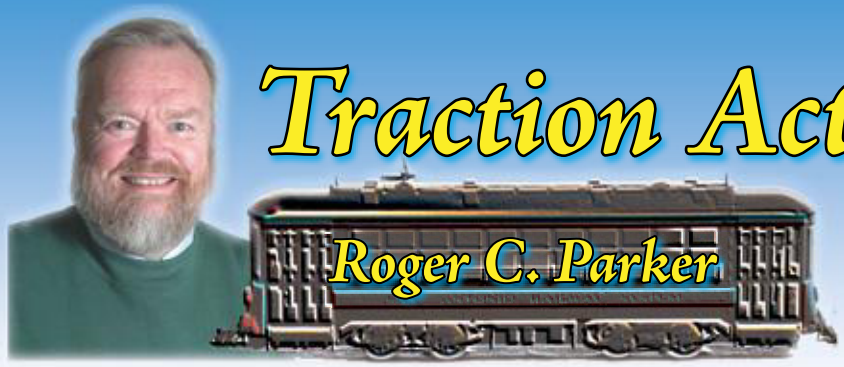

Traction Action

Roger C. Parker

The Joy of Combines

An interview with traction modeler Gerald Brothers

A few weeks ago, I was discussing interurban rolling stock with Gerald Brothers, whose craftsmanship frequently graces these pages. Our conversation turned to the numerous combines he's built for his line, the outside 3rd rail Black Hills and Western, set in South Dakota.

Why have you built so many combines?

Combines are fascinating because they came in so many flavors, with their own unique stories. So many real persons showed their ingenuity and pride of service through these great cars.

Combination cars were often the first type of car ordered by new electric railways. These came in a dazzling array of different combinations: baggage/passenger (most frequently used), baggage/mail/passenger, mail/baggage, diner/lounge, café/lounge, and many other more specialized varieties.

The needs of each railway could be met by the many builders who also had their own visions of what a car should look like and how it was to be made. This resulted in different window treatments, door sizes, the placement and number of doors, entrances for passengers on either or both ends of the car plus whether passengers should board only from one side of the car or both.

How were combines used?

Combines were used with coaches and other cars to accommodate the many kinds of luggage used by affluent passengers, which in the early years were often large "steamer trunks." Combines were used in named trains, numbered trains, extras, fair trains, specials, overflow trains from the ballpark and simply, as "the train that left on the hour."

What about freight?

Combines carried people, trunks, pets, hand-cars, poles, milk, pails, lumber, flowers, shoes, hides, soap … and the daily papers. They made possible the growth of many small businesses, farms, small towns and newspapers and magazines.

I notice some of your models have a mail compartment.

On some roads, mail played an important role. Combines used for handling mail had to conform to numerous Railway Post Office regulations specified by the United States Postal Service. These specifications referred to the size of the mail compartments, its internal fittings, the numbers and styles of windows, security restrictions (e.g., no passengers allowed to pass through any RPO area like car number 320 in Photo 1), windows with bars and other fixtures (such as whether the car

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should be equipped to pick up mail on the fly).

Other mail combines could have a special compartment but simply pick up "bagged" mail. This type of mail could also be handled in an ordinary baggage/passenger combine.

Where did the lines obtain their combines?

Many lines simply ordered combines from the car builders' catalogs; some lines specified exactly what they wanted, while others simply modified existing models.

There was a great deal of "home building," too. On many lines, older coaches were converted to combines by simply cutting in a large door someplace in the side.

Do your models represent "exact prototypes?"

In most cases, no; most of my models are "close enough" models that I discovered through the many books I've read and re-read over the years. The thing that ties them together is the purpose and nature of the "miniature world" that exists in a space defined by all modelers as "my layout."

For example...

On my own line, the cash-short Rapid City, Black Hills and Western, articulated Combine 500 shows the resourcefulness and skill of a Chief Mechanic who, after a disastrous wreck and with little money in the bank, melded the pieces together

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and produced a unique car that the patrons loved. In actuality it is a model searching for a prototype and made from two LaBelle kits, highly modified, of course, permanently coupled with the coupling also serving as the mount for the third truck. (See lead photo.)

Why so many different colors and paint schemes on your line?

My line was formed from the merger of three preceding lines in 1911. I have set my line in 1912, a year later. This explains the sensible numbering system, the clean condition of the rolling stock, and the various paint schemes.


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The colors also indicate the class of train. Yellow cars (Photo 2 - car #310) are assigned to First Class trains, green is for cars that normally run on freight schedules (Photo 3 - car # 307), red is a leftover, still-to-be repainted car. However, any and all cars will run together as needed, creating quite colorful trains but pleasing to the dispatcher and the accountants!

Do you scratchbuild all of your cars?

Although brass is my favorite for building locos, I prefer wood for the bodies of coaches and combines followed by plastic modular parts such as those from East Gary Car Company for box motors. Wood is my favorite because of its feel, smell, and forgiving nature. Many of my combines began as LaBelle wooden kits modified to closely resemble some prototype cars but made to fit into my freelance world.

What's your favorite part of modeling?

What I enjoy most in modeling is making my own drives out of NWSL parts with Q-Car or scratchbuilt sideframes and other parts adapted to my own designs. I use a simple CAD program to finalize these designs into useful form and to check that they will fit into the car bodies. This saves a lot of time, expense, and self-critical language.

Nothing is as satisfying as seeing a new drive drift quietly down the track.

Who were some of the modelers who inspired you the most?

Bob Hegge was the inspiration in most of what I did. I turned to outside third-rail inspired by his article: *"What Brought the Catenary Down?"* in the June, 1978, *Model Railroader*. I was also inspired by *CERA* Bulletin 129, *Not Only Passengers*.

What type of control system do you use?

DCC is the real answer to running trolleys or interurbans with short headways and multiple routes. The ability to quickly MU two or more locos or cars, pointing in any direction, is a blessing and truly frees up scheduling. You can even automate parts of or your entire layout to allow you to be the motorman of your preferred train while keeping cars moving all around you. Sort of like driving dodge-em cars.

Do you depart from traditional modeling practices?

My modeling philosophy is to not put actual glass or clear plastic in the windows since this produces oversize fuzz balls which destroys the desired look. I also have not used lights for the same reason, that it looks "toy-like," but with the newer LEDs and DCC decoders, that has been overcome. I also use a minimum of internal detail because I want the viewer to see the model mainly as a complete car and let the viewer's eye simply accept that the car has the expected details inside.

Thank you, Gerald, for inspiring us all!

You're welcome. I enjoy sharing my models with readers of this great magazine! ◆

Traction Freight

There are passengers and then there is freight…and more opportunity! When last appearing here, I made a less than oblique comment about discussing traction freight trailer kits and moving freight under the wire. The vast majority of modelers hear the words traction and trolleys and immediately jump to the conclusion of running a passenger operation, picking up and transporting commuters or residents out and about town. And while perhaps many modelers do run a passenger trolley about their layout in some configuration, so much more could be done to interchange with one's other modeling interests, be it steam or diesel driven. This of course does not refer to those heavy mainline boxcabs and electrics common to the PRR and other lines.

Consider in your mind's eye the remarkably tight radii that accompany driving down the street and making turns and now image a trolley following the same route. Ok, that's simple and easy to visualize and accept, particularly for those that have ridden such. But now consider taking 36-40′ freight cars around the same curves! To facilitate getting around that corner you could maybe relieve the corners of the freight car to have a rounded end and if that wasn't enough, you could permit the coupler to pivot or use a radial coupler that would swivel through the arc as defined by the end curvature of the car. Now you can run freight cars through your cityscapes, wrap right around the blocks and navigate directly up to the doorways of warehouses and businesses to make deliveries with none of those nasty expulsions from steam or diesel powered locomotives.

Traction freight cars were built and used by such luminaries like the Northern Ohio Traction & Light Company, Union Traction, the Cincinnati & Lake Erie, and the Western Ohio Railway. Of course, just about any configuration of regular freight car translated across to traction freight cars, *e. g.* , flat cars, gondolas, boxcars, reefer cars (even billboard reefers), and the list goes on. There were even standard designs generated by the Central Electric Railway Association (CERA) to address increasing freight business and to decrease maintenance and repair costs. Thus was borne the Standard Freight Trailer, or CERA box trailer, as described in the *Electric Railway Journal* in 1926. For a good introduction into the use of traction freight and freight cars, I can recommend that you sit down with a copy of *Not only Passengers: How the Electric Railways Carried Freight, Express and Baggage*. This happens to be *Bulletin 129* of the other CERA, the *Central Electric Railfans' Association*, and copies can be located with minimal effort. And of course back issues of both *Traction and Models* combined with *Trolley Talk* are both invaluable resources; the former published plans of an array of box trailers, and even a paper model that could be cut out and assembled.

So, what are the options for traction modelers? Unsurprisingly and unfortunately, very few options indeed exist for today's O Scale traction modeler. A few short decades ago you could order as many as 6 different types of box trailers from All-Nation; those kits still surface periodically but with decreasing frequency. One of the 36′ box trailers that I've managed to acquire is shown in Photo 1. All-Nation also

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had offered a stake side flat car trailer with and without a load, and a gondola. Midwestern Train Hobbies produces (produced?) two traction trailer kits; a flat car and a stock trailer. While the flat car provides an outstanding entry point for scratchbuilding a vast array of possibilities, the stock trailer can provide a reasonable representation of an actual prototype car, albeit one that will have to have all of the appropriate details added to it as these kits come with very little, if any, detail parts. The stock trailer is patterned after the #651-79 series of cars that ran on the Interstate Public Service Company in Indiana that were built in 1924. After that lengthy list of possibilities, there seems to be precious few other options except to scratchbuild such cars for your layout or to score a vintage car off eBay (Photo 2). But before


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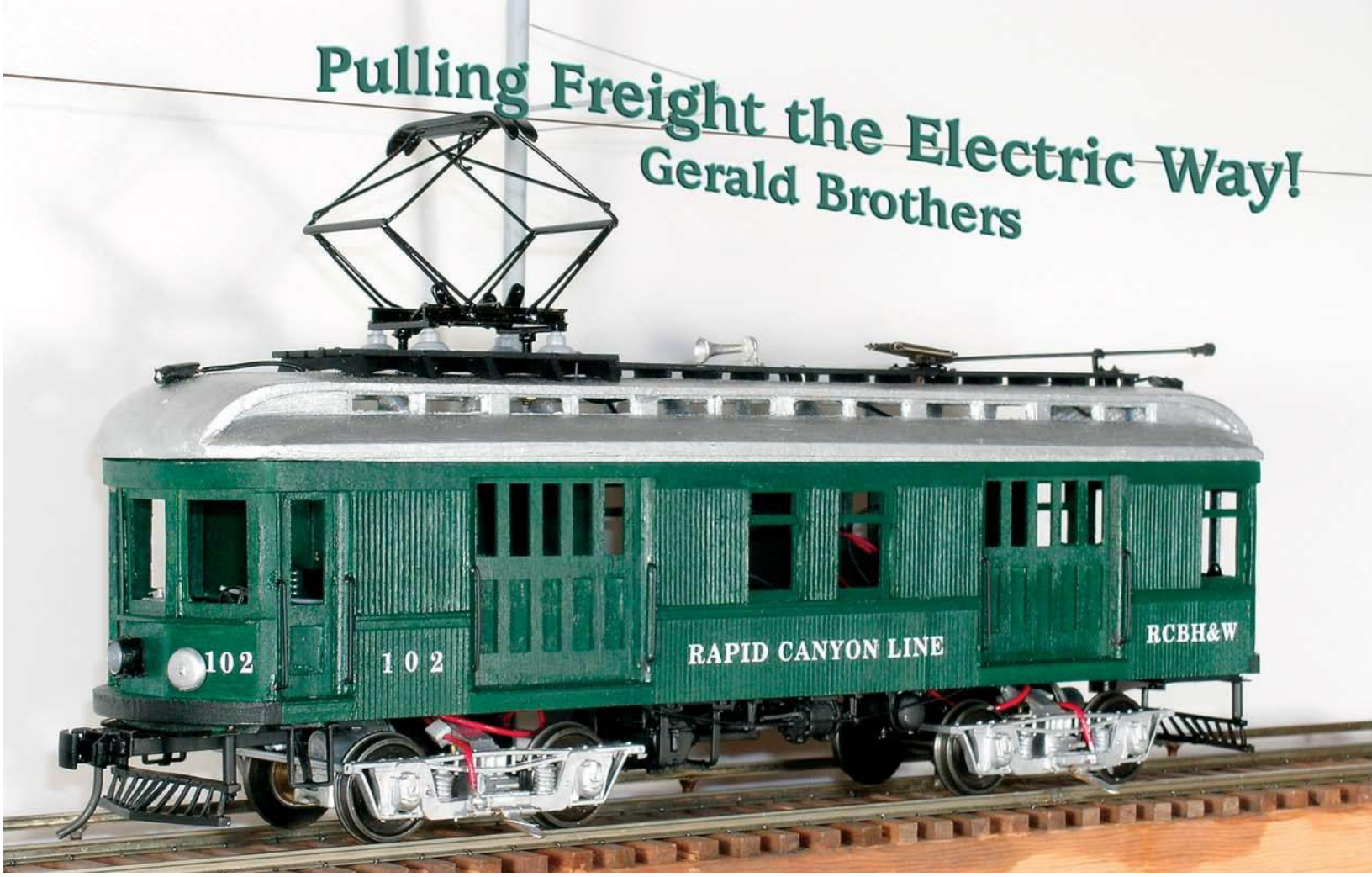
embarking on that exercise, note that LaBelle (who continues to make some outstanding wooden O Scale trolley kits) also makes three different box trailers in HO, including the CERA box trailer, a standard design one can build in as many as 16 different configurations. One could probably scale up such kits with reasonable assurances of success. I think it's entirely possible that we'll head off in that direction in some future installment! ◆

Pulling Freight the Electric Way!

Gerald Brothers



Interurban lines are usually thought of as people movers, as indeed most were. But a number of lines saw right away just how lucrative the freight market could be and positioned themselves to be competitive players in that market.

Humble Beginnings

Starting with small box motors such as #102, they carried packaged goods, milk cans, papers, fresh bread and all the stuff needed in the next town. When these small box motors proved to be inadequate, the interurbans acquired bigger ones or rebuilt passenger cars to motors such as #112, built Texas Electric style, with outside hung doors. Mail was also an important moneymaker, so they had cars (like #304) that also accommodated loose goods.

Freight Cars & Freight

Realizing that it makes more sense to let someone else do the loading and unloading, the interurbans began to acquire more powerful motors which were intended to pull interchange freight cars. Motors, such as #402 which was modeled after a steel motor from the Crandic, met that need. The bow-type trolley is just whimsy on my part as I have never seen one mod-

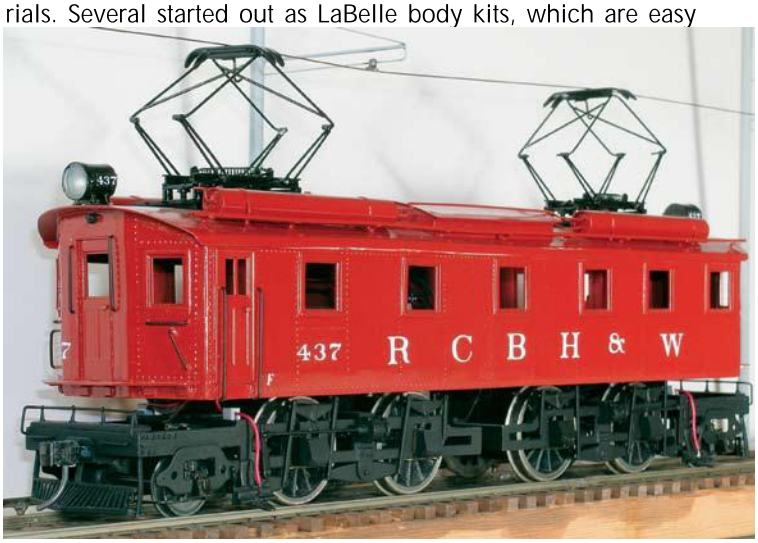
eled and I wanted to try it. It works just fine. The next stage was reached when the lines bought steeplecabs, like #403-404 (modeled after OA&E engines), and boxcabs, like #407 (modeled after P&N loco #5100). These motors were powerful, but were soon overwhelmed by longer and longer trains. Then, a very bright engineer on the Piedmont & Northern came up with a way to harness the power of two engines together, and designed a loco like #412. This design was used subsequently by several other linesvi that needed extra power with the flexibility to negotiate those tight interurban curves.

Serious Freight Haulage

When the trains were long, the tunnels longer, the mountains steep and the revenue large, even some major steam lines tried out electric locomotives. A couple of examples shown here are #437, a Boston & Maine early locomotive, and #417, a GE locomotive made for a Mexican railroad. Yes, it really did have three trucks, as does the model.

The Models

These models are all O Scale, made from a variety of materials. Several started out as LaBelle body kits, which are easy and fun to modify. Quite a few have Q-Car trucks, the best in the business. Others are scratchbuilt, with trucks that incorporate NWSL motors, gears and wheels and sometimes have Q-Car sideframes and parts. My motto is not just "light-rail", but "light-amperage" also. These engines provide that. I also run with DCC decoders in all cars and engines. "Light-amperage" means I can use HO-size decoders. These engines have provided me with many years filled with the fun of design, historical research and the pleasure of sitting at a workbench, which has got to be the best of any leisure activity. I use the name of a fallen-flag railroad which ran from my home in Rapid City to a town called Mystic. About 35 miles long with over 100 bridges, the Rapid City, Black Hills & Western provided a bridge route through the Black Hills between the CB&Q to the west and the C&NW to the east from about 1907 until 1947. Yes, I know it was a steam railroad, but in my world all the trains are electric. We interurban modelers should be thought of just like the live-steam guys. We do it the real way. ◆



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