

News from Houston N'Crowd



September/October 2022

THE ORDERBOARD

Temple for Trains



Temple Model Train Show: Above left, the NTRAK layout at the show handled 100-car trains. Above right, a wind turbine towers over the Central Texas Area Model Railroaders' HO layout. Below, nearby the show, action with a friendly wave from a hostler on the BNSF.



*Inside: Zooming the Valley Quad • Modified Paint for UP Locos
Temple Model Train Show and More • Test & Tune Makes Things Better*

"GREEN EYE" - CLEAR BLOCK

by Naz Hally, President

Dancing the "Start/Stop Rhumba": What's with that?

You've probably heard some talk lately about the state of our club layout. A lot of it has been about track power, the number of locomotives the layout can handle without shutting down, bus wires, districts and sub-districts, rail gapping, and all manner of electrical whatnot. This month, I'd like to talk about what many of you experience while running trains on the Bayou City & Gulf and the problems we must solve to improve how the layout works for everyone.

If you've been a regular Saturday visitor or operator on the layout, no doubt you've watched - or maybe unwittingly participated in - the "Start/Stop Rhumba". For example, the dance may have started with an A-B-B-A consist transiting Bennett with, at the same time, another A-B-B-A consist with lighted passenger cars crossing the bridge at Giddings. Meanwhile, another pair of locos have just crossed on to the front of the layout headed into Allyntown.

Suddenly, all three trains stop, then re-start, stop, re-start, and so on - this is the Rhumba! After quickly checking, derailments (if any) are fixed; however, the Rhumba persists! This is because the ten locos and car lights in this example draw more current than the layout power management network can safely deliver.

To stop the Rhumba, an operator must remove locos from their train or drag it into the other district or remove their train altogether from the layout. That's no fun, especially if it happens repeatedly throughout the running session. It's a club layout, after all, and I think it needs to be robust enough to run the wide variety of trains and consists that all members may wish to run. Sound decoders, LEDs, long trains, fast trains, MU'd

locomotives - all of it. For your \$20 dues, you shouldn't have to run on a "power poor" layout.

Also, for those of us who enjoy operating sessions, wouldn't it be nice if the layout could reliably handle the demands of an hours-long session? We haven't had one in over a year mainly due to these problems.

So, we're planning to revamp and, where necessary, upgrade the power network to make it more robust. Before we shut anything down, or spend any funds, or ask for volunteers to crawl under the benchwork, we're doing some testing to pinpoint exactly what and where the problems are.

Thus far, we've learned that it's not just a matter of replacing a board or booster or bus wires or re-drawing district and sub-district boundaries - although any one or all of these steps may ultimately be necessary. There are other, more pernicious problems: cross-wiring between sub-districts, suspect feeders, district and sub-district gapping, loose rail joiners, and a few places where the roadbed could use some work. All the shiny new hardware and bus wiring in the world will never overcome a hidden voltage leak between the Budweiser yard and the main line next to it.

In the coming weeks, I'll report to you on what we're finding, what we're able to easily fix, what will require more extensive work, and what it will cost in materials and labor.

It's been said that layout work is never complete - there's always something to work on. I agree.

Naz

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N'Crowd Wednesday Membership Meetings:
September 21 / October 19 / November 16 / December 21
Meetings start at 7 p.m. at Papa Ben's Train Place.

N'Crowd Test & Tune Sessions: First Wednesday of odd-numbered months. 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at Papa Ben's.

N'Crowd Even-Month Ops Sessions: Operating sessions are temporarily replaced by Test & Tune sessions. See the calendar on the back page for information.

We Zoom in on the Valley Quad



Above, James McAuliffe's Valley Quad layout.

N'Crowd member James McAuliffe recently hosted our first virtual layout tour in several years. The tour featuring James's Valley Quad was conducted online on Aug. 24 using Zoom.

The Valley Quad is set in the early 1950s and features equipment from 16 Class 1 railroads. James's collection includes 145 locomotives, 180 passenger cars and 155 cabooses. The cabooses go beyond the 16 Class 1s, representing 90 railroads.

The layout is DC powered. Four powerpacks allow James to run up to four trains at a time on different loops.

If you would like to host a virtual layout tour, contact N'Crowd President Naz Hally.

New paint scheme for Union Pacific



UP's new locomotive paint scheme drops nose wings, moves U.S. flag forward. Images courtesy Union Pacific

Union Pacific debuted a new locomotive paint scheme in late July. Upon announcing the new paint scheme, railroad officials said, "The flag is now in a better position to keep clean and be protected from heat" noting that "its previous location made it a challenge." The Union Pacific shield remains on the nose, but the nose wings have been removed "to let the shield proudly take center stage."

The new paint scheme was created by employees at Union Pacific's Jenks Locomotive Shop in North Little

Rock, Arkansas. The railroad will not embark on a full-blown campaign to repaint locomotives into the new scheme. Instead, locomotives will be repainted when they need new paint or are upgraded as part of UP's ongoing locomotive modernization program.

Union Pacific recently signed a contract with Wabtec Corp. for modernization of 600 locomotives. Railroad officials say the \$1 billion-plus program is the largest such agreement in the industry's history.

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Temple show delivers the goods

by Tom Marsh

The 40th Annual Temple Model Train Show filled the city's Frank W. Mayborn Civic and Convention Center to capacity with layouts, vendors and railroad-related exhibits over the weekend of Sept. 17-18. N-scale was well-represented at the show, with substantial NTRAK and T-TRAK displays, along with numerous vendors offering new and used N-scale equipment for sale. Bargains seemed easy to find, judging by the number of people toting purchased goods.

The Temple show makes for a good day trip for folks who don't want to overnight away from home. The city is only 170 miles via excellent roads from downtown Houston, and has the added attraction for railfans of being a major BNSF junction with a large yard, substantial locomotive servicing facility, and excellent spots, including two pedestrian-friendly overpasses, to view the railroad action.

But the highlight is a trackside park with a beautifully restored two-story former Santa Fe station that houses a museum and Amtrak facilities, and a second Santa Fe station moved to the site from nearby Moody which houses the Central Texas Area Model Railroaders' large HO scale layout. CentraMOD sponsors the Temple Model Train Show.

N'Crowd's affiliated organization, Houston Area T-TRAK Association (HATTA), has been invited to participate in the 2023 show. See you all there!



The gentleman in the blue N'Crowd shirt at center above is our own president, Naz Hally. Something seems to have caught his eye. Did he buy it?



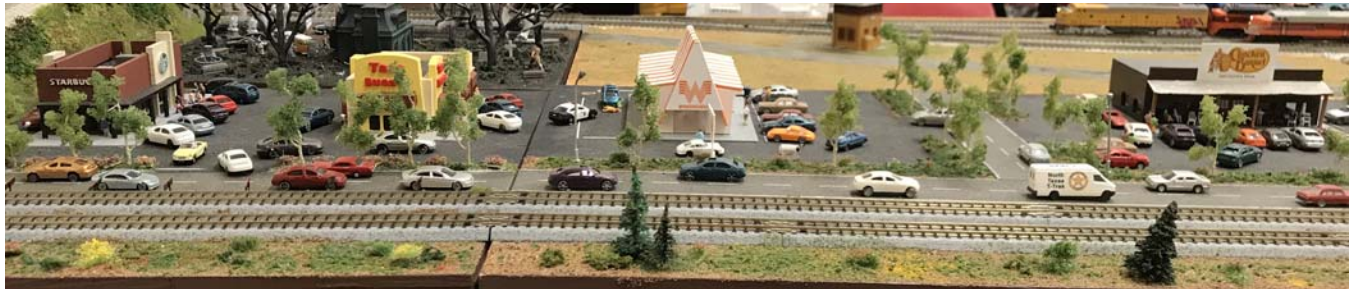
Above, everybody's attention is on the 100-car Maersk container train making its first trip around the NTRAK loop and crossing. At one point, it was unclear as to whether or not the train was too long to avoid a crossing incident, but it ended well. N'Crowd member Andrew Monaghan provided the cars. An overall view of the NTRAK layout appears on this issue's front page.

Below, tinplate and Z-scale layouts rounded out the layout lineup at the 2022 Temple Model Train Show.



At right, the T-TRAK layout was coordinated by North Texas T-TRAK Modular Railroad Club of Plano.

Below, the T-TRAK layout featured a modern “restaurant row” with Starbucks, Taco Bueno, Whataburger and Cracker Barrel.



New SP/Amtrak boxcar models set a high standard for detail

We don't usually plug new products in *The Orderboard*, but the wealth of detail incorporated into the latest boxcar model from Canada's Rapido Trains, Inc. deserves a mention and a photo. Multiple vendors were selling the new models at the Temple Model Train Show.

According to Rapido's website, Pacific Car & Foundry built 250 B-100-40 50-ft. boxcars for Southern Pacific and Cotton Belt in 1976.

According to *Amtrak By the Numbers* (White River Productions 2011), 50 of the cars were rebuilt for Amtrak express service in 1997.

Originally delivered to Amtrak in overall dark green paint reminiscent of the defunct Railway Express Agency, the cars were repainted



Rapido Trains' has released a model of Amtrak express boxcars rebuilt from SP boxcars in the late 1990s. The model is also available in SP paint schemes.

later in Amtrak's standard passenger colors seen on the model above. Amtrak disposed of the cars in 2003. Rapido offers the model in both Amtrak paint schemes; the Amtrak models include parts specific to the rebuilt cars. Rapido also offers the cars as delivered in

SP's "Hydra-Cushion" tuscan and yellow paint scheme, as well as in the Golden West Services blue paint many of the cars received in their later service lives, and in faded GWS blue with patch reporting marks. Prices start at \$36.95 for single cars; multi-car packs are also available.

Temple: easy trainspotting

by Tom Marsh

On the 363 days each year that Temple does not have a train show, it's still a great place for railfanning. BNSF and Amtrak action (and Union Pacific about a

mile away) is easily observed from safe, publicly-accessible locations. Here are a few photos of BNSF action taken over the 2022 train show weekend.



Left top, this view of the BNSF Temple locomotive servicing facility was taken from the southeast end of the former Santa Fe station platform. The station is pictured below.

Left center, this overall view of the BNSF Temple yard was taken from the West Adams Ave. overpass, as was the photo on the front page of this issue.



The photo at bottom left shows the view from the other side of the overpass. Two overpasses, West Adams Ave. and West Central Ave. (visible in this photo), carry opposite one-way road traffic over the BNSF tracks, and they each have pedestrian sidewalks on both sides.

Below, the stately Prairie Beaux Arts-style former Santa Fe station at Temple. The station houses the Temple Railroad & Heritage Museum as well as Amtrak. Amtrak's Texas Eagle stops here daily.



Just what the doctor ordered:

Test & Tune sessions make things run better

If you are having mechanical issues with cars and/or locomotives, DCC or DC control systems, layout planning and wiring, or any other aspect of model railroading, you should attend an N'Crowd Test & Tune session. The sessions are a great benefit of N'Crowd membership, offering an opportunity to draw on the expertise of experienced and knowledgeable model railroaders.

Don't know why that previously quiet and smooth-running Kato locomotive is suddenly squeaking and clacking? Do you have a troublesome freight or passenger car that will not stay coupled or even on the track? Need to speed-match locomotives so you can run multiple-unit consists in

which the locomotives work together to move your train rather than doing the herky-jerky? Do you have questions about your layout design and wiring? Need advice on what type of track to use and how to lay it? These are just a few of the things for which you can solicit advice at a Test & Tune session.

Test & Tune sessions take place at Papa Ben's Train Place on the first Wednesday of odd-numbered months starting at 6 p.m. and on the first Sunday of even-numbered months starting at 2 p.m. Sunday sessions will be suspended in November and December when the store will open on Sundays for the holiday season.



Above left, N'Crowd President Naz Hally has perfected his technique for speed matching locomotives, and spends much of his time at the Test & Tune sessions doing just that. Above right, N'Crowd founding member Gordon Bliss takes a deep dive into the innards of one of the club's locomotives to clean out the accumulated gunk in the drive train. The results are below.



LCL

Less than Car Load: a few notes from your editor

Your support needed for *The Orderboard*: Contributions to your newsletter are always welcome; they are what make it possible. Lack of contributions implies lack of interest. Won't *you* contribute?

The deadline for the November/December 2022 issue is Friday, Nov. 4. Thank you!

The holidays are closer than you think: And with the holidays come expanded hours for opening the club layout and, for the first time, participation in the annual San Jacinto Model Railroad Club fall layout tours by both the N'Crowd and our affiliated organization, Houston Area T-TRAK Association (HATTA). Check

the time table below for more information. Volunteers will be needed to meet our obligation to Papa Ben's.

Photo contest is open to all: Entries are now being accepted online for the Gulf Coast Chapter - National Railway Historical Society's 39th Annual Railroad Photography Contest. The contest is open to all amateur photographers, although you must be an NRHS member to be considered for the best of show award. The entry deadline is Nov. 5.

For more information and to see winning entries from previous contests, go to: www.gulfcoastnrhs.org and click on the links near the top of the page.

HOUSTON N'CROWD 2022 TIME TABLE - SUBJECT TO CHANGE

September 7

N'Crowd Test & Tune, Papa Ben's Train Place, 4007-E Bellaire Blvd, Houston, 6 p.m.

September 17

2022 Galveston County Model Railroad Club Train Festival, Texas City Museum

September 17-18

40th Annual Temple Model Train Show

September 21

N'Crowd Membership Meeting, Papa Ben's Train Place, 4007-E Bellaire Blvd, Houston, 7 p.m.

October 1-2

6th Annual Fall Plano Train Show, Plano Event Center

October 2

N'Crowd Test & Tune, Papa Ben's Train Place, 4007-E Bellaire Blvd, Houston, 1 p.m.

October 8

Rosenberg Railroad Museum Fall Fun-Fest

October 19

N'Crowd Membership Meeting, Papa Ben's Train Place, 4007-E Bellaire Blvd, Houston, 7 p.m.

October 22-23

New Braunfels Model Train Show, New Braunfels Civic Center

November 2

N'Crowd Test & Tune, Papa Ben's Train Place, 4007-E Bellaire Blvd, Houston, 6 p.m.

November 6 - December 31

Trains will run on the BC&G every Saturday and Sunday except Christmas day. Volunteers needed!

November 16

N'Crowd Membership Meeting, Papa Ben's Train Place, 4007-E Bellaire Blvd, Houston, 7 p.m.

November 19-20

HATTA T-TRAK layout on the San Jacinto MRRC fall layout tour. Layout will be set up in Montgomery. Additional details will be in the SJMRRC tour guide.

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N'Crowd Model Railroad Society, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit educational organization incorporated in the State of Texas.

Tom Marsh, Editor

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Send newsletter contributions to:

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Please note: We reserve the right to edit any and all submissions for clarity and length.

Visit our Web site:

www.houstonncrowd.org

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