The Trolleyville Times

November 2007

SEE CUSTOM TRAXX DEMONSTRATE DCC OPERATION WITH OVERHEA

Allied Model Trains "Grand Opening"

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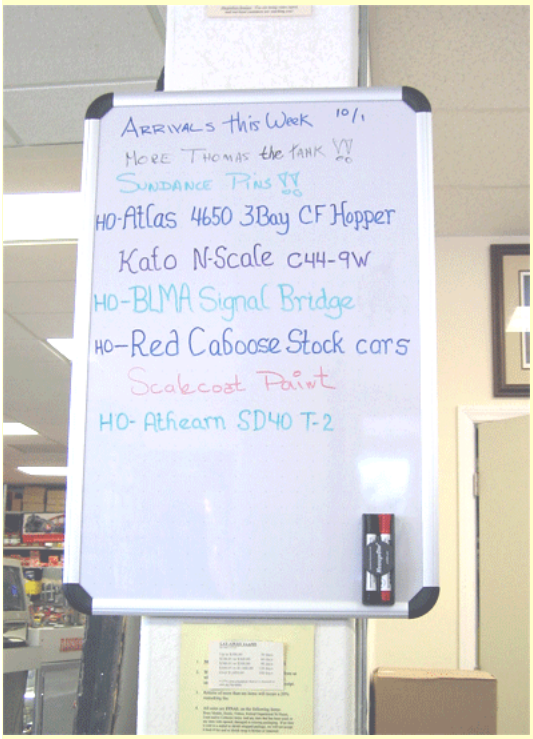
Allied Model Trains held it's Grand Opening on Saturday, October 6, 2007. Every one of the hundreds of customers who stopped in between the hours of 10:00 AM and 6:00PM was eligible for benefits. First of all, The store had been freshly stocked with many of the new releases, and these arrivals were noted on a board installed for that very purpose.



To add to your shopping pleasure, bottled water and Coca-Cola in both regular and diet versions were available in cold cans along with fresh fruit and various types of soft chewy cookies. Then there were small bite size sandwiches, easy to hold in one hand so you hold your purchases with the other.

Although there were a steady flow of customers all day, crowds were really large around 11:30AM and 2:15PM with long lines at the counters to make their purchases and get their free locomotive or freight car. In the next photo, Fred and Dave are handling the line of customers at one of the two check-out areas.

San Francisco Continues Work on Muni Class B Car 162!

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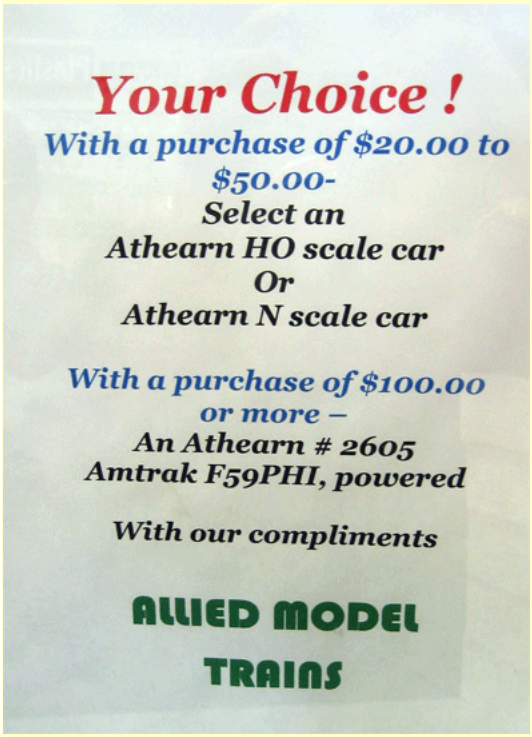
On Saturday, September 30th, while returning from a trip to Northern California, we happened to pass by the San Francisco Municipal Railway Metro Center as car 162 was being moved from the DTE track in the 425 Geneva Building to the Overhaul Shop. What some perceived as a simple move was compounded by a few problems. First, the car has no motors, having had the motors removed for complete renovation. So Breda LRV 1471 was called upon to provide the muscle.

Second, the wheels have flanges from an earlier era with much wider flanges. These flanges cause problems on dual guarded areas of track such as turnouts. So the car attempted derailments at half the the turnouts that it traversed. However, the professional and knowledgeable crew on hand managed to have the right people on hand with the right tools to get the job done. Two hours later, the car was in the desired area in the Overhaul Shop. The wheels are being re-profiled and the re-built motors are being installed.

Significant progress on the refurbishment of this car has been made by the magic minds of MUNI as you can see from the interior view seen below:

Streetcar refurbishment at Muni continues on a daily basis. Keep tabs on the operation by viewing the Market Street Railway web site.

Some new items were displayed on the front counter and additional qualified help was on hand to meet and greet customers. To display the "New and Friendly" atmosphere now pervading all aspects of the new Allied Model Trains, each customer was greeted with the following, after they passed the refreshment table.



Many HO and N scale layouts in Southern California will be running trains with these cars and locomotives for years to come.

There is a lively air in the new & friendly Allied. For the first time in many years, all the current employees, all of which did worked under the former ownership, are eager to come to work, assist each other and serve customers. George, shown

Bachmann HO Scale Peter Witt Photos

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Bachmann recently posted photos of the HO scale Baltimore and Saint Louis Peter Witt models on their web site. These will be great trolleys for a 1930-1050 era layout. Although a specific Baltimore prototype, there were similar cars in other cities. Philadelphia was considering ordering several similar cars, as referenced in "Surface Cars of Philadelphia" 1911-1965, by Harold E. Cox, page 58, in the late 1920's/early 1930's but the depression of 1929 killed those plans. The photos are of the yellow Baltimore car and the red Saint Louis version.

In case you were not aware, Micro Mark was offering an undecorated version of this car for $68.50 plus shipping. We know many trolley fans who have ordered one.

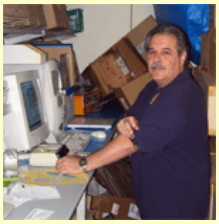
[DCC, from column 1]

On this day, the club began to demonstrate the practicality of operating trolley cars via overhead wire using DCC. After several hours of running the club found that overhead wire electrical contact seems to be improved in some respects due to the higher voltage in the wire. At the beginning of a session, it was found that a dab of ACT-6006 Track & Rail Cleaner solves any initial problems and quickly and has an even greater effect it had when used with overhead wire running under analog operation. ACT-6006 is produced by Aero-Car Hobby Lubricants, P.O. Box 336, Western Springs, IL 60558, 708-246-9027, fax 708-246-7648. We normally take a Q-tip or similar swab and rub under the wire in several spots at the beginning of any session and that's it for dirty wire. It is preferable to clean the trolley shoes/wheels of cars that have not run in a long time as they are usually severely oxidized. We normally employ a circular wire brush in a Dremel tool to do this. Each time we have a session or a display, we have to swab a little less. Sometimes, we do not have to do anything. The cars just run unless a car has not been run for a long time and the trolley shoe or wheel collector has really oxidized. Our current display modules will probably be operated in the analog mode for some time to come but the subway car module is already DCC operated and the new downtown city loop, when completed, will be operated by DCC.

There are a few peculiarities. Double end cars wired for trolley pole reverse can remain in that mode when converted to DCC as we realize that these cars will still be operated on analog layouts for years to come. See the wiring plan developed by the SCTC for our cars. But we recommend that you pay attention to the contacts at the trolley pole hooks. When we were testing our car 4, we addressed the car and the front headlight came on but we tried to run the car, the LED headlight went out and the car failed to move. When we turned the throttle off, the headlight came back on again. In the analog mode, an illuminated headlight meant good contact. But, since we were using an LED for the headlight, it was making sufficient contact to pass power to the headlight but not enough contact to pass both the LED current and the signals from the decoder. So we will be flattening out those round trolley pole hooks that we have been used for years. After we improved the front pole contact, the LED remained bright and the car operated.

below left, is shown assisting a customer with a Lionel purchase, while Fred Hill and Cyndie, assist John McWhirter, a member of the Southern California Traction Club, with his purchase. John has been a consistent visitor ever since being the first customer in the new store on July 21st.

Nick, shown below left, was caught earlier in the day ensuring that all the new items had been received and were on the floor prior to the opening of the store. Below right, Bob, the store DCC guru, was also caught explaining the many facets of DCC to a customer while his wife, Trudy, patiently tried to get a word in.



After the day was completed, store owners toasted the new store and the employees with Champagne and held a dinner for all permanent and associate employees at Sir John's Steak House, a local Culver City restaurant with long standing strong community ties. But before that, some of the owners, employees and associates gathered at the counter for one photo. Shown next, l to r, are Dave, Fred, Sam, George and Brian. Not shown were Bob, Cyndie, another George, Jeff and Nick.

About the only thing about Allied Model Trains that has not changed is the name itself. Today's Allied has a lively feel, a forward looking approach and conveys to the customer a strong desire to stay in business for years to come. There is a spring in the new Allied's step. You can feel it as soon as you walk in, especially if you frequented the old store. The young people who were in the store during the day were model train fans and seemed to really enjoy themselves, even if the model train layouts were all gone. The new store is smaller and items are stocked in lesser amounts but the staff is trying to get a little of everything so if you visit and do not see what you want, please tell the staff and they will try and get it for you. The often cold, sometimes museum type atmosphere of the old store is gone. Allen Drucker, the former owner of Allied Model Trains from 1975 until earlier this year stated in the local press that he sold the business because "I always told myself I didn't want to be the old man running the train store". We are convinced that he was already that, and had been that for some time and probably was the only one that did not know it! But now the "old man running the train

Bob Santelli's major area of expertise is his extensive knowledge of DCC and the installation of decoders. He has been working in DCC sine 1989 and has developed a deep knowledge and understanding of the subject. He installed the first decoder in our first trolley, a Bowser PCC trolley, painted for the Philadelphia Transportation Company's "Safety" Car 2128.

Bob is shown above in his Allied Model Trains workshop installing a sound systems in an N-scale engine. As we had been told and had expected, cars without decoders can be run on DCC layouts, but due to the convention used in converting cars to overhead wire, such cars will run in reverse to run in the same direction as decoder equipped cars. They should not be allowed to stand idle as the motors can heat up and be damaged. There is a "singing" from the motor when the motor is stopped so when such cars are not moving, we either pull the poles or place the car on a dead section of track.

But, despite all the detractors that have told us, we can tell you that DCC works with overhead wire and so far seems to work well. We spent an entire day at Allied Model Trains on Saturday, October 20th running five cars on our demonstration layout, sometimes two at a time. Three trolleys, a Bowser PCC and a Bachmann Brill, both equipped with Bowser 99 mechanisms and A-line 20040 flywheels, and a brass Soho LARy Class M, equipped with an A-line 40324 motor and 20006 flywheel, were equipped with Train Control Systems M1 decoders. Two other cars, both models of Philadelphia's 1981 Kawasaki cars, were equipped with Bowser 125100 mechanisms and A-line flywheels but not equipped with decoders were also run during the day sometimes with one of the decoder equipped cars. As we went to press, a fourth car, an MTS PRT/PTC 5200 series double end car, was being prepared for another decoder, this car would be equipped with complete with headlights and rear red lights.

Train Control Systems decoders were recommended by Allied Model Trains mainly due to their "Ask No Questions" one-year warranty. We did "fry" the first one we tried to install and TCS replaced it with immediately at no cost. Another one malfunctioned this very week and was returned to TCS for replacement.

The problems that we have been told about do not seem to be occurring. Decoders are not "going crazy" when there are power interruptions due to dirty wire. On the contrary, operation is at least as good as in the analog mode and it might be somewhat better. The cars seem to run smoother on the DC power fed to motors from the decoder. We are in the process of converting more cars to DCC as the decoders make them run slower and smoother in the DC or analog mode. But since our test track and our demonstration module allows cars to be operated in either the analog or digital mode with the "flip of the switch", we get to see first hand the effects of each. After over six hours of continued operation, we considered the day a success for DCC. Toward the end of the test day, Bob Santelli and George Huckaby posed behind the demonstration module for this photo at the end of the day.

store" is gone. Come down and have some fun and enjoy model trains again! We sure did!

More Progress on DCC with Overhead Wire Operation!

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Last year it became obvious to members of the Southern California Traction Club (SCTC) that Digital Command Control (DCC) had made significant technical progress in HO scale steam, diesel and electric locomotives. The sound and smoke in some cases had reached new heights of realism. But there was not a single HO scale Ready-To-Run trolley, let alone one with trolley sounds. Then earlier this year, Bachmann announced a Ready-To-Run trolley equipped with a DCC decoder that would be available later this year. The car was advertised as capable of operating from track or overhead wire. Recently, new ITC DCC-ready steam locomotives were announced in the December 2007 issue of Model Railroader. It seems that DCC and associated subjects are everywhere and the handwriting appears to be on the wall.

So it became obvious that the problems, if any, with DCC operation using overhead wire, had to be explored. After much consultation with Bob Santelli of Allied Model Trains, it was decided to take Custom Traxx demonstration module 970 and convert it to DCC operation. It was also decided to keep the Innovator 3000 that currently powered the module so that all trolleys could still be operated. In August 2006, we had installed our first DCC decoder, a Train Control Systems (TCS) decoder in our Bowser PCC car, finished as PTC 2128, the "Safety" car. We had operated the car solely in the analog mode until earlier this month. The club had been working on a downtown city loop to be operated with DCC along with the subway car module but it had been delayed with the problems of installing a computer program for automatic operation of the subway cars.

In mid-October, a Digitrax Zephyr Command Station was obtained and connected to the demonstration module. The Zephyr has controls that were similar to a conventional streetcar controller with a controller and reverser and has more than sufficient power to run such a small 36" by 32" module. A DPDT switch was also installed to allow almost instant change from analog to digital operation. The switch can be seen in the side of the module directly below the front door of the Light Rail Vehicle. Although it is strongly recommended that you allow a few seconds when switching power sources to the decoder and only when the cars are NOT running! (We learned the hard way!)

By October 16th, the Digitrax Zephyr was able to be connected to both Module 970, shown above, and the SCTC test track. Both are equipped with Innovator 3500 analog control systems and the track is electrically accessed via a DPDT switch that prevents DCC signals from entering the Innovator throttles.

[See DCC, column 2]

Testing is far from completed. We will be running these cars and any additional cars that we equip with decoders at the International Railfair in Roseville, CA next month. The display may be back at Allied Model Trains sometime this month for another display. Meanwhile, DCC for trolleys is in its infancy. As of now, there are no HO scale ready-to-run DCC equipped trolleys on the market but that may change before the end of the year when the Bachmann Baltimore Peter Witt is released. Until that time, DCC is not for beginning trolley modelers unless the modeler is already familiar with it. DCC is a fascinating subject. The more we learn, the more we see we need to learn and it seems to be fun learning it.

But as of now, to add DCC to an existing HO scale trolley means installing and readdressing the decoder. This requires some knowledge of DCC and the system that you are using. On all cars, one must take extreme care in locating the decoder where is will not contact the motor or flywheel. Installation in a single pole car is relatively simple. Cars with two poles can be wired with the trolley pole reverse left intact for running on analog layouts but the electrical contact at the trolley pole hook can be a problem. Sometimes new decoders are NOT programmed correctly so they should be tested prior to installation. There are testers available and they are provided with some of the DCC systems when sold. Loy's Toys used to provide a great decoder tester but we have been told that they could eventually be available again from Ulrich Models, Boulder, CO.

As we went to press, we had been running our test layout every day, or every other day to test the overhead wire operation. We found that two of the three cars would start without any problem. The third would need a touch of the ACT-6006 and operation was flawless for the entire session after that. We are learning that under analog there are two types of contact with the overhead wire, contact and no contact. With DCC there is a third type, insufficient or partial. This will be explained more in the Trolleyville Schoolhouse that should be available by the end of this year.

DCC is not without its problems but it has so much potential to increase the fun of operating model trolleys. So we will continue to explore all the options until we succeed or meet a "brick wall". Just think of where personal computers started and where they are now. DCC or some form of digital control is the future of the hobby and the problems seen so far are all workable now or will be very soon. This conversion to DCC and the lessons learned will be the subject of that same Trolleyville Schoolhouse lesson.
