

Alex Azary's O Scale Layout In A Small Place

by John A. Henke

One often hears the statement, "I just don't have enough room for it" or "I love the detail and realism of O scale, but...". Some then go on to fill half a room with HO layouts, which although very nice, just can't match the authenticity of the "King of Scales." Others claim that the cost of O scale is just too high (arguably a justifiable claim) and then proceed to spend large amounts of cash on numerous HO engines and rolling stock or on a few high-priced, brass HO products.

Alex Azary's Dayton and Michigan Northern Railway and Transportation Company (D.A.M.N.), a former Pennsy branch line, on which Ann Arbor Railroad has trackage rights, is an answer to those who just don't seem to be able to make the step to O scale.

Alex, a man of many interests, converted to O scale in 1976 after being involved in HO for a number of years. He has developed his skills over the past 60 plus years, repairing, rebuilding and painting models for himself and others. In 1990, he moved to a new home and because of limited space had to downsize his layout to its

present L-shaped 23 feet long by 10 feet wide size, the southern 10 ft of which narrows to 6 ft wide. A workshop, a den and an area for Mrs. Azary's hobbies forced Alex to improvise in the small area indicated.

Over the past 12 years, Alex has built and modified his layout and collection. He has constantly upgraded his roster of engines and rolling stock through trades and purchases following the lineage of Max Gray through U.S. Hobbies and Westside models to Iron Horse models, with side trips to Overland, Precision Scale and NJ Custom Brass. He has one lonely plastic AHM Indiana Harbor Belt 0-8-0 switcher.

A lover of steam and large locomotives, Alex has downsized to Moguls, Atlantic's and GP35's. He still maintains a beloved Pennsy Q2, but it just can't make it around the curves on Alex's layout so it is stabled on a

friend's layout with 84 inch radius curves.

Much of Alex's present collection of engines is based on experiences from the past. As a child living in Dayton, Ohio, Alex and friends used to bum rides on a PRR B6sb switcher at the sidings on Dayton's west side. Alex fell in love with the Pennsy Atlantic #460 (the so called Lindbergh engine) after seeing Charles Lindbergh fly over his home after his return from Europe. A Max Gray model fills the niche. Pulling his ore train is a Kemtron Wabash Mogul. A prototype of this engine



An Ann Arbor GP35 (Overland) stops at Ann Arbor Station. Note the Whitcomb Steeple Cab Ann Arbor #1.



The D.A.M.N. Railroad Transportation Museum. Entrance to Trolley Museum showing mainline at P.V. Tower. Westbound track with "clear" signal.

is housed in the National Transportation Museum in St. Louis, Missouri. Alex has a HO scale model of the Wabash Mogul and at one time owned a 1.5 inch scale live steam model of the same engine. A second Mogul is a Pennsylvania F-3 built by Gem. Other smaller engines include a pair of Pennsylvania B1 "Rats" by 3rd Rail, and an Overland Whitcomb 44 ton diesel known as the Ann Arbor "1 Spot". Two GP-35 diesels by Overland (one lettered PRR, the other Ann Arbor) complete the diesel roster.

Alex has long been a traction fan and, in fact, when he moved to his new home he started out building an interurban layout. This was necessitated by the small space and the tight curves that arose out of that situation. The initial layout utilized true scale road bed that was found to be too limiting and so Alex converted to cork road bed with Atlas flex track.

He found, however, that he could not abandon his love of railroading and particularly of



Overview of P.V. Tower, powerhouse, Noble-Onnee Packing Company, Jiffy Mix grain storage (a Chelsea, Michigan landmark), and the Trolley Museum with Pennsy GP35 on mainline.

The Pennsy B 1 "Rats" on the main pass by a warehouse near the engine facility. Note that the Overland GP-35 and three steamers (Max Gray Atlantic and Gem B6sb and Mogul) wait on the sidetracks.



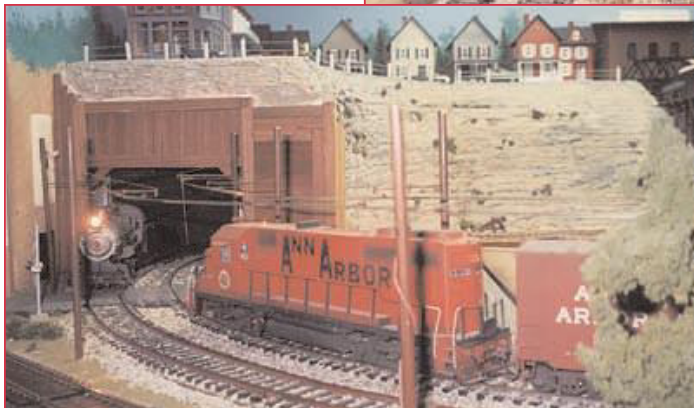
A close-up of Chelsea's Jiffy Mix milling tower area. The Pennsy GP-35 (Max Gray) rumbles by on the main. A Feather River Lumber Company Shay (Max Gray) is on the sidetrack. The "reefer" in front of the packing company is a Custom Brass model.

Trolley Museum and its inhabitants. For sentimental reasons Alex does retain a GI Pullman passenger car (in which he rode many miles during WWII) and a Wabash heavyweight (because of its past connection with the Ann Arbor railroad). The present layout features mainly freight operations, with a variety of

hoppers, boxcars, gondolas, tank cars, and cabooses,

Carefully selected and weathered structures and accessory vehicles accent the 1950s venue. Pennsylvania Railroad style signal towers give the railroad a distinct Pennsy flavor, as do the overhead wires. The setting is a combination of the Ann Arbor area and an elevated Pennsylvania mining town, which is situated atop a hill traversed by a two-track tunnel,

Alex's wife, Jan, a miniaturist and artist, has supplied the artistic talent that has converted a somewhat ordinary layout into a



The Ann Arbor GP-35 (Overland Models) heading into a tunnel beneath the Village of Itsall. The B6b is exiting the tunnel.

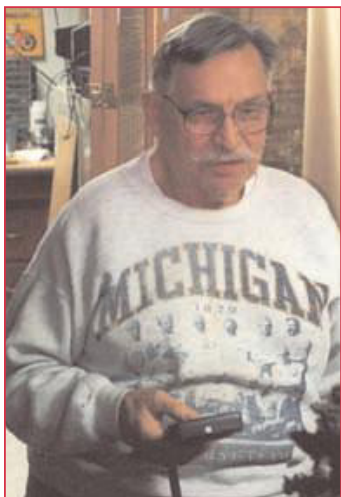


A Checker Cab, hoping for a fare, sits next to Chelsea Station as #460 (a Max Gray Atlantic) pulls up for a stop.

work of art with a splendid hillside scene and a wooded backdrop with a painted blue sky and clouds.

A leisurely trip around the layout begins at the Ann Arbor passenger station and heads west past the companion freight station. Passing under a Pennsy style signal bridge (Superior Models Limited) one comes on an Model Masterpieces interlocking tower and Overland 35,000 gallon water tank. Following the mainline, two sidings, one for cabooses and one for engines, are noted to the right. In addition, a turntable lead connects the mainline to a Bowser motorized turntable using a Dallee electronic indexing kit. Tracks from the turntable lead to a generic engine house in which resides the IHB 0-8-0 switcher. On the adjacent track sits the Ann Arbor "1 Spot".

Across the mainline from the engine house one encounters the Dexter Farm Bureau warehouse. Continuing along the main the Chelsea, Michigan, passenger station is on the right. Continuing through Chelsea one passes Chelsea Milling Company silos and mill, famous for "Jiffy Mixes," and ahead a little further encounters the Noble-O'Nee Packing Company. On the left, the General Light Power Company can be seen just in front of the D.A.M.N. Trolley Museum. The PV interlocking tower, obtained from and named for the late Pennsylvania Railroad fan and modeler, P.V. Risinger, is also seen on the right. Passing under a second Pennsy style signal tower one rounds the curve and enters a new venue. A distinctly Pennsylvania flavor is evident on approaching the portals leading under Tunnel Hill.



The village of Tunnel Hill, seated on the hill, is the home of the Itsall Mine Company. Its ore tipple is an Oak Ridge kit and the hoist house is scratch built. Passing through the tunnel exit, a road crossing is encountered and the Ann Arbor, Michigan area, with its passenger and freight stations, looms just ahead.

The D.A.M.N. Trolley Muse-

A man of many interests, Alex is an avid Michigan football fan. No, he did not play for the 1879 Wolverines!

um adds interest with overhead wires so typical of the first half of the twentieth century and are reminiscent of the Pennsylvania Railroad. Alex has used a single inverted N scale rail for his overhead wires. This provides an excellent and durable overhead. It accommodates both trolley shoes and pantographs very nicely. Wooden trolley poles, by John Pilling, support the system.

The layout has a double track mainline with designated east and westbound tracks. Three sources of power are utilized, a dual Kurtz-Kraft power supply rated at 18 volts D.C. and 5 amps, each furnishes power through two cabs. For trolley operations, the Kurtz units are disconnected and two A.C. transformers, rated at

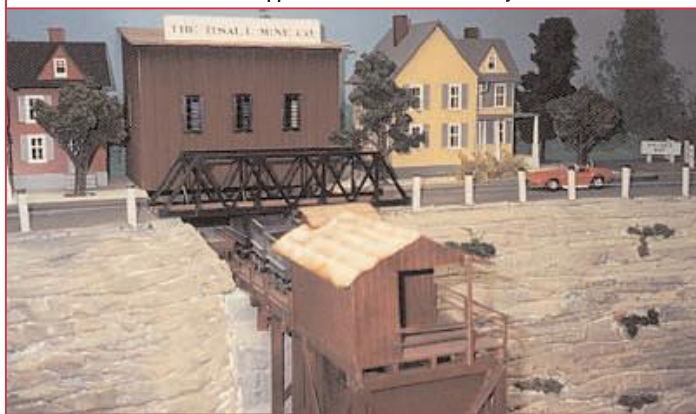


D.A.M.N. Railroad Transportation Museum showing a variety of traction stock.

24 volts and 4, amps provide power one to each track. A recently installed North Coast Engineering 10 amp "Power House" system provides Digital Command Control. This array of options provides tremendous flexibility on a small layout.

Bench construction utilizes 2 x 6 ft sections, many of which were moved from Alex's previous layout. Each section is coded

The Itsall Mine Tipple and Hoist. Note the Shelby Cobra.



for easy assembly and disassembly. Atlas flextrack and Roco #6 turnouts on quarter inch cork roadbed, applied using rubber cement, has allowed rearrangement of trackage on more than one occasion. The present layout has 48 inch and 36 inch radius curves. The detection system and Pennsy-type block signal system was designed and constructed by Jay's Engineering (Joe Kocsis) of Westland, Michigan.

If you happen to be in the Ann Arbor area and want to see a magnificent small O scale layout, look Alex up. You will be impressed!

