



N-scalers invade Sugar Land!

by Gordon Bliss and Tom Marsh

The N Scale Collector (NSC) National N Scale Convention came to Houston last month and N-Scalers from around the world attended.

The convention started with two days of pre-convention outings, first on Sunday, June 20, to the Houston Area Live Steamers' superb Zube Park miniature railroad, then on Monday a bus trip to the George Bush Presidential Library and Museum in College Station, Richmond Fire Dept.'s Station No. 1 at the Sunset Route's crossing of the Brazos River and the Rosenberg Railroad Museum. A donation was made to the museum on behalf of NSC, and the donation will be recognized with a paving brick at the museum's entry.

The convention proper started on Tuesday with layout tours to Gordon Bliss's Santa Fe - All the Way, Harry Daniel's Pecos River Railroad and Rick Townsend's Spruce Valley & Texas Railroad. All of these great N-scale layouts elicited many compliments. At the host hotel, Marriott Sugar Land Town Square, Tuesday also saw convention participants preparing for the live and silent auctions and the model contest. NTRAK and T-Trak layout setup began as well. The day concluded with a traditional Welcome Reception, hosted by Micro-Trains.

On Wednesday, a large group took two buses for a tour of Space Center Houston and NASA. Others went on a layout tour to see Jason Smith's Union Pacific Overland Route, Al Hague's Kansas & Pacific Railroad, both N-scale, and Barry and Blake Bogs' Colorado & Western G/Gn3 layout. Again, many compliments were heard about the tour layouts, with the Bogs' atrium-spanning bridges causing a lot of dropped jaws!

Back at the hotel, the N-Trak layout came together with Houston's Northwest Crossing, the North East Oklahoma N Scalers of Tulsa, Fort Bend County Model Railroad Club, TexN Modular Railroad Club of Plano and Austin's AustNTrak all contributing modules. The T-Trak operation was in the capable hands of the Rio Grande Valley T-Trak folks from McAllen.

Voting on the model contest's 23 entries started Wednesday afternoon and the lively live auction was held that evening. Contest voting continued Thursday morning.



NSC Convention Chairman Dick Ollendorf, left, presents a donation to Peter Bryan of Houston Area Live Steamers (HALS). Joining in are Jim Hinds, local convention co-chair, and NSC's Dean Daughenbaugh. The HALS visit was a pre-convention activity on Sunday, June 20. Photos above and below by Tom Marsh; bottom photo by Gordon Bliss.





The last of the layout tours took place Thursday with an outing to Gil Freitag’s HO Stoney Creek & Western, Don Bozman’s HO GREAT Great Northern Railway and Craig Raymond’s Sn3 Rio Grande Southern. As anyone who has visited these fine layouts would have expected, many compliments were heard.

Thursday also featured the “History & High Technology Tour” during which participants visited the Houston Railroad Museum, Battleship Texas and Harris County Metropolitan Transit Authority’s Rail Operations Center.

The NSC Banquet and Contest Awards Ceremony took place Thursday in the Sugar Land Ballroom. Door prizes aplenty were given out!



Above, participants in Monday’s tour were treated to a number of train sightings during the event, which ranged from the Bush Library in College Station to Richmond Fire Station No. 1 and the Rosenberg Railroad Museum.

At right, the lunch venue in College Station offered a view of the UP mainline.

At bottom, BNSF obliged the group with a manifest freight crossing the Brazos River behind Richmond Fire Station No. 1. Three photos by Tom Marsh.





Friday's events included the Manufacturers' Breakfast and the NSC's traditional Swap-A-Rama, where a great many good deals were to be found. In addition, a number of model railroad manufacturers were on hand to

answer questions and take suggestions for future models.

At the breakfast, Kato announced they would be producing Amfleet cars and the Tokyo-based firm also showed an early sample of their new Tokyo tram, which could form the basis for American prototype LRV models. Con-Cor reported on new tooling for freight car trucks allowing easy conversion to Micro-Trains couplers; the new trucks will be featured on an upcoming release of 57-ft. mechanical refrigerator cars to be offered in a modern Tropicana paint scheme. Micro-Trains discussed their next heavyweight passenger car, a parlor, and the upcoming PS-2 high-side covered hopper.

Walthers announced that the 130-ft. turntable would now be offered with DCC, and that the 100-ton Greenville hoppers will be arriving in seven road names in early 2011.

Digitrax debuted its new DN-135 decoder "for almost anything N-scale" and with an \$18.95 MSRP. Other announcements from various manufacturers gave convention attendees plenty to talk about.

Friday ended with a visit to a nearby ice skating rink for a catered barbecue and some fun in less than 90-degree heat.

The convention concluded on Saturday with a public train show and a series of model railroad clinics. The show attracted a fair sized crowd, and the clinicians gave tips on operations, NTrak electrical upgrades, how prototype shippers deal with a variety of issues, T-Trak creativity, and tools of the trade. The operations clinic was presented by N' Crowd members Gordon Bliss and Eddie Aycock.

A good time was had by all, as they say, thanks to the efforts of the volunteers who organized the event, the exhibitors who supported the Swap-A-Rama and the public train show, and the N-scalers who traveled from far and wide - and nearby - to attend!

The layout tours featured some of the area's finest N scale model railroads, including Gordon Bliss's Santa Fe - All the Way, seen in the top two photos. In the middle picture, Rick Townsend talks trains with visitors to his Spruce Valley & Western. In the bottom two photos, Harry Daniel's three-level Pecos River Railroad provides interesting western desert vistas. Photos by Tom Marsh.





At top left, Gil Freitag's HO Stony Creek & Western is always a favorite, as is Don Bozman's GREAT Great Northern Railway, seen in the photo at top right. At right, second from top, the roundhouse on Craig Raymond's Sn3 Rio Grande Southern. Photos by Howard Laker.

Middle, above, Al Hague explains operations on his Kansas & Pacific Railroad. At right, third from top, Bayou City & Gulf business car Houston brings up the markers on a train on the K&P. Above, Jason Smith welcomes NSC visitors to his Union Pacific Overland Route, while at right, second from bottom, Jim Brandenburg operates the garden railroad in Jason's back yard. Bottom right, Barry and Blake Bogs' atrium spanning bridges on their G/Gn3 layout never fail to impress. Photos by Tom Marsh.





These fine models were among the contest entries at the NSC convention. Photos by Tom Marsh



Thursday's tour took in the Houston Railroad Museum, Battleship Texas and Metro's Rail Operations Center (ROC), followed by a ride over the full length of Metro's light rail line.

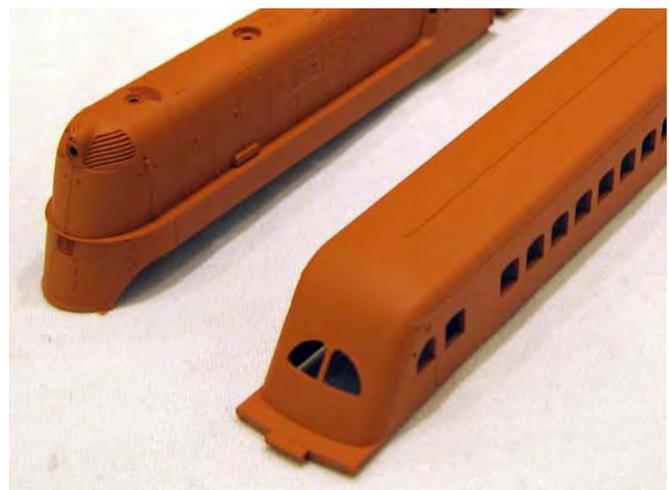
At left, can you spot the eight N-scalers in view on the Texas?

Below, Metro's light rail vehicle (LRV) simulator provided some "entertainment", while the shop tour let everyone get up close to one of Metro's LRVs. Photos by Tom Marsh





Fox Valley Models, top, was among the many manufacturers with displays at the NSC Swap-A-Rama on Friday and the public train show on Saturday. At left and below, Saturday afternoon saw the UPS man deliver a real treat to FoxValley: The first test shots of the company's new Hiawatha in N scale. Top photo by Gordon Bliss, others by Tom Marsh.





NTrak and T-Trak layouts were in operation for much of the convention and during the public train show.

Top, while modest in size, the variety of modules and multi-module scenes incorporated into the layout showcased numerous N-scalers' imaginations.

Above, a tribute to the heroes of the space program.

Above, left, a coal mine scene was nicely presented, and the shiny coal in the Soo Line hoppers looked like gleaming black diamonds.

At left, a happy T-Trakker!

At bottom left, a sharp set of GM&O GP-30s overtakes a train powered by ICG units.

Below, the Houston skyline rendered in miniature, and a Route 66 tourist attraction. Photos by Tom Marsh

