



Station Strips

Helping engineers find their way around an unfamiliar layout



– by Jerry Boudreaux

It's your first time operating at a layout. The host tells you "Run west as far as Red Rock, meet #20 at Rufus, and set out three at Granite Creek." The five-minute layout briefing that was supposed to give you all this information seems an eternity ago, and you're remembering very little of it. Which way is west? How far is it to Red Rock? Where's Rufus? Do I have enough time to make the setouts at Granite Creek?

Old hands on the layout know this stuff (at least they should!), but a new crewman trying hard to make a good impression can find it difficult to keep

track of all this information. A user-friendly layout shines here, letting even the newest crew members enjoy themselves without stressing out.

How can we as layout owners provide the information inexperienced train crews need in a compact and easily-understood format, while not boring the old hands? Part of my answer was a series of fascia-mounted diagrams I call station strips (figure 1).

I've been using station strips on my Pasquinel Division for about 18 months. I've had lots of new operators in that time and most really like them. Even

Figure 1: Through train No. 20 passes a yard switcher as it heads through Lakeside on the eastbound main. Its engineer, a newbie on the author's Pasquinel layout, uses the fascia-mounted station strip to see direction and which towns are next.



Figure 1

A T & S F

PASQUINEL DIVISION



my experienced operators use them from time to time.

Basic information

Crews need some basic information:

- The name of the station at the current location
- Which way is railroad east and west
- Location on the layout relative to other stations
- A key to place-name abbreviations
- The station elevation (I use inches above the floor)
- Milepost marker for the station

The last two items are not required, but lend a bit of railroad atmosphere to the signage. Your layout may need different information.

Making station strips

I used MS Word to create these 3-1/2" high by 14" long strips. Two functions that proved really handy are "insert object" for lines, dots, and arrows and "text box" for titles, sta-

tion names and abbreviations. I'm just barely computer literate so I mooch off others who have more expertise than I, or fool around with the software using "Dummies" books until I get what I want.

As I said, I'm not a computer wiz. If I can make these signs, you can too. If worse comes to worst, show this article to the kid who lives next door, and he'll be able to show you how to make the signs.

I print them out on my inkjet printer, then head over to a local office supply store to have them laminated and cut to size. I use commercial lamination because my station strips are printed on legal size paper (8-1/2" X 14") paper that's too big for my home laminator.

If you want some extra strength, mount the laminated station strips to a styrene backing strip using contact adhesive. Screwing them to the fascia makes them removable if your layout changes in the future. I used finish washers under the screws (figure 2).

Figure 2: I take the paper station slips to a local office supply store and have them laminated in plastic, making them impervious to spilled liquids or accidental bumps from shoulders or hips. Once laminated, they're easy to attach to the fascia – I add styrene backing and use four screws to hold mine in place.

The yellow square is a "you are here" indicator. East is to the right and west is to the left. The elevation (48") and milepost (58) are nice touches, but not absolutely necessary. Include what seems appropriate on your signs, but try to avoid clutter which makes them hard to read.



Jerry Boudreaux

Jerry Boudreaux has loved trains since his early years in Central Arizona's ranch country. He loved chasing trains in the back of his dad's ancient pickup. Warbonnets, zebra stripes, and blue-and-yellow diesels became a way of life as they twisted their way over the mountains to the desert floor.

Working 33 years as an educator brought Jerry and his wife, Jeanne, to retirement on a ranch in Corvallis, Oregon. Jerry gets to work on his railroad AFTER the ranch chores are done.

This is Jerry's second MRH article. His first, [Temporary Bridges](#) was published in the [December 2011](#) issue.

Layout Diagrams

My layout is linear. This makes it easy to create a station strip track diagram that looks a bit CTC-ish.

If your layout has branchlines and junctions it may be trickier to come up with a good arrangement for the track diagram.

If you have a double-deck layout you'll need to decide whether to provide a station strip for each deck.

If your layout has multiple main tracks on a deck, but some tracks

are railroad-west on the left, while on others west is to the right, you'll need to be really clever. I've seen this issue solved by color coding the directions for each track.

Station strips have been well-received on the Pasquinel Division of the Santa Fe. I have operated twice per month for 18 months with two different groups, and several clubs have come over to run at other times. I often see engineers with their finger on the strips figuring out where they are and where that other guy is. Try it; your new operators will appreciate it. ☒



Figure 3



Figure 3: A fascia-mounted station strip at Cottonwood on my Pasquinel Division layout.

Figure 4: The tools and materials needed to install a station strip.



Figure 4



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