



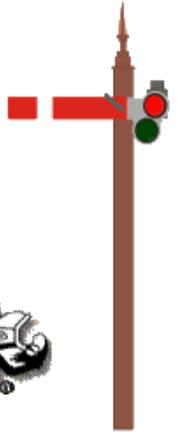
The Semaphore, The Official Publication of Land-O-Sky, Division 15, Southeastern Region, NMRA



The Semaphore

LAND-O-SKY
DIVISION 15, SOUTHEASTERN REGION
NATIONAL MODEL RAILROAD ASSOCIATION
AND
WNC MODEL RAILROADERS, INC.

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July 2007

Our next membership meeting is on Thursday, July 21st at 12:00 p.m.

Send comments about and contributions to this newsletter to [Clint Smoke](#).
Please keep us informed of changes in your address, phone number or email address.



Left and right views of **Blackstone** D&RG K-27, for more see this month's *Fireman Seat*





The Fireman's Seat

By Robert Bell, Division 15 Assistant Superintendent



Greetings!

Blackstone Models, a division of *Soundtraxx*, recently introduced the first truly "Ready-To-Run" HO_{n3} locomotive. In doing so, they have raised the proverbial bar for all model railroad manufactures. In the past, the closest to RTR in HO scale narrow gauge was some expensive, imported, brass model, maybe factory painted, but one still had to install couplers and in most cases "tweak" the mechanism for smooth operation. That has all changed now. *Blackstone Models'* RTR HO_{n3}, Denver & Rio Grande K-27 is highly detailed model with exceptional running characteristics, and phenomenal sound. This is a 2-sided review of the model, one side is the Model of the locomotive and the other side is the *Tsunami* DCC sound decoder installed.

The brief history of the prototype starts with the delivery of 15 three foot-gauge, outside frame 2-8-2 Vaucrain compound locomotives to the D&RG in 1903. Numbered 450-464, they were "state-of-the-art" and the largest engines on the D&RG at the time. Without discussing in detail. The intricacies of a Vaucrain compound cylinders. Suffice it to say this arrangement resulted in a large amount of maintenance, and in 1906 they rebuilt with "simple" cylinders with square valve chests and slide valves. Between 1917 and 1929, all four again had been rebuilt, this time with modern piston valves and Walsharts valve gear. In 1924 they were given the designation K (for Mikado) -27 (the approximate tractive effort in thousands of pounds). Two K-27's survive today, the #463 operates on the **Cumbres & Toltec** in Chama, NM and the #464 (slide valves—not rebuilt with piston valves) operates on the **Huckleberry RR** in Flint, MI.

The same company that is building all of *Bachmann's Spectrum* series, built this model in China. The model's packaging within the box is even the same style. But there, the similarity ends. The model I ordered was painted-not lettered version, and it came with a 7-page "Quick Start Guide", an 11-page "Operations Manual"; a 7-page history booklet, an exploded parts diagram, a sheet of decals (custom made by San Juan Decals), a product registration card and a compact disc with all the manuals for the *Tsunami* sound decoder. WOW! The Operations Manual has lots of high quality pictures and descriptions of how to disassemble and lubricate the model, and how to install the snowplow, (available separately).

So, how does the model look? Fantastic! While I am a narrow gauger, I am not a big fan of the D&RG, (or any of the CO ng rr's for that matter), so I did not count the upper course of rivets on the tender. But, the finish is every bit what we have come to expect on model produced today. The number of separately applied details surpasses anything else out there, I think. This engine has nice backhead detail and a metal deck plate between the loco and tender. The tender trucks even have chain connecting them to a frame. The only minor (and I mean minor) detraction to the looks of the engine is the drawbar. This is actually a two-piece micro connector between the engine and the tender through which pass all of the wiring for the motor and lighting effects, (this will be available separately).

The *Tsunami* decoder is a "dual-mode" decoder, meaning it will run on straight DC or DCC. I do not own a DCC system, yet, so I first tried my *TAT-V* (True-Action-Throttle 5) that I built about 1990. How does it run on DC? Weeeeeelll, the "destructions" state that it takes about 5-volts to start the sound and about 7-volts to get her to move. This is probably "pert-near" close. The potentiometers (the electronic thingy that the knob turns to control the speed) in my power pack are pretty good and I can control the amount and duration of any "pulse" output from the *TAT-V*, so the sound started first and then the locomotive moved. "Herky-jerky" at first, do to the factory having applied a tad too much oil to the motor, but I already knew about from the HO_{n3} "yahoo" e-mail list. A slight puff of smoke and she ran beautifully.

OK, then club member **Bill Seibert** loaned me his *NCE Power Pro* DCC system. Now the engine really shines. I set the *Power Pro* cab to 128-speed step mode and bumped it to speed step 1; the model started creeping down my 7-foot test track. How slow? How about between 4 1/2 and almost 6 minutes to traverse

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76 inches! Yup, 5 minutes 49 seconds, that's 1.08 scale MPH. On another run of 52 inches the time was 4:02 or 1.067 scale MPH. Double WOW!!

Sound is the fourth dimension for model railroaders. The *Tsunami's* 16 bit sound is incredible. Most sound decoders are 8 bit. 16 bit decoders can do twice what an 8 bit decoder can. Many of the sounds are linked to what the locomotive is doing, for instance: when the headlight is turned on, first the dynamo starts to spin up and the light is dim, as the dynamo reaches speed, the headlight increases to full brightness. When the engine is brought to a stop, you might hear "Fireman Fred", start shoveling coal, rummaging through the toolbox, or "oiling around". As the locomotive starts one can hear the "pphht" of the snifter, or when the direction is changed of the Johnson bar is heard. The sounds included:

| | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Optically synchronized exhaust chuff | Bell |
| Whistle | Short Whistle |
| Air Pump | Dynamo (generator) |
| Water Stop | Brake Squeal |
| Brake Release | Slide Rod Clank |
| Snifter Valve | Cylinder Cocks |
| Johnson Bar/Power Reverser | Firebox Blower |
| Cylinder Blowdown | Boiler Pop Valves |
| Fireman Fred Toolbox | Coupler Clank |

According to the paperwork/ed, one add automatic sounds such as a grade crossing whistle, bell, steam release and brake squeal. In DC mode, many sounds are automatic: three short toots for reverse, one for stop, and two medium toots for forward. And there are supported to be 8 different whistles to choose from. I also understand that is a "back EMF" feature that will deepen the exhaust chuff under load of heavy train or steep grade. I'll get to that someday.

The last thing I want to applaud *Blackstone* for the LED headlights, the price, and their customer support. They used golden-white or warm-white LEDs instead of the bluish-white or yellow LED's that certain other manufactures use, and these look MUCH better than those. The locomotives retail for \$339 without sound and \$419 with sound, and there are 11 versions to choose from in either format. From what I have read on the HOn3 list, *Blackstone* seems to have a real interest in their customer's happiness. Though the models were built in China, the decoders were installed in Durango, CO the home of *Soundtraxx/Blackstone*. So, unlike other sound equipped locomotives that use somebody else's decoder, *Blackstone* has an intimate knowledge of both the engine and electronics installed.

The model is really something, the only thing missing is the smell of real coal smoke, but I'm not sure the wife would appreciate that. I remember reading years ago about how HOn3 stuff never ran that well, at least not without a LOT of "tweaking", (of course they said the same thing about N-scale). This K-27 changes all that. *Blackstone Models* have really set the bar several notches higher for ALL manufactures. The various effects and sounds that the *Tsunami* sound decoder procedures are second to none. For those interested, *Blackstone Model's* website (www.blackstonemodels.com) and *Soundtraxx's* website (www.soundtraxx.com).

In August Fireman's Seat, I'll try to talk you joining the NMRA (Hey, I can try can't I?). **Until then, remember: It's your club - get involved! LET'S PLAY TRAINS!**



Important Stuff for Members

Editor's note: My thanks to Robert Bell for his help in publishing this issue while I was away.

Operating Sessions

BY WALLY BROWN

Just a quick note on our recent session. Even though we have a smaller number of crew members in attendance, plenty of tonnage was removed. Each crew member was able to run more trains than usual, so that there was little down time for anyone. Having the session start at 9AM was certainly a plus as far as temperatures were concerned. It remained quite comfortable through the session. We did discuss the next session which will be on Sunday, and agreed that we should try an evening session. **In July we will operate on Saturday, July 14th starting at 9:00 AM, and Sunday, July 29 starting at 7:00 PM.**

From the Superintendent

FRED COLEMAN, SUPERINTENDENT, DIVISION 15

Our next meeting will be our annual Picnic, and will be held Saturday, July 21st in our usual meeting hall. The barn will open at 10:30 AM for your enjoyment. Food will be served at 12 noon. **Please call or [e-mail me](#) your RSVP**, so that we have enough food.

We still need volunteers for several positions concerning the 2008 SER convention! Your club's elected staff cannot do it all. We have a GREAT site for "**Smokey Mountain Rails**", and hope to make it the best convention the SER has had to date. So please, step up, "get involved", and help out, it will be greatly appreciated by all attending the convention.

End of the Line: With much sadness I report that **Ken Buchen**, a long time member of WNC Mode Railroaders and a member of the NMRA for 47 years, passed away, Monday, June 11th. His wife **Betty**, passed away on Thursday, June 14th. Our sympathy goes to their family and friends.

New Layout at Junaluska

BY BULL SEIBERT

Mon. 6-18-07: Kent Roberts, Jack Mershon, & Bill Seibert met with a group of nine men, all interested model railroaders at the Terris Hotel at the Junaluska Assembly on Monday, June 18th. A 10 x 17 ft. layout was donated to them and set up beside the main registration counter in the lobby. Many ideas were exchanged and responsibilities assigned to start to make the layout functional by the time of our December show. They hope to have the scenery done by the 2008 SER convention.

The layout is quite impressive but needs some major revisions to be usable in the context for how they want to display and use it. For starters, two reverse loops have been eliminated. They're desire is to have two buttons that can be pushed to run two trains on two tracks for 3 to 5 minutes by anybody passing by. The situation is such that it would be difficult to have operating sessions. I personally hope that would change because of the fun is in operation as we do at the barn.



Adding lights to your structures (continued)

BY JOHN UNDERHILL (FROM MR MAGAZINE WEBSITE)

The best time to install interior lighting is while the building is under construction. I install the bulbs after I've completed the structure's floor and exterior walls, but before adding the roof. At this point access to the interior is easy. Lighting can also be installed in a finished building by removing its roof or floor.

Concealing the source

The view into a building is important, because you don't want visitors to see a bright bulb inside. To avoid this problem, I set each building on the layout and mark its exact location so I can return it to the same place.

Look for interior locations where a bulb can be concealed from view. Then check the location by looking into the windows and open doors from every possible viewing angle. I also look at the building from different heights, by bending down or using a stool.

Once satisfied, I mark the hidden bulb locations on the floor of the building. Then I check under the layout to be sure nothing will be damaged when I drill the holes for the wiring

One room at a time



A vertical tube supports most light bulbs inside John's buildings. The white walls behind the lamp reflect light in one direction, while an extra layer of styrene keeps light from showing through the thin plastic walls. (Lloyd Loring)

Beware of light on the sky

Sometimes the light from a window will fall on the backdrop. Raising or relocating the bulb will often solve the problem. I've also had to close a few windows by covering their openings from the inside with wood or styrene



Exterior lighting shouldn't overpower the interior illumination, or the viewers won't notice or be able to see into the various lighted rooms. (Lloyd Loring)

For modeling purposes, I call each interior space that will be illuminated a room. This room can be the entire building or just a portion of it.

I carefully check each room for light leaks at the corners, ceiling and floor joints, and around the window and door frames. Many of my model buildings didn't include floors, so I made my own from wood or styrene sheet.

To check for light leaks, I use a flashlight or a 12-volt bulb with 18" wire leads connected to a power pack. The long lead wires let me slip the lamp inside the structure so I can easily check all the joints.

This is also a good time to check the walls. Some building walls are so thin that light shows through. If this happens, I either paint the interior walls flat black or add another layer of material to make them thicker.

If a building has several rooms, I give the same attention to all the walls and joints to avoid any light

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painted flat black on both sides.

Windows that face away from the viewer can be used to produce a handy footlight effect. I cut an opening in the back of the building and install a bulb inside that will illuminate the area behind the building. If necessary, I add a false wall to mask the bulb from the balance of the interior. [Evergreen sells black styrene sheet that's perfect for this job. - Ed.] In this case, I'm careful to ensure that the additional exterior light doesn't show on the backdrop.

Replaceable bulbs

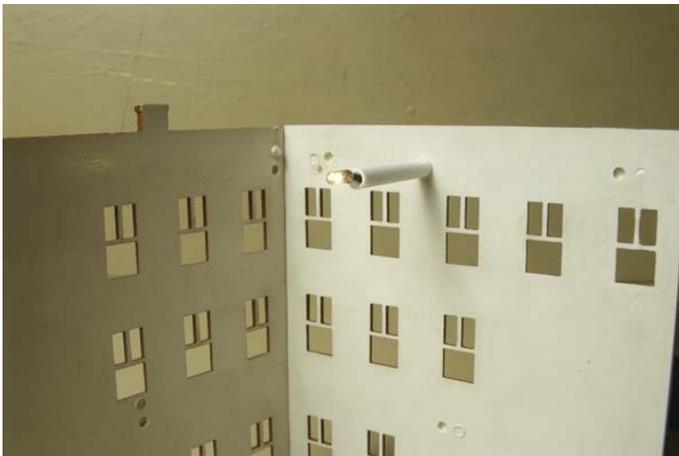
It's desirable to be able to replace a bulb without having to take a building from the layout or lift off its roof. To keep the bulbs accessible, I mount them on vertical lengths of Plastruct no. 228 3/16" styrene tubing. Each removable tube passes through the layout and the building's floors to support a bulb at the correct height.

Using my bulb location mark, I drill a 3/16"-diameter hole through the floor of the building. Then I reposition the building on the layout and use the 3/16"-diameter hole in the floor to locate a 1/4"-diameter hole through the layout.

To determine the length of the tubing, I measure the lamp's elevation inside the building, add the layout's thickness, and add about 1/4" to provide room to tape the lamp's wires to the tube.

After measuring the tube's length, I record it beneath the building on the underside of the layout. I also include the name of the building and the length of the tube near the spot where the tube comes through the layout. Remember, the bulb must pass completely through the tube and protrude 1/2" beyond its end to ensure full illumination and avoid overheating. Then I cement the tube into the floor of the building.

To light the upper floors of my taller buildings, I use horizontal instead of vertical tubes. They enter the tall buildings from the back where they're out of sight, as shown in the picture below.



As before, the bulb should protrude about 1/2" beyond the end of the tube. The wires from the bulb are run down the rear wall of the building.

With all of my bulb leads exiting under the layout, I connect all the wires to Radio Shack no. 274680 terminal strips with screw terminals.

Most of my light bulbs are Micro-Mark no. 82590 C grain-of-wheat bulbs, 12- or 14-volt 1/8"-diameter bulbs, or Miniatics no. 1801420 2.4mm, 14-volt lamps. The wires on these light bulbs are long enough and stiff enough for the bulbs to be easily pushed up through the tubing and to be held in position.

On tall buildings, bulbs can be supported by horizontal tubes through the side or back walls. After the light tube is in place, John adds floors and other interior partitions to direct the light into specific rooms. (Lloyd Loring)

Other manufacturers offer lamps in a variety of colors, sizes, and voltages that can be used for all sorts of special effects. In addition, light-emitting diodes offer even more options. All it takes is a bit of imagination and some ingenuity to add your own realistic lighting effects.