

NORTH CAROLINA PORTABLE SWITCHING LAYOUT

Story and photos by Monte Heppe

Our local club, the Intracoastal Model Railroad Club located in Brunswick County North Carolina, is a multi-gauge club with everything from Z to G, and scale to tinplate. It has a number of portable and modular layouts that are set up

large gauge. The result is a portable S gauge switching layout serving six industries and a team track in a 2' by 8' space.

It is built in three sections that are hinged together. The center section

switches. Since this is an industrial area, I did not use any roadbed. The track layout maximizes the number of industrial sidings and makes switching interesting. I intended the lead parallel to the WB & S interchange to hold 2 cars and an engine, but it turned out to be a little short. This makes run around moves even more complex.



at few local train shows, but mostly at a variety of community events. This exposes lots of non modelers to the hobby. Unfortunately the only gauge not represented among the layouts is S. Obviously there was a need for a layout to introduce S gauge to the area. As there are only two other S gaugers in the club, I didn't want to take on a modular layout.

I wanted a layout that would be easily transported and set up by one person; be able to demonstrate the advantages of S gauge; feature state of the art components; and show the ability to have an interesting layout in a small area with reasonably

is approximately 24" by 48" and fits over a folding table. The end sections are about 24" by 23" and fold on top of the center section. The ends of the folding sections are supported by removable legs that screw into base. The frame sides are 1" X 4" boards. The scenery base is 2" foam set 1" below the top of the frame. This gives a 2" clearance between the sections when folded for track and low scenery elements. Mounting the hinges 1" above the scenery base allows the track at the section joints to separate when folded. 1" by 3" boards were used for the frame ends at the joints between sections. These match in height with the recessed foam base. As shown in the pictures, 3/8" holes were drilled through the end pieces and 3/8" dowels were glued into the holes in the center section ends. These insure alignment of the sections when unfolded.

Track is a mix of S-Helper and American Models flex track (it's what I had on hand) with American Models

Motive power is an S-Helper SW-9 with DCC and Tsunami sound. Control is via a Digitrax Empire Builder starter set. The system components are housed in a fan ventilated box that attaches to the back of the layout with interlocking plate picture hangers. I chose DCC as it would provide good control for a switching layout and it is something I've wanted to try.

Track power leads for each section are separate so there are no wires between sections. The track leads are routed underneath the layout to the back of each section and terminate in a polarized two pin connector. Three corresponding connectors from the system box plug into each section.

Buildings are a mix of kits and scratch built:

- McPherson's Tool and Machinery - Twin Whistle kit
- CTRR office - NASG Armco kit
- Midnight Oil - plastic pipe couplings, Walther's pipe detail kit and AF accessory shed.
- South County Distributors - foam core and brick paper
- H&K warehouse - foam core, brick paper and sheet plastic.
- Engine shed - Plastruct shapes
- Oyster shell bin, wharf and team track ramp - strip wood

The wharf and warehouse are intended to represent structures that extend beyond the layout. I wanted to include the oyster shell recycler



to keep things local, but this presented the problem of how to model 1/64 oyster shells. A request for suggestions to the S Yahoo group seemed to have everyone stumped or wondering why anyone would want to model oyster shells. About two weeks later, Joe Haenn, of Joe's train Repair, suggested Quinoa, a grain that goes back to the Inca's. The grains have just about the right size and shape. I carved a foam block to the right shape for a pile, covered it with spray adhesive and rolled it in the grain. I then sealed the grain with multiple coats of Floquil Figure Flat (the grain swells if it absorbs water), I dusted it with flat white spray paint and dabbed it with a black alcohol wash for highlights.

Ballast and ground cover are Woodland Scenics products. Roadways are Valspar Stone spray paint applied directly to the foam base. Even though the can says enamel, it does not affect the foam. There are several colors indicated only by the cap color. I used one that is mostly gray with white and black flecks.

The only club layout that has a theme is the HO Wilmington, Brunswick and Southern named for a real road that ran from Wilmington, NC to Southport. The HO version expands the line along the coast of Brunswick county to the towns of Shallotte and Calabash. I named my railroad the Calabash Terminal RR to keep with the local theme and included an interchange with the WB&S. Calabash bills itself as the Seafood Capital of the World. I chose a shrimp as the CTRR logo which can be seen on the engine and the CTRR office sign.

Operations are via a switch list made up before each session. Cars on the interchange track can be changed to add variety. So far it typically takes me about 30 minutes to switch 6 cars. DCC provides great control for switching and the Tsunami sound really adds to the experience.



Calabash Terminal, huh? Jimmy Durante would be proud.

