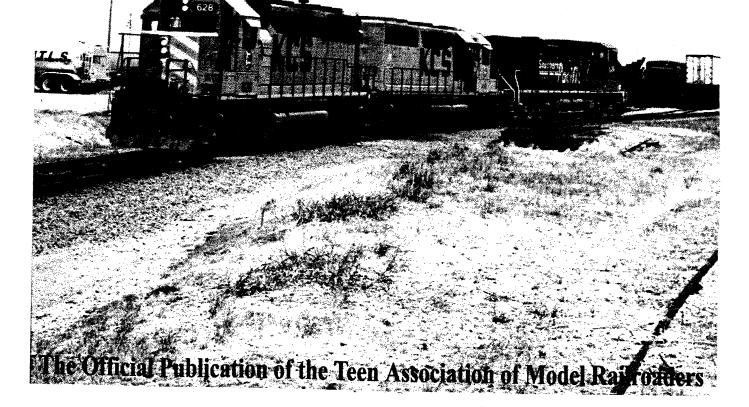


*The "New" Hotbox *N Scale Coupler Overview *LOASSB

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The Hotbox

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Hotbox Staff

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Contributions:

The Hotbox depends on its readers for material. All railroad and model railroad related articles, drawings, cartoons, and photographs are welcome, and will be published at the discretion of the Hotbox staff.

Feature Articles:

The Hotbox needs feature or lead articles the most. They should be a page or two long, typed, and possibly accompanied by a drawing or photograph. Feature or lead articles can be on any number of topics:

- Members' layouts
- Railroad news
- Railfan trips or rail travel
- Modeling projects, etc.

Columns:

There are many monthly and quarterly columns you will be seeing in the Hotbox, all of which need material. Most, if not all, of them you can contribute to. You can even conduct your own column. Please contact the Editor to contribute to or conduct a column.

Photographs & Drawings:

Photographs of railroads and model railroads are needed. You can submit black & white and/or color prints, any size, as well as color slides. 5"x7" or larger black and white or color prints are necessary for the cover page.

Drawings, cartoons, and artwork should be well done, in black ink, and on white paper (no lines).

Please contact the Editor for further details on submissions.

The official Publication of the Teen Association of Model Railroaders

"Putting the future of model railroading on the right track"

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ABOVE: Fordyce & Princeton SW1500 #1504 and Arkansas, Louisiana & Mississippi GP28 #1812 are sitting at the shops in Crossett, Arkansas. The SW1500 just received ditch lights. Photo by Danny Schueth.

On The Cover: Kansas City Southern SD40-3 #628, SD40 #6613 (with snow shields, no less!), and a Southern Pacific AC4400 get ready to pull an intermodal train out of KCS's South Garland (TX) Yard, August 20, 1999. Photo by Ritchie Roesch

The TAMR is a non-profit organization created to promote, stimulate, foster, and encourage young persons in the hobby of model railroading, the activity of railfanning, and the preservation of the history, science, and technology thereof.

Membership to the TAMR includes an eleven-issue subscription to the Hotbox, the annual Directory of Members, quarterly regional newsletters, and an invitation to attend and participate in all TAMR events. The available membership categories are as follows:

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Hans Raab. TAMR Treasurer. 240 Staniford Rd., Burlington, VT 05401.





Hello all, and welcome to the "new" Hotbox! Over the next several months you will be seeing a lot of changes with this publication, some of which have already occurred.

The first change I'd like to point out is that the Hotbox is now a team effort, consisting of an Associate and an Assisting Editor, as well as the Editor in Chief. The addition of these editors should help the Hotbox to come out timely, as well as make the transition from one editor to the next a lot easier. You'll meet the new editors in next month's issue.

The second change I'd like to point out is the addition of a posted schedule. This has been done in the past with great success, so I am bringing it back. You will find the schedule for the next issue at the bottom of this page.

Before I go, I'd like to thank each and every one who contributed to this issue. Thanks guys! I still need a lot of material (especially regular columns), so please send me articles, photos, etc., if you can.

Until next time, Happy Railroadin'!!! – Ritchie Roesch

Help Needed for Special Issue!

I would like to put together a special "All Steam" issue of the Hotbox. I need features on layouts from the "Steam Era", stories on prototype steam, photographs of steam locomotives, and that sort of thing. I'm going to publish the "All Steam" issue in December, which is just a few months away. With your help, the December issue could be the best one yet! –Ritchie Roesch

Hotbox Deadlines Contributing:

All articles, photographs, drawing etc., need to be in my hands no later then <u>October 9</u> to be published in the October issue. If I receive an item after that date, it will be published in a later issue. Publishing:

Publishing:

The October issue of the Hotbox will be published no later then October 23. –Ritchie Roesch

N-Scale Couplers: A Brief Overview

By **Tim Vermande**, with assistance from **John Reichel**.

More than the second se

The old standby: Rapido

In the early days of N scale, then called ("Treble O" or 000 "Triple O"). manufacturers used a variety of different couplers. Some of these were gigantic hooks and loops which worked well but looked very unrealistic. The survivor was the Rapido coupler, which was praised in Model Railroader in 1964 for having a fairly prototypical appearance. N scale locomotives and cars often come with this coupler, which looks like a large, square version of a knuckle. It couples reliably and stays coupled. However, it's much larger than scale size and can ruin the appearance of an otherwise nice model. The Rapido comes with the vast majority of N scale equipment. It won't couple to anything else. Its primary advantage is that it's cheap, and is standard on a lot of cars.

Elegance at a price: Micro-Trains

Once they get past the beginning stage, most modelers upgrade to Micro-Trains couplers on their cars and engines. This is an offshoot of the HO scale Kadee coupler. These couplers look a lot like real couplers and have a realistic delayed uncoupling feature. A trip pin that looks vaguely like an air hose comes out of it. Some people object to this pin, saying that it looks unrealistic. Others reason that it does indeed look like a hose. This pin allows uncoupling over a magnet, and if you master the sequence, you can even uncouple and push a car to another spot and leave it there. Micro-Trains couplers can also be uncoupled with a flat, pointed skewer inserted between the knuckle faces. Rix Products makes such a device; small screwdrivers and flat toothpicks can also be used.

Although these couplers are a bit out of scale (some HO and S modelers use them instead of Kadees to get the right size for their scale), they look great. However, they are expensive. Installation is not difficult on most cars, but for a few it can be a challenge. The most common method of installing these couplers on rolling stock is to replace the whole truck assembly, which adds \$3-5 to the cost of a car. A few brave souls body-mount the couplers, which is more realistic and less prone to derailment. However, this requires good eyesight and skill with a tap. Another option is the 1128 series. The 1128s are the shortest shank, which allows for close coupling (higher numbers have longer shanks). This coupler goes into the Rapido coupler box on most trucks, but you have to modify the box and insert a spacer, spring, and the coupler (which is in two pieces). This is an extremely difficult conversion, and, according to several N-scalers, does not always stay where you put it. One of the problems with Micro-Trains couplers has been occasional accidental uncoupling. A new "Reverse Draft Angle" modification makes it less likely that this will happen.

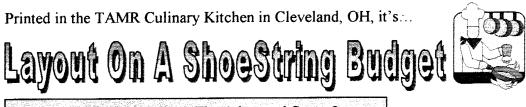
It is worth mentioning that Micro-Trains also makes freight cars. All of their cars are limited runs, so you can't wait around to buy one that you like. New releases are announced the first of each month at http://www.microtrains.com, and in "The Short Line" newsletter from the company. These cars come equipped with Micro-Trains couplers, naturally enough.

Converting locomotives to Micro-Trains has recently become much easier. Early N scale locomotives used a variety of coupler mountings. There was a specific conversion for each one. Now, most diesel locos from Atlas, Kato and Life-Like have a small clip which is easily removed. You pull the Rapido coupler and its spring out, put a 1015 in (these are available assembled), and replace the clip. Note: look carefully before you remove the clip and note where it sits, and make sure it goes in all the way in when you replace iton some Atlas and Life-Like models it will appear to be seated but has caught on the steps. Some Kato locos require different conversions, it is good to check on these, as most require that you purchase two sets at a time.

Alternative life styles

Four other couplers are reasonably available in N scale. The newest is from Model Die-Casting. It is a T-shank that fits into most Rapido boxes without modification (use the spring that comes with the MDC coupler for best results). This coupler works well with Micro-Trains or Intermountain couplers, but does not always hold well when coupled to itself! It also has a tendency to flip to a vertical position if you hit it too hard with the next car when assembling a train (just flip it back). The price is good: \$3-4 will get you enough for 10 cars. I have found this coupler to be a good alternative for cars

Continued on page 7 ...

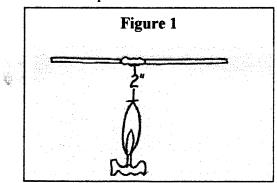


Noodlemania Series, #2 The Advanced Street Lamp

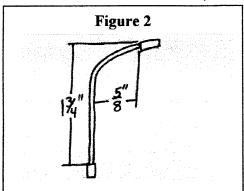
By Peter Maurath

elcome back! In this issue we'll build the more advanced. modern (N scale) noodle street lamp. Though it may be more advanced, this noodle lamp is a cinch to build once you get the hang of it. To start, let me advise you that we will be working with open flames, and make sure you take all necessary precautions, and get permission before striking a match or lighter. I don't want to lose any of my readers!

We'll begin by cutting a long section of spaghetti noodle, longer then the combined length of the arm and pole of the finished lamp. Next comes the part that will take a little practice. Hold the noodle over a heat source (I use a small candle in candlestick, please be careful when working with an open flame!!) approximately two inches above. Within a few seconds the section directly over the flame will begin to cook. As soon as it does, bend it to the angle desired and get it out of the flame (see Figure 1). This whole process with practice should take no longer then five or ten seconds, otherwise the noodle will burn up.



Once cooled (and the candle blown out) you can trim the street lamp to experience that will make them the correct height, and reach o of the arm you want. For my layout they measured $1\frac{3}{4}$ " (4.2cm) tall with a reach of 5/8" (1.7cm) (see figure 2). In case you're wondering, I made these lamps slightly taller then the street lamps in the previous issue. Once trimmed add the light (illustration board) and base (wood



or styrene square strip) same as the two piece street lamp in the last issue. The last step is to paint.

For an advanced street lamp that isn't too difficult and is real inexpensive, the spaghetti noodle works well. What's even better is the many **Bill of Materials** Spaghetti noodles. other appliillustration board, 1/16" cations for wood or styrene square bendable rod, acrylic flat black paint, white glue or CA. noodles.

such as piping to a tank farm or details to a structure.

That's all for this issue! Join me next time when we take on building traffic lights for N scale, as noodlemania continues. -Peter Maurath Page 4

Getting Along With Your Atlas N-Scale Front-Runners

By Tim Vermande The Atlas Front-(N scale) is a Runner modern piece of great intermodal equipment. But there are problems because of their unique design. Here are several points that I've found from work better. I think that many of these will be true for the HO version from Walthers.

1. Run them in the last half of the train, the farther back the better. They're quite light, and will tend to derail at the front.

2. Make up blocks of up to four cars with UniMate couplers. Put a Micro-Trains conversion only on the outer ends of the block. Not only will you save money, but the UniMates will hold the cars together and keep them on the track better.

3. When you put the Micro-Trains conversion in, file the center hump off the coupler cover. Also put the smooth side of the M-T adapter box toward the coupler cover.

4. Not all trailers have the same spacing between wheels. Deluxe Innovations chassis, Atlas 45-foot trailers, and Micro-Trains 40- and 48-foot trailers fit the Front Runner best. Micro-Trains 45-foot trailers will sit on the car 's rear wheel wells, and will slide off if you go around a curve too fast.

5. Run the cars with the trailer hitch forward. Since the rear wheel set is fixed in place, it can cause problems on typical model railroad curves as it is, and putting that fixed set first is asking for trouble. A 19-inch radius curve in N scale is equivalent to a 23 degree on the prototype. This is the absolute minimum limit for coupled equipment, to be operated "dead slow." A "very sharp" curve is 10 degrees-43 inch radius.

6. Glue the ladders on with ACC (super glue). There are eight on each car (four on the side and four underneath). If you do not do this, they'll fall off eventually, either into oblivion, leaving you with an odd-looking car, or into the track, causing derailment. а -Tim Vermande



Atlas N Scale EMD SD60

By Hans Raab

The Atlas SD60 is one of Atlas' newest locomotives, and it is definitely worthy of their name. The prototype SD60s were designed for heavy-drag or medium-duty freight service. The first SD60 demonstrator units were released in 1984, and the first production units were delivered to Norfolk Southern that same year. Production of the SD60 standard cab totaled 537 units.

The model I bought was lettered for Burlington Northern and had a Lenz DCC decoder already installed. The model was completely assembled, and came with Rapido couplers. After less than five minutes, I had the couplers changed to Micro-Trains #1015-1 couplers, and it was pulling a couple of freight cars on my test track.

Performance of the engine was very good, and so was the detail. All of the paint was crisp and things like the number boards and other small lettering was not forgotten. The one error I found was that the color of the handrails did not match the body of the engine. Other than that, it was very nice! If you model N-scale in the 1980s or 90s, you need to get one of these locomotives on your layout! -Hans Raab

Model Railroader's Donner Pass Video

By Andrew Berndt

Model Railroader magazine's video on Donner Pass takes a look at the Union Pacific's (former Espee) route through the Sierra Nevada. The tape begins with a series of images of the modern Donner Pass and a very basic introduction to the line's operation and traffic, as well as a few locomotives. The tape, shot like a typical railfan video, travels west-to-east starting at Colfax, California. Unfortunately, this tape skips the massive Roseville Yard, which was being rebuilt at the time the footage was being shot. However, the yard is not part of Donner Pass.

At Colfax a description of ex-Espee's SD40M-2s is shown, as well as ex-Espee's snow-fighting equipment. The video then travels east along the route and has a map to guide the viewer along. As the tape stops to view trains, specific details along the right-of-way are shown and explained. Video footage in some locations shows the line in both winter and spring. The tape concludes at Sparks, Nevada in Union Pacific's yard.

Thumbs up: Good overall video footage, especially ones with both weather types.

Thumbs down: Country banjo-like music at the beginning and end of the video; at times there is too much narration, pointing out things that are completely obvious to the viewer; and not enough footage of surrounding towns located along the line.

Conclusion: This video is ideal for those who know some about Donner Pass. Those that don't know much about it, though, will find little use for this tape. -Andrew Berndt

LifeLike's N Scale GP20 By Ritchie Roesch

Within the last few years Life-Like has produced several high quality, reasonably priced locomotives. Their latest release is EMD's GP20.

The first thing I noticed when I pulled my Santa Fe GP20 out of the box was how detailed it was, with excellent tooling, very thin handrails, a very fragilelooking bell, number boards, and a to-scale three-chime horn. The paint looks nice and the decals crisp. The detail on this locomotive is easily just as good as a KATO.

The locomotive is on a split with zinc-alloy frame dual flywheels (when you pull off the shell it looks a lot like a KATO or Atlas). It runs at a real slow speed right out of the box, and can pull a number of cars up my 4% grade. It runs well with all my KATO and Atlas locomotives. Micro-Trains #1015-1 installs very quickly.

Life-Like's GP20 will look excellent on any layout from the 1960's to present, as several of these locomotives are still being used today.

With a retail price of \$65.00 (you can usually find it for less), this a locomotive you won't want to pass up! -Ritchie Roesch

<u>Top 7</u>

By Peter Maurath Top 7 things the TAMR is doing to be "Y2K" ready...

#7 All officers quietly moving to a below ground 'nuclear proof' shelter.

#6 Moving all funds into a 'safe' offshore bank account.

#5 Stocking up on plenty of Spam and those little powdered donuts.

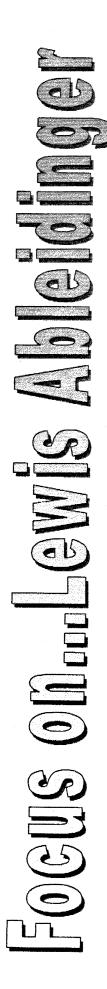
#4 Installing new computers software warranted until June 1903—wait a minute....

#3 Mid-winter Northeast Region convention, December 30-January 2, canceled.

#2 Buying lots of noisemakers and champagne!

And the number one thing the TAMR is doing to be 'Y2K' ready is...

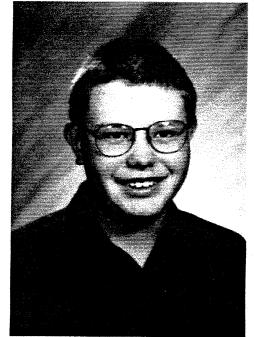
#1 Absolutely nothing!



Hello, there! If you've read the title, you already know I'm Lewis Ableidinger. I'm the director of the TAMR "Great Plains Division". It's great to see that Ritchie is re-starting this great column!

To start off, I was born November 18, 1983, and I'm currently a sophomore at Kensal (North Dakota) High School. There are approximately 50 attending the school.

I've been into trains as long as I can remember, particularly the Soo Line. One memorable day came on August 17, 1987, (before the Soo was consumed by CP), when my grandma persuaded a Soo crew (3 man crew—Skip, Floyd, and Warren) to let us ride in the cab while they switched a grain elevator. Soo engineer Rob Kulla grew up in Kensal, so when he's on a train stopped in town he usually lets me up in the cab.



My current model railroading interests are the "true" Soo (pre-CP Rail), and the 600 mile Red River Valley & Western. My layout is the 12' x 8' "Dakota Page

Railways", which was in the September '97 Student Fare column in Model Railroader magazine. as well as the '98 Hotbox. This November winter, though, I'll be redoing everything (except benchwork) to represent the Soo from Carrington to Wimbledon, ND (Kensal included) in about 1987-1989. It will also include the RRV&W in Carrington. After I complete trackwork, I'll undertake scratch-building three corrugated-metal-side grain elevators!

Another hobby of mine is golf. Ironically, all the courses I play are next to railroad lines. I usually don't bring my camera to the courses, though. My biggest highlight was winning a single-player tournament at a Dekalb Seed Company Convention in Chamberlain, SD. (That course is parallel to Dakota Southern's line.)

I also enjoy fishing, hunting, and photography. As many of you know, I also make videos. (Thank you, Newton Vezina, for showing them!)

The music I listen to is swing and "country swing" ("Asleep at the Wheel" type music), along with songs from other types of music. This type of music is the lead-off to my videos.

My current job is just helping around my parent's farm, such as driving tractors and, during harvest, driving trucks, which I'm doing a lot of this month. Because work is seasonal, I get most modeling done in the winter.

So that's me! –Lewis Ableidinger

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Regional News & Reports

Northeast Region:

A regional meet will be held October 8, 9, 10, and 11 in Saugerties, New York, hosted by Dave Mason. Activities will include railfanning Selkirk Yard and the Hudson line, as well as visiting Steamtown in Scranton, Pennsylvania. For more information, contact Dave Mason, 36 Blue Hills Drive, Saugerties, NY 12477. Phone: (914) 246-8087.

A regional meet will also be held November 19, 20, and 21 in Edison, New Jersey, hosted by Andrew Matarazzo. Activities include a Greenberg Train Show (there will be a TAMR table at the show), railfanning, pizza party, videos, and more. For more information, contact: Andrew Matarazzo, 22 Sunshine Road, Old Bridge, NJ 08857. Phone: (732) 238-7238

Northeast Region Summer Convention Report

Congratulations to the "New York/New Jersey Division" for hosting another record-breaking convention in New Jersey. Two words describe the Northeast Summer Convention: TRAINS and FUN !!! Not only was there a record attendance (11), but also the record length of days (6)!!

Conventioneers were Andrew Matarazzo (NJ), Andrew Sabens (NY), Tom Matarazzo (NJ), Dan Adams (PA), Tom Matthews (NJ), Paul and Bill Sternitzke (NY), Anthony Person (RI), Andy Rasch (NJ), Hans Raab (VT), and Newton Vezina (MA).

Activities included railfanning and cab rides on the Greenwood Lake Railroad, railfanning (and riding) commuter trains on the Northeast Corridor, such as Metro North, New Jersey Transit, and Amtrak. Conventioneers were treated to a visit to Penn Station in Newark, NJ, Metro Park. Model Railroad events included a 2-day, Greenberg Model Railroad show at the New Jersey Expo Center in Edison. Thanks to the Greenberg people, the TAMR had 24 feet of table space at the show on both days. Operating sessions were held at Andrew Matarazzo's N-scale Penn Central layout and Andrew Sabens layout of Northeast railroads. Non railroad activities included Pizza Parties, watching Mystery Science Theater 3000, cookouts, swimming, camping, and laser tag-a New Jersey tradition!

Hats off to Andrew Matarazzo and Andrew Sabens, the convention directors-keep holding those awesome conventions!! The TAMR is growing strong because of conventions like this one!!

And that ends my report! Thanks to all who attended and participated! -Newton Vezina

Southern Region:

A regional meet was held July 22-24 in Raleigh, North Carolina, hosted by Joshua Trower. The official attendance was 7, but the unofficial attendance was 10. Activities included railfanning, visiting the North Carolina Transportation Museum, and two layout tours, to name a few. This was a very successful convention, especially considering that this was the first Southern Region meet in several years.

The Southern Region also hosted the Texas Eagle '99 national convention, July 7-11, in Dallas, Texas, and the Texas Eagle '99 postconvention, July 12-14, in Houston, Texas. Both were very successful.

Letters

I received this letter from Canadian/International Region Representative Steven Southcombe:

We are trying to attract new members through putting up some signs...in hobby shops. There is [also] a group of teens in British Columbia that are creating a display layout to attract attention to the TAMR.

"Could you put a little note in the next issue of the Hotbox that all members with article ideas should send them to their regional reps? I have no ideas left for our newsletter."

Thanks for the letter, Steven! I know when I was editing the Crescent, the Southern Region's newsletter, that I was short on articles. So, if you have something to contribute, why not send it to your regional representative?! -Ritchie Roesch

....N-Scale Couplers: A Brief Overview, continued from page 3.

that would otherwise require a Micro-Trains 1128 conversion.

Another alternative is the Intermountain coupler. This is available as a truck-mounted coupler, you can also purchase body mount kits. The spring is built-in. This coupler requires its own mounting box, so it's either replace the trucks or body mount. It's cheap, though: \$18 will get you 10 pairs of trucks and couplers (you have to install the wheelsets, put the coupler in the box and snap a lid in place). Like the MDC coupler, this one works well with Micro-Trains couplers. It also holds well to its own kind, although it can be a bit difficult to get them together. Sometimes a little extra nudge is needed, and you can't always get that by just pushing the cars together with a locomotive. Neither the MDC nor the Intermountain will uncouple automatically, but you can use the same skewer you use for Micro-Trains to do it manually.

The Precision Masters Unimate coupler is also a T-shank available in three lengths) that fits in Rapido pockets without modification. There are also versions for the common Atlas, Kato, and Life-Like locomotives. not an automatic coupler. You will have to lift any car This is equipped with these couplers off track and put its coupler in place with the next car's as you re-rail it. The pay-off for this is that you can get extremely close coupling, and the cars will not come uncoupled under most circumstances. These couplers do not couple very well to the others, in part because they mount at a slightly different height.

Kato also offers a coupler. This coupler is standard equipment with their passenger cars and recent locomotives, and seems to work well. Although it is long, this is not a problem on this equipment with the way they're mounted. Kato also used this coupler on their covered hoppers (their only N scale freight offering as this is written), where its extreme length resulted in a very wide spacing between cars that was extremely annoying. This coupler works well with Micro-Trains and Intermountain. However, it is very complicated mechanically, so don't plan to install it on anything new. There are two other emerging possibilities for couplers. Con-Cor's new line of Budd passenger cars comes with a coupler that looks like Unimates but couples well with knuckle couplers and Unimates. These couplers are not available separately yet. More interesting is a recent confirmation on the Atlas Forum that they are testing N scale Accumate couplers. From what I know at this point, N scale Accumates resemble Micro-Trains couplers. They uncouple magnetically, and will couple with any coupler that a Micro-Trains will. The testing will take "several months," and if the Accumates are suitable, they will become standard equipment on Atlas releases.

On many N scale cars, it's difficult to install Micro-Trains trucks, They don't fit the Atlas jumbo tanker and pulpwood flats, for example. Passenger cars use a variety of mounting schemes that defy simply replacing the trucks. Changing the trucks on the Kato is also impractical due to the mounting system. For most of these applications, I use a combination of MDC and Unimate couplers. On a passenger train, Unimates go on the couplings within the train. I use Micro-Trains couplers at the outer ends of the train. Thus, the train won't separate by accident, but I can get the locomotives off. For my sand train I create blocks of four cars (as many people do with coal trains). The outer cars have Micro-Trains or Intermountain couplers; the cars inside the block have Unimates. Thus, I can switch the cars, but avoid the expense of equipping every car with Micro-Trains. On ore trains, I created blocks of 12-16 cars this way. Another use is with the Atlas Front Runner. The Micro-Trains conversion for this car is about half as much as the car itself and quite tricky to install. I again created a block of four cars using Micro-Trains on the outside and Unimates In-between.

On the whole, if you are changing consists, switching, etc., Micro-Trains couplers are the way to go. They are expensive, but well worth it. There are alternatives for situations where you're not switching a lot, or where Micro-Trains couplers are difficult or too expensive to install. Much as a good photographer settles on one kind of film for primary use but is acquainted with others, it is worthwhile for the N scale modeler to know what alternatives are around. -Tim Vermande

Texas Images









TOP LEFT: A Union Pacific rock train near Houston, TX, led by a Tunnel Motor, 7/14/99. Photo by Ritchie Roesch. **TOP MIDDLE:** Georgia & Alabama #702 in Sherman, TX, 7/5/99. Photo by Peter Maurath.

TOP RIGHT: Dallas, Garland & Northeastern GP38-3 #3048 and an ex-Norfolk Southern high-nose GP40 in Farmers Branch, TX, 7/3/99. Photo by Tim Vermande.

BOTTOM LEFT: A Kansas City Southern SD40-3 in Garland, TX, 8/20/99. Photo by Ritchie Roesch.

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Coming up next Month:

- TAMR 35th Anniversary Issue

*Please note: Material is needed for this special issue. If you'd like to contribute articles or photographs. please contact the editor.

The Hotbox Ritchie Roesch, Editor 4667 FM 3364 Princeton, TX 75407



