NTRAK Modular Railroading Society, Inc.

N-Scale Modular Railroading

Tips N SCALE Techniques

Trainboards

June 1, 2020

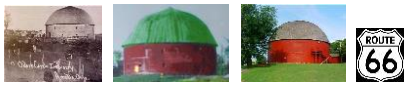
The NEONS (Northeast Oklahoma N-Scalers) NTRAK club enjoys setting up its layout at train shows and running a variety of trains. Many of the trains we run are 80 to 120 cars long and are great crowd pleasers. The most frequently asked questions are “How long is the train?”, “How many cars are in it?” and “Are all those engines real and does it really take all of them to pull the train?”

A few years ago, the NEONS developed “Signboards” for all our NTRAK modules that explained what each module was about. These Signboards were printed on heavy-duty 8½” x 11” card stock and are mounted on the front of each module. They explain each diorama, indicating if the module depicts an Oklahoma scene, a Route 66 scene, and/or any specific railroad’s tracks. We’ve received many compliments on our Signboards from the public and members of other clubs.

Round Barn

In the spring of 1898 William Harrison Odor built what would become known as Arcadia’s Round Barn. The two story barn is 60' across and 45' high and has no rafters. It sits on the north side of the road that became the Mother Road, Route 66, and across the highway from the MKT tracks and the Arcadia, OK depot.

By 1988 the tracks and depot had been abandoned and removed. The badly deteriorated barn was donated to the Arcadia Historical and Preservation Society in an attempt to save it. With the efforts of many volunteers, the restored Round Barn now stands as a roadside attraction along old Route 66 about 23 miles northeast of Oklahoma



As a response to the frequent questions about the trains that are running and using the success of our Signboards as an incentive, we developed the concept of “Trainboards” which are 8½” x 14” printed sheets that answer these questions and more. Like our module Signboards, a Trainboard describes each train that is running on the layout and is posted just above the layout’s skyboards so it can easily be read by the public.

The objective of this exercise is two-fold. First, it attracts the attention of the public which will, hopefully, spur the interest of some observers and plant a seed that may grow and blossom into new model railroaders. Second, it gives us an opportunity to add a new dimension to our modeling experience, affording us the chance to personalize our trains by researching and learning a little more about railroad history and then to sort and assemble our inventory of engines and rolling stock into not just model trains, but train models.

Each Trainboard is divided into three sections. Section one provides information about the prototype that is being modeled. This data includes the type of train, its name (if it has one,) what time era it represents, the train’s route, what engines are pulling it and what kind of cars are in its consist. Section two contains details about the model. Train specs include model engine manufacturer, whether the engines are analog or DCC, decoder brand and if sound equipped, the actual and scale length of the train, the number of cars, the train’s approximate scale speed and, most importantly, to whom it belongs. Section three contains an informative narrative regarding the train, the railroad, the era, and/or explains why that train exists and how it provides a service.

We have two, three-slot Trainboard displays. The slots are sandwiched between a large piece of foam board and a thin sheet of Plexiglas. Individual Trainboards are simply dropped into the slots and can easily be pulled out. Above each slot is a label indicating the track on which that train is running. Because the red line is usually part of the Red Line Route™ and therefore not exclusive to NEONS trains, we do not normally display info on trains running along the red line. When it is a member's time to run a train, he/she inserts the appropriate Trainboard into the proper slot and then powers that train onto the layout.

For example, with a little research I discovered that Santa Fe operated the *Tulsan* between KC and Tulsa from 1939 up into the '70s. In the early years, it was a daytime heavyweight pulled by steam. Couple a standard, out-of-the-box, Con-Cor set of heavyweight Santa Fe passenger cars with a Bachmann Consolidation (or other) Santa Fe steam engine and suddenly, this nondescript little passenger train becomes the ATSF *Tulsan* and the public can relate to it. Sure, detail-oriented model railroaders might find some inaccuracies and discrepancies between the model and the prototype such as that the Santa Fe never ran this train with a Consolidation locomotive, but for the most part, it is a reasonable representation, particularly in the eyes of the public.

In the '30s and '40s the New York Central Railroad used their iconic Dreyfuss streamlined J3a Hudson locomotives to pull several of their regularly scheduled passenger trains. These trains were called "Meteor" trains. Just as with the *Tulsan*, a six-car set of Con-Cor heavyweights in the NYC livery pulled by Con-Cor's model of a Dreyfuss Hudson becomes a NYC Meteor train such as the *Detroit Meteor* or the *James Whitcomb Riley*, and just like the *Tulsan*, is a reasonably prototypical model.

You can take a mixed freight train pulled by any given railroad's engines, define where along that railroad's system the train is running, match the vintage of the cars to the vintage of the engines and instantly, you have a train that can be described on a Trainboard. Prepare a small story about the railroad's history in relation to the train and again, you have something that will grab the public's attention.

Trainboards can also be easily prepared for fantasy trains. The *Beer Train* Trainboard is a good example.

Low-definition heralds for most all railroads can be copied and pasted to your Trainboard. Drumheads of most named passenger trains can be found on-line. Check the Tomar website for many of them.

When we're in a multi-loop layout with trains from other clubs running on the red line, we post the "Red Line Route" trainboard in the outside track slot

Most model railroaders buy additional rolling stock now and then, so their trains grow over time. You may not be able to finalize the number of cars in any given train, or the length of that train until just a few weeks or days before the show. When you consider that while running a train, the operator often has to remove one or two problem cars to make the consist function trouble-free, the resulting train will probably have fewer cars and be shorter than what is shown on the Trainboard anyway. So, if the Trainboard data isn't exact, but is close, then that should suffice. We do keep a Sharpie handy so updates can be posted if the operator so desires.

Examples of Trainboards follow:

Atchison Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad

Prototype Information

Train Type: Express Mixed Freight

Engines: six EMD GP-20s

Origination: Albuquerque, NM

Era: 1979

Destination: Chicago, Illinois

Route: Topeka, Kansas City, Peoria

Consist: box cars, flat cars, gondolas, hoppers and tankers

Train Information

Motive Power: ☐ Analog ☒ DCC ☐ Sound

Six powered Life-Like engines w/ TCS decoders installed

Number of cars: 90 ☒Caboose ☐FRED

Length: 32.6 ft = 5215 scale ft = 0.99 scale miles

Speed: 40 mph (approximately)

Conductor: **Steve (Razor) Gillett**

ATSF's passenger engines were painted in the famous red and silver "War Bonnet" scheme and their freight engines were painted blue and yellow. In their quest to improve safety, the "War Bonnet" design was modified in yellow and blue freight colors to create an easily recognizable paint scheme on their freight engines. The bright yellow nose was very easy to see. These engines show both freight paint schemes.

The Santa Fe Railroad tracks linked the port cities of Chicago, Houston/Galveston, Los Angeles/Long Beach and San Francisco/Oakland and connected with many of the eastern railroads in both Chicago and Kansas City. In the late 1970s, the ATSF was one of the largest and most profitable railroads in the country.

Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad

Prototype Information

Train Type: Beer Reefer Unit Freight Train

Engines: two ALCO RS-2s

Origination: Chicago, Ill

Era: 1945

Destination: Albuquerque, NM

Route: Peoria, Atchison, Topeka,

Consist: Billboard wood sheathed ice reefers and box cars

Train Information

Motive Power: ☐ Analog ☒ DCC ☐ Sound

Two powered Kato engines w/ Digitrax decoders installed

Number of cars: 57 ☒Caboose ☐FRED

Length: 17.0 ft = 2718 scale ft = 0.51 scale miles

Speed: 40 mph (approximately)

Conductor: **Steve (Razor) Gillett**

This special freight train of billboard ice reefers advertises America's finest beers, beverages, tobacco products and other unique items. The reefers carry the best of the brewer's art across the country to fulfill the needs of a thirsty mid-America.

I call this my "Sin Train." Nearly all of the cars are prototypical and really did exist at one time or another. The train is an example of the fun that can be had in model railroading by using one's imagination. Its objective is to get beer to all those thirsty cowboys in the great southwest and maybe divert a few of them to the bootleggers in Tulsa and Oklahoma City!!!

New York Central Railroad James Whitcomb Riley

Prototype Information

Train Type: Heavyweight Passenger Train B

Engines: One 4-6-4 J3a Hudson steam locomotive w/ art-deco, Henry Dreyfuss designed, bullet-nosed shroud

Origination: Chicago, Illinois

Era: 1941

Destination: Cincinnati, Ohio

Route: Kankakee, Lafayette, Indianapolis

Consist: baggage, RPO, coaches, Pullman sleepers, a diner, and observation car

Train Information

Motive Power: ☒ Analog ☐ DCC ☐ Sound

One Con-Cor locomotive w/ no decoder installed

Number of cars: 6 ☐ Caboose ☐ FRED

Length: 4.0 ft = 637 scale ft = 0.12 scale miles

Speed: 50 mph (approximately)

Conductor: **Steve (Razor) Gillett**

In the '30s and '40s the New York Central Railroad used their iconic Dreyfuss streamlined J3a Hudson locomotives to pull several of their regularly scheduled passenger trains. These trains were called "Meteor" trains.

This particular daytime train began service on April 28, 1941. Even though it was pulled by a Dreyfuss Hudson, it was named the *James Whitcomb Riley* (a well known Hoosier poet) instead of the *Indiana Meteor* because it ran mainly across the State of Indiana.

NEONS TRAINBOARDS

Trainboards, like those seen to your right, provide information about the trains currently operating on the layout. Preparing them adds a new dimension to our modeling experience, affording us the opportunity to personalize each train. By researching and learning a little more about railroad history, our club members can sort and assemble their inventory of engines and rolling stock into not just model trains, but train models.

Generally, when we set up our layout with other clubs, each club assembles a loop of modules and all the loops are connected to each other. All N-Trak modules have three continuous rail lines on them. Trains running on our middle and rear tracks can only run around our loop, but trains on the front track travel around the entire layout, visiting all the loops. This outer track is known as the RED LINE ROUTE™ (RLR).

All trains running on the RLR are individually controlled by a DCC throttle system that sends specific signals to each engine. That way, multiple trains can run on this track at the same time. The RLR is not exclusively for the use of NEONS club members so we do not normally display information on trains travelling the front line.

Author

Steve Gillett of the Northeast Oklahoma N Scale (NEONS) club is the author of this TipsNTechniques.