrary view



Today, by contrast, the leading model railroads include layouts like: Jack Burgess' Yosemite Valley, the La Mesa club's Tehachapi Line, Lance Mindheim's Downtown Spur, Tony Koester's Nickel Plate, and

of course, Allen McClelland's famed Virginian & Ohio – although the newest version of the V&O has been relegated to the pages of history now.

What's common about this more recent crop of model railroads is they're generally way more prototype than freelance.

There's also the trend toward more prototype accuracy with model railroad meets – take the RPM (Railroad Prototype Modelers) meets. They're proliferating like the proverbial mushroom and their focus is modeling the prototype as accurately as possible.

And look at the model locos and rolling stock being produced today. Ever increasing amounts of fantastic but delicate little details that begin breaking off the minute you get the item home and take it out of the box.

What ever happened to the “good enough” philosophy?

I have to wonder, is the hobby of model railroading getting too sophisticated? Have we become a community of “prototype freaks” who end up turning away beginners as “not serious” modelers?

If we look at the trains that most often capture the general public's interest, we find it's things like Thomas the Tank Engine, The Polar Express, and the Hogwarts Express – all fantasy railroading.

Let's take Thomas, for example. While your typical “serious” model railroader will turn up his nose at such silliness, booths at train shows featuring Thomas are often jammed with parents and little kids.

A local tourist line, the Mount Hood RR, features a “Polar Express” excursion every holiday season from Thanksgiving to New Years.

They encourage the parents to bring their children in their PJs, serve hot chocolate on the train, and feature a visit with Santa at the foot of Mount Hood in the snow.

Here's a drafty old excursion train running in the dead of winter, yet the runs are typically sold out by

December! Clearly, the public's still fascinated by fantasy trains.

Has the mainstream hobby's fetish with prototype accuracy hurt the hobby? Are we making a hobby that's a total turnoff to newcomers, especially youngsters who are the next generation of modelers?

While the level of detail in many of today's rolling stock and loco models is fabulous, they're certainly not for kids any longer.

Maybe we need to swing the pendulum the other way, back to more freelancing and (horrors) even fantasy model railroading?

I wonder if our almost exclusive focus on rivet level detail accuracy of modeling risks raising the bar so high that we're becoming a hobby of elitists?

I do think there's room for appreciating the modeling skill to produce a really nice Thomas the Tank layout, for example. Or how about an article on how to model the Polar Express train?

I'm interested in hearing your feedback on the comment thread. Are we turning away new modelers with our fetish of prototype accuracy? Are we making the hobby too complicated for beginners with our insistence on being “true to the prototype?” ☒



— by Joe Fugate

Back in the 1950s and 60s when model train sets were still in vogue as *the* Christmas toy of choice, the most popular model railroads in the hobby press were layouts like John Allen's Gorre & Daphetid, Whit Tower's Alturas & Lone Pine, Bill McClanahan's Texas & Rio Grande Western, and Frank Ellison's famed Delta Lines.

The one thing in common for all those leading model railroads of the time: they were all freelanced. The whole prototype-fetish that's become common today was largely unknown then.