

COWTOWN MODEL RAILROAD CLUB

FORT WORTH TEXAS

CMRRC



Volume 10

May 2023

Number 5

General Meeting

The May monthly meeting of the CMRRC will be on May 15th at 7:00 pm. The program will be provided by member Dale Schmidbleicher. The program for the evening will be showing some videos on "Tips & Tricks." Hope to see you there.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

by Joe Pritchett



The North Texas Council has started working on 2023/2024 show season preparations. Contracts for the shows are available on the Council Website. The Fall Show will be Sep. 30th & Oct 1st. The January Show will be January 20th & 21st. Model City Exhibit progress, the street lights have been installed. The track replacement project has started and I hope to complete it before Memorial Day. Once they get the Lexan child barrier up, we can start to work the areas along the front to the exhibit.

The temperature has been reasonable, so we have been able to resume the Thursday/Saturday

sessions. Tom has been working switch machine and electrical panel repairs. George and Dale have been working scenery and ballasting track. I have mostly removed the dip in the track on the East end of St. Charles. The work on the sidings has started; the new sub roadbed is in place and leveled. The roadbed and track are ready to be installed and should be completed in a work session or two. The layout is operational but the two siding tracks are currently out of service. Watch your email for the next operating session. I encourage everyone to come out and participate.

Get with Dale or I if you would like to do program for one of the meetings, we are always looking for new topics.

Now that cars have been spotted on the layout make sure that if you need to move a car to work on something that you put it back where it was. When you are out working on the layout, please make the sure that nothing is left on the rails and remove any leftover materials that could interfere with the testing. If you know someone that might be interested in joining the club, be sure to invite them out since we are open to having new members. I want to thank Dale for all of work it takes to put together the newsletter each month.

We continue the normal schedule of Thursday night sessions, 1st & 3rd Saturdays. Saturday sessions will start at 9:00am and run until 12:00pm.



Joe Pritchett
President - Cowtown Model RR Club

CMRRC New Member



The Cowtown Model Railroad Club has a new member. I would like to introduce Charles Cruikshank. Chuck joined the club in April and has been out working on the layout and learning how we operate on the layout. Chuck grew up in Pennsylvania and was interested in the Penn Railroad. He was a member of a local Pennsylvania model railroad club when he lived there. He was an engineer for a product support company. He also spent 30 years volunteering as an EMT (Emergency Medical Technician). He has an HO scale layout that he has in his son's barn.



TREASURER'S REPORT

by Dale Schmidtbleicher

Membership stands at 10 active members. All members are currently up to date with dues.

As always, a full treasurer's report will be made at the Club's monthly meeting.

For those member's paying dues quarterly, the next submission will be by July 1st.

Please mail your dues to the following address:

CMRRC
P.O. Box 331513
Fort Worth, TX 76163

Make payable to: "Cowtown Model Railroad Club".



www.cmrrc.net

We continue to get traffic reports from WIX on the number of visitors and hits on our cmrrc.net website. People are still looking at us. In April we had 33 visits on our website which was down from the previous month. Of those, 90% were new views and 10% repeat viewers.

We are on occasion getting some requests/feedback from our cmrrc.net website and I will forward any information of interest to the membership.

Member information can be downloaded from the website. Click on the required topic on the front page, download the PDF file you are interested in.

Operation

We have made some repairs to broken switches on the layout. There is still one in Gila Basin that needs work, or needs to be replaced. This will soon be addressed.



Yard and spur track still needs to be cleaned.

A partial car check in Cimarron and St. Charles yards was done a few sessions ago. Operators are not properly locating cars to the correct track. In the yards, the track numbers start at the closest track to the front façade and increase as you go back. Also, on engineer sheets some cars are not being delivered or picked up along the various routes. Please check your engineer sheet on local trains for each town, spur, or industry. Most switching chores are printed in black.

We will need to complete a car check to make sure all the cars are where the computer thinks they are.

We hope to see more members attending in the future.

Update on Construction

by Dale Schmidtbleicher

What's new in the area of layout construction?

Joe is reworking the track in the St Charles downtown industry area. He has taken out the "hump" on the two spur tracks by reworking the support structure. We will have to rework in scenery in that area but the rail transition is now a lot smoother.



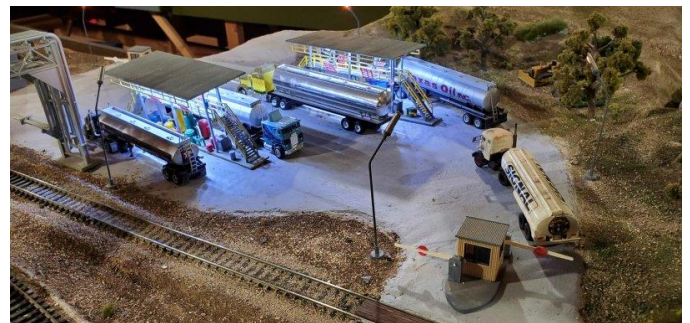
We have a broken switch in Gila Basin in the worst location, mid-center on a road crossing. We hope to be able to repair it without having to rid it out which would be a major headache.

Dale and George have been ballasting track. Our newest member, Chuck, has been put to work

adding scenery. Tom is still addressing electrical panel issues.



Dale has fixed the lighting electrical connections to the truck loading area of the Mountain States Refinery. A couple of light poles still need work.



We have been running a few tracking cleaning cars around the layout when possible.

MONTHLY SCHEDULE

General Meeting:

The monthly Railroad Club meeting is held at 7:00 PM on the 3rd Monday of the month.



The meeting is held at the Handley Community Center in the first-floor room.

Normal Work/Operate Schedule:

The normal work schedule is as follows:

Thursday Nights 6:30 PM-9:00 PM

1st & 3rd Saturday 9:00 AM-12 Noon.

Should a work session be cancelled for any reason, an e-mail will be sent out, time permitting.

Operating sessions will be announced by e-mail prior to the scheduled event.

Dependable Performance from Inexpensive Car Kits

by *Dan Osborn*

"Shake the box" kits have long offered good quality at reasonable prices. Although a number of manufacturers, including *Life-Like Proto 2000*, *Atlas*, *Intermountain*, *Kato* and *Red Caboose*, now offer "upscale" (more expensive) plastic models, *Athearn* still provides the best value, especially for the beginning modeler. Even with their recent price increases, *MDC/Roundhouse*, and especially *Athearn*, are still the mainstays of the model railroad market and the backbone of most of our fleets, and are so popular that hobby shops often have packaged *Athearn* kits into starter sets.

While fit and finish are important to us, a car that leaves its coupler on the right-of-way, or picks a switch during an open house or operating session, is more than just an embarrassment – it's a major nuisance. Usually such a car either ends up in a "dead" pile or back in your fleet, its problems forgotten until the next time the car ends up in a consist and produces another headache. These "shake the box" kits can use some minor tweaking to improve their dependability and performance. The problems and headaches only multiply if your goal is to assemble as many car kits in as short a time span as possible. Remember, this is a hobby! Model railroading is fun! This is not a race or a production line! There is an old saying that "there is always time to do it right the second time." In other words, take your time, do it right, and enjoy your hobby. Let's get started.

If you don't own an NMRA Standards gauge, now is the time to get one. You will also need a #11 X-acto knife, a needle-nose pliers, a small rule with one end marked in 64ths, a needle file set, a large

flat file, at least one Kadee coupler height gauge (I use two), a coupler trip-pin pliers (unless you feel comfortable bending them with your needle-nose), #0 Phillips and 1/8" straight blade screwdrivers, a good side-cutting pliers, some sort of tweezers, a variety of drill bits (and holder), a 10-32 tap, a postage or dietary scale, and your favorite weighting material (lead weights, sheet lead, etc.). You also need a variety of glues. I prefer Plastruct liquid cement, Pro-Weld, 3M silicone glue, Super Glue brand Thick Gel CA, and Zap-A-Gap CA+ by Pacer. You will also need a "shake the box" car kit. We will discuss *Athearn* as they represent the majority of my large stock of cars, and I have probably built well over 300 of their kits in the last five or six years.



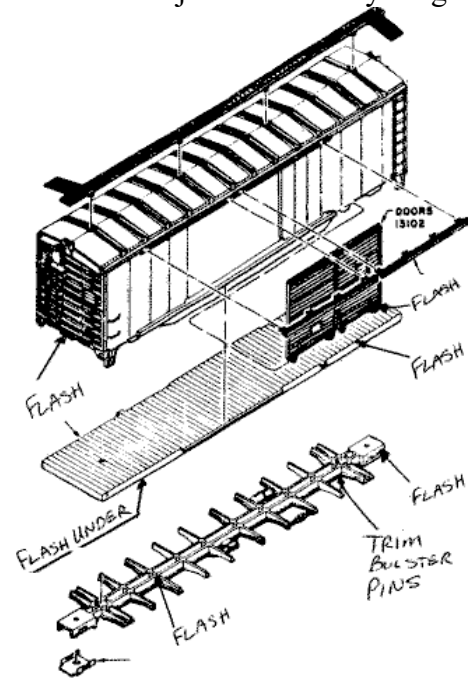
Every car that I have ever encountered (including the fancier ones by the new guys) has needed molding flash cleaned off somewhere. Take your #11 knife and gently clean off any flash that you can find. Carefully check the underframe, the back side of side frames, any place you can see a parting line. This is extremely important along the sides of the coupler boxes! Be careful not to remove the ears that the coupler covers clip over. Now, check the bottom edges of the car ends where the couplers protrude and clean any flash or excess paint. Cars that use a lower underframe need special attention, as they have little pins on the upper sides. The pins are what is left of the casting gates from the manufacturing process and can interfere with proper fit of the frame into the car body. Boxcar floors need to be shaved along their long edges. Boxcar doors usually have flash on the back side and inside the lower guide ears, as well as along lower edges. Check your other small parts as well, as they usually have some flash. And all cars generally have a little nib in the coupler box which is needed for proper operation of horn-hook couplers, but is unwanted when installing *Kadees*. Carve this nib out carefully. Handrails on tank cars should be adjusted for squareness, and all holes should be drilled through where ends of the handrails enter the

car body. This tip goes for *Athearn* engine handrails as well.

Have you noticed that there has been no mention of assembly? We're not ready for that yet! Get the wheelsets out and examine them. Remove any little nibs from their back side, then roll the wheelset on something flat, like a glass tabletop. If they roll smoothly, install them in the side frames and roll them on the flat surface again. If there is any indication of hop, check for flash on the wheel flange, and then test roll on a piece of track. If all checks out, move on to the other set. *Athearn* wheelsets are usually close to gauge, but most are also unacceptable for intense operation. The NMRA standards gauge is used to accurately check wheel gauge. I usually set my wheelsets to the widest possible setting, while still remaining within gauge. You must also check to see that the wheels are centered on their axles. This is where the small ruler comes in. If the wheels aren't centered, they will climb rails, points, joints ... anything they can. Next, let's move on to the underframe bolsters. This is where I reduce wobble. Remember those horn-hook couplers you threw away? Get one out of the trash, check it for flash around the pivot hole, and placing the round pivot end over the bolster pivot, bottom it on the bolster pin. Take your #11 knife and carve off any of the bolster pin that is sticking out past the horn-hook. Do this to both ends.

Now we will mount the couplers in the box. Examine the *Athearn* retaining cover, making certain that it has been bent squarely and that the legs are equal. Put in the bronze centering spring and the coupler according to *Kadee's* instructions and then place the *Athearn* cover over the retaining ears. Using the needle nose pliers, squeeze the cover tight to the frame on both sides of the coupler box. Do this for both ends. If you are dealing with one of *Athearn's* quad or twin hoppers, you will probably need to clip a small amount off of the cover leading edge, as it interferes with the underframe and will not clip on correctly. I have also found that hopper car bolsters are not square and level, requiring some carving around the pivot to level the truck. If this is not done, when the truck is attached, it will tilt the

truck, lifting the lead axle, causing the wheelset to ride up and derail on just about everything.



Place the trucks on a piece of track and place the frame over the trucks. Do not screw together yet! Put a *Kadee* height checker on the rails and push the frame toward it (this is where two height checkers come in handy - one on each side of the car). If the trip-pin hits the height checker, bend the trip-pin up until it clears, after checking to see that the coupler is at the correct height. If the coupler is low, *Kadee* has two thicknesses of fiber washers for placement between the truck and the frame (0.10" and 0.16" thickness). If the coupler is too high (doubtful, but possible), you will have to cut a shim for inside the coupler box, above the coupler. After coupler and trip-pin heights have been adjusted for both ends, weigh the entire car - couplers, trucks, body and all. Notice that I have not said to assemble anything yet! According to NMRA guidelines, cars should weigh one-half ounce per inch of car length, plus one ounce. On enclosed cars, I use automobile wheel weights to bring the weight up. On open cars I use sheet lead or "Heavyweights" from *T&J Rail Services* (strip lead in different thicknesses). Glue in the additional weight.

Now assemble the car. Glue parts, when possible, from the inside to reduce the chance of marring the

finish of the car. Trim the shaft on the brake wheel in half so that the wheel fits close to the car body. Tighten the truck screws until any wobble disappears, but allow them to pivot freely. Now set the new car in your yard, as it is finished.

Passenger cars need attention too. The *Athearn* streamline cars have a heavy coat of paint in their window openings that must be removed if you want the windows to fit. As with the other cars, remove all flash. Check and adjust all wheelsets. Use a razor saw to cut the windows into more manageable pieces. Use liquid cement from inside to carefully glue in the windows, taking advantage of capillary action to draw the glue into the joints. Glue sparingly! This goes for the heavyweight cars as well. Correct the weight of the cars, then move to the trucks. Using your side cutter, remove the talgo coupler tongue from each truck. For *Athearn* passenger cars, I use the complete #5 *Kadee* box and coupler. Making certain that the coupler clears the car body, mark the location of the coupler box. Then drill and tap for 10-32 screws. I use nylon screws from *Detail Associates*. Dry assemble (no glue) the car body to the frame and attach the coupler and trucks, then check the coupler and trip-pin height and adjust accordingly. If the coupler is too high, shim with styrene. If low, shim the truck or carve material from the floor of the car at the coupler mounting location. I know of no one that makes shims for the *Athearn* style passenger trucks, so you're on your own.

MDC and *Walthers* cars are very similar and need many of the same adjustments. The most common trick is the bolster pivot pin trimming. Flash is very common, and cleaning this off adds to the look as well as the fit of the car. On *MDC* metal frame cars, the large file is a must, as well as the #11 knife and the needle files. I clean the underframes and file the clearances until the frame slides easily into the car body, as painting the frame will close these gaps quickly.

I especially like the *Walthers* sprung trucks. *Walthers* provides them in a variety of styles and bearing configurations, but they require a little "tuning" work. Most difficult is the area where the bolster slides in the side frame, in the spring area. Work this area with the #11 knife until the bolster slides smoothly, but do not damage the spring retaining pins. The springs are a little stiff, but you can play with them by clipping a turn at a time off of them with a small side cutter. *Kadee* coupler springs also fit well.

I usually sit in front of the television with my wife, after my daughter goes to sleep, to assemble cars. It generally takes me about an hour to do an *Athearn* or plastic frame *MDC*, and about two to three hours for a metal *MDC* frame car, so I can usually get two a night into shape. The payoff comes when my trains run almost flawlessly on the Columbia Club's modular layout for hours at a time.

Happy kit building!



