6 Ways to Improve Your
Toy Train
Scenery

A supplement to *Classic Toy Trains* magazine

Introduction

ONE OF THE GREAT things about toy train layouts is the ability to add scenery and details to your satisfaction without fear of some invisible panel of experts judging your work as "unworthy." In the world of toy trains, you can make your railroad as realistic – or as abstract – as you wish. Like the famous fast-food chain slogan, you can have it your way.

The CLASSIC TOY TRAINS staff has identified three broad categories of toy train layouts, based largely on scenery and details.

The first layout style we call "Toy Train." The surface of these basic layouts can be painted wood, paper grass sheets, or various types of carpet representing lawns, fields, or bare earth. Toy train-style layouts are the realm of time-honored tubular Lionel track and pre- and postwar-style accessories, which are often alive with motion and vibrant colors but may have no known prototype or may be grossly oversized or undersized compared to the trains on the layout. Trains and accessories are run for their own sake and are not keyed to the real world. There is no higher purpose to the layout other than to have fun.

The second style we call "Traditional." Here a layout builder is trying for a more realistic approach, but without abandoning all of the toy train-style elements of model railroading's past. Layouts may use tubular track, or they may use more realistic track produced by GarGraves or MTH. There is an attempt to include Lionel's more realistic postwar structures and accessories, as well as authentic modern accessories made by MTH, K-Line, and other manufacturers. Still, you may find a discreet oversized Lionel gateman popping out of a shed as a train passes, or spot a modern Lionel "disco ball" nuclear reactor glowing ominously on the horizon. But traditional-style layouts have textured scenery, including hills and valleys populated by realistic looking trees and vegetation made from dyed ground foam. And all of the trains and accessories on the layout have plausible reasons for being there.

The third style we called "Hi-rail." The generally accepted parameters of a hi-rail layout include a track plan with a sense of purpose and destination, realistic track, and accurately proportioned scenery that models a specific spot on the map. Trains are scale-sized models rather than approximations of O or S gauge, and locomotives, rolling stock, and structures all – without exception – reflect those of a specific railroad and a clearly defined place and time.

Regardless of which style you favor, the scenery projects on the following pages are easy to understand and build, and will inspire you to make your railroad, whatever its style, all that you want it to be! – *Bob Keller*

Add a gorge

to your layout

Stan Trzoniec creates a scenery feature that looks great on an O or S gauge railroad

NO MATTER WHAT size or scale layout you have, including a gorge or creek bed will attract the attention of visitors. Even if your S, O, or Standard gauge railroad already has track and scenery, you can build a gorge.

Cookie-cutting a foundation

The first step in adding a gorge involves cutting into the tabletop to accommodate an open area. Begin by marking an outline on the tabletop where your gorge will be. When determining its width, keep in mind that the typical O gauge trestle bridge is 24 inches long.

This gorge has a 22-inch opening, which leaves an inch on each end to support the trestle bridge. Farther in from the front edge of my layout, the gorge narrows and is crossed by a second track. A plate girder bridge is used for the second crossing.

Once you've checked your gorge's location, use a saber saw to cut an opening in the plywood tabletop. You may also have to cut through some bracing beneath the tabletop. (**fig. 1**).

If necessary, add a new brace farther in from the edge of the layout or closer to

◀ You can add this neat gorge to your own layout. Follow these directions and you'll see how easy it is to add this scenic feature to your railroad.

the floor to make up for the brace you cut.

Next, you need to decide how deep your gorge will be. If you really want to go wild, building a deep gorge down to the floor level may be in the cards, although a dramatically deep gorge may look out of place if the rest of your layout's terrain is relatively flat.

This layout uses a shallower basin about 4 inches deep. Use a 1-by-4 piece of lumber to frame the sides of the gorge and a sheet of plywood to serve as the bed of the gorge.

Cut three equal pieces of the 1-by-4 to serve as the walls of the gorge. If your gorge is deeper or shallower, use a different width of wood accordingly. Using carpenter's glue and 1¼-inch-long drywall screws, secure two of these "walls" to the left and right undersides of the cutout area so they're perpendicular to the edge of the layout. Then secure the third piece to the rear of the opening (**fig. 2**).

Take the sheet of plywood and cut off a section that's about the size of your opening (my opening measures approximately 22 by 30 inches).

This piece serves as the bed of the gorge. Again, use wood glue and drywall screws to secure this piece to the three 1-by-4 supports. When finished, you should have a three-sided "compartment" to scenick.

Fig. 1: Start by cutting out the shape of the gorge and any underlying braces. The width of the cut in the tabletop is a couple of inches less than the bridge that spans it.

Fig. 2: Next frame the gorge with 1-by-4 sides and a base made of plywood. Be sure that the pieces of wood fit flush to the front edge of the layout.

Fig. 3: Once the abutments are in place, you can cut cardboard strips shaped to the rough outline of the walls of the gorge and staple them in place.

Fig. 4: Now you're ready to place overlapping pieces of PlasterWrap on top of the cardboard strips and let them dry for a day or two.

Fig. 5: After covering the PlasterWrap with a coat of Gypsolite, you can start painting and texturing the gorge to match your scenery.

Fig. 6: Details include grass on the banks, talus, ground cover, and lichen. Once you've painted the bottom of the streambed, you can add "water" to finish this "gorge-ous" scene.

Fig. 7: Before pouring Enviro-Tex into the creek bed, place a tarp on the floor and a 1-by-4 at the edge to act as a dam. Remove the board as the Enviro-Tex sets but before it bonds to the material.

Scenery base

Ready for the real fun? I'm referring to making the scenery surrounding the gorge. First, though, I decided that, for added realism, I wanted concrete abutments to support the center and ends of the trestle bridge and the ends of the girder bridge. I bought my abutments from Scenic Express, a model railroad scenery supplier.

After checking that the abutments were the right height and making adjustments, I weathered them with a wash of rubbing alcohol and black India ink. I let the weathering dry overnight. Then I secured the abutments in place with dabs of Liquid Nails on their bases.

Whether you include abutments or not, the next step is to cut strips of corrugated cardboard and staple them from the edge of the tabletop down to the plywood bed of your gorge. Using the strips and a bit of artistic license, contour the scenery so it flows down into the gorge (**fig. 3**).

Since the gorge on my layout is rather shallow, I decided to combine a dry wash with a small creek that is low at this time of the year because of the lack of rain. Other alternatives would be to make the gorge full of water as if it were a rain-swollen stream or river. Again, it's your choice.

I made banks for my creek with a material called PlasterWrap, which I rolled up to form the basic contour of the water flow. This also let me form a "dam"

to confine the Enviro-Tex two-part clear epoxy that I use to model water. Both PlasterWrap and Enviro-Tex are available from model railroad scenery companies such as Woodland Scenics and Scenic Express, which advertise in CTT.

PlasterWrap is just what it sounds like – a mesh wrapping material impregnated with dry plaster. It was originally developed as a convenient way for physicians to put broken bones into casts. Be aware that this material can be messy. If your layout is sitting on a nice carpet, you ought to put a tarp under it to spare the rug.

Use an old pan or tray for preparing the PlasterWrap. Disposable paint-roller trays are another alternative. Fill your tray about a third of the way with lukewarm water. Cut the PlasterWrap in strips 6 to 8 inches long.

Dip the strips in the water; you should be able to work with three or four at a time. Lift them out and let the excess water drain off. Then drape the wet strips over your cardboard latticework. Let the strips overlap for added strength (**fig. 4**).

Don't worry about getting a star for neatness. Have fun and let everything dry for a day or two, depending on room and humidity conditions. Then get ready to finish the rough scenery with Gypsolite, another material.

Gypsolite is a lightweight gypsum base-coat plaster. Look for it at home improvement centers. I've found that a

mix of 3 parts Gypsolite to 1 part water works best. It creates a consistency that lets you brush on this mix with relative ease while still being able to take time to work it the way you want.

Place the 3 parts of Gypsolite into a washable container and add half of the water to start the mix. Then pour more water into the mix and keep turning it until you get something like wet concrete. You can then begin to lay the Gypsolite onto the walls of your gorge with an old brush (**fig. 5**).

Allow for natural flows in the terrain. If you have an area where you think water will spill into the gorge, shape the Gypsolite with your brush to suggest erosion from the water. Later add details like talus (small rocks) and debris to show the direction of the water as it reaches the bottom of the gorge.

Paint and details

After the Gypsolite has dried, you can paint and detail it right down to the water line (**fig. 6**).

You can add earth to the base of the creek, followed by some coloring for the water. Start with a darker color in the middle of the creek for depth, and let it become lighter as it gets to the shallow shore. Since I had plenty of greens and browns on my layout already, I took a bit of artistic license and used hues of blue.

The finale is pouring the Enviro-Tex epoxy to model the water in the creek. I fashioned a temporary dam from a 1-by-4 at the front edge of the benchwork to keep the mixture from spilling out onto the floor of my train room (**fig. 7**).

Be sure to pull the dam out just after the epoxy sets solid. Otherwise, your temporary dam will bond to the benchwork.

I mixed up the Enviro-Tex following the manufacturer's instructions. Then I poured in the mixture until I had filled about 1 inch of the gorge. I let everything set overnight.

That's all there is to it! A few hours of work yielded a gorgeous gorge that earns compliments from visitors.

Welder-done

Don Woodwell's easy-to-build scene will give your layout sparkle

FOR ME, RUNNING TRAINS is just one aspect of our hobby. Creating interesting scenes around moving trains is another.

A while ago, I found myself intrigued by a miniature welding scene with a flickering arc-welding light. I knew I had to make my own.

An old plastic bus with a broken wheel seemed like a natural for a welder's "repair job." I figured a Lionel Barrel Shed, which is about the right size for a mechanic's workshop, could hide the electronic board that drives the flickering light.

I wanted the whole scene removable. It's easier to build that way, and if I ever need to make changes, sitting down at my workbench is a better repair posture than standing and leaning into my layout. Given the footprint of the shed and size of the bus, I determined I needed a ⁵⁄₃₂-inch-thick, 4 by 5-inch base board, so I cut some basswood and sanded its edges.

Next, I assembled and painted the shed from the Lionel kit, but left the roof unglued. I positioned the shed on my layout, marked holes in the base for the wires, and then glued the finished shed to base. Once it was dry, I set a welder electronic board inside the shed and ran wires out of the holes.

Elsewhere on the basswood base, I glued the bus in place (leaving one wheel off) and then glued the small flickering light bulb onto the welder figure's hands, running the wires beneath the board inside the shed.

After hooking up the wires, I tested the flickering welder light with a 12-volt AC power source.

I finished assembling and painting the variety of castings and kits I chose to enhance the scene and then glued the welder, the junk pile, and these assorted pieces to the base. I topped off the scene with a little landscaping.

After drilling a hole for wiring and positioning the mini-scene on my layout, I installed a pushbutton on my control panel (you could also place it near the mini-scene). I ran wires from the scene to the pushbutton and to a 12-volt AC power source.

Little details such as these make layouts come alive, and help bond visitors' attention to our hobby.

Parts list

- Welder Light Kit – Busch
- Barrel Shed with barrels and ladder – Lionel
- Vehicle – your choice
- Welder figure – Arttista
- Momentary contact pushbutton – Radio Shack
- 30-gauge hookup wire – Miniatronics
- Miscellaneous castings (tire jack, axle, muffler/pipe, oil pumps, engine block – Oakridge Hobbies
- Gas welding set and auto junk pile – Valley Model Trains
- Miscellaneous supplies (basswood, landscaping materials, and other welder bulbs and kits) – Your local hobby store

This Circuitron arc welder circuit is similar to the Busch unit I used, but it has larger bulbs to simulate a welder working inside a building.

Forced perspective

Neil Besougloff shares tips for adding depth to your layout

CLIMB TO THE top of the roof of your house. Now take a look around. The farther away the homes are in your neighborhood, the smaller they appear. Conversely, the smaller they appear, the farther away they must be. That's the trick behind what modelers call "forced perspective."

Careful use of forced perspective can make your layout look larger and your trains appear to be traveling farther. By artfully using structures and other objects smaller than the scale you model, you "force" the perspective and create the illusion of greater distance on your layout.

The key to successful forced perspective is to group similarly scaled objects together while separating those groups with relatively "scale-less" objects, particularly trees, rocks, and hills. Groups of large or tall objects, such as a Lionel no. 153 signal and a no. 445 signal tower, go in the foreground. Smaller objects, such as prewar Lionel villas and bungalows, go far, far in the background.

But beware: if you mix the large and the small or place the two groups so close to one other that they become part of the same scene, you spoil the illusion.

To make the most of forced perspective, follow three guidelines:

1) Step down one scale for structures and other objects placed an arm's length or more from the outer edges of your layout. For example, on an O gauge layout, these structures would be S scale. On an S gauge layout, these structures would be HO scale.

Depending upon your layout, you may be able to jump twice: full-scale structures in the foreground, one-step-down structures two or three feet from the edge of your layout, and a third step down along a far back wall.

2) Use nondescript scenery to keep the structures far enough apart visually (actual distance doesn't matter as much) so someone looking at your layout doesn't see two different scaled structures in the same scene.

Keep in mind that although the scenery separating the "layers" is nondescript, it also should gradually shrink in scale as it recedes. If you plant O gauge trees on the outer edge of your layout, then place HO scale trees farther away to create a forced perspective.

3) Gradually elevate the structures as they're placed farther and farther from the outer edges of your layout. Again, think about your home's rooftop. You may live in pancake-flat Florida, but if you look at a photo taken from the top of your roof, you'll think the houses in the distance are on slightly higher ground.

Forced perspective is subtle, but it really works. Use it and you'll find your layout can look larger than it really is, and who'd complain about that?

OPPOSITE PAGE: The overgrown haunted house on a bluff looks just right as an Ace 4-4-4 locomotive steams past. Although tinplate, the British steamer is sized right for O scale.

ABOVE: In reality, the house – posed with wire cutters for size comparison – is HO scale.
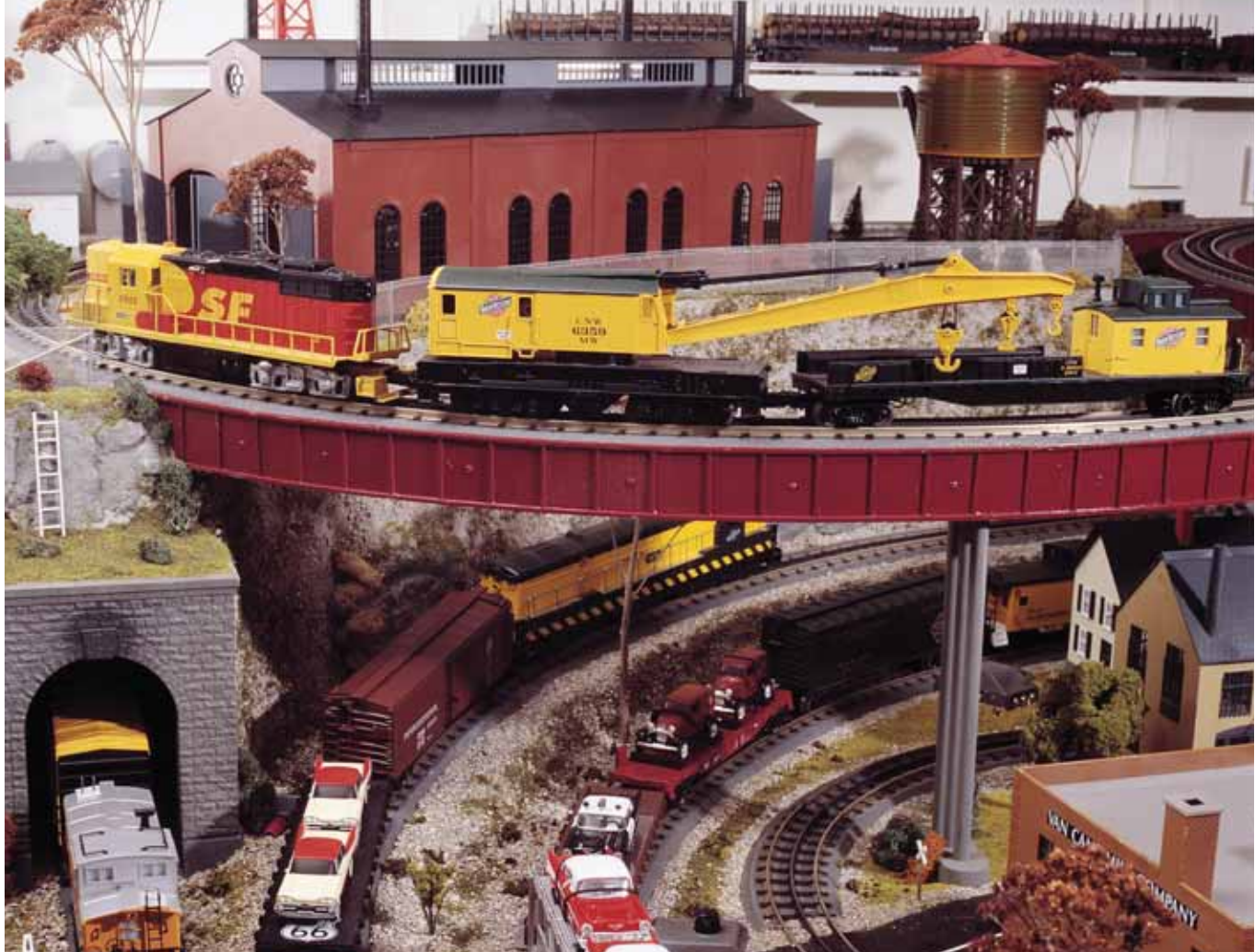
Making an elevated line

Dick Teal shows an easy way to construct a customized elevated bridge

WHEN MY LAYOUT was featured in CTT's February 2002 issue, some readers took special note of my custom-built elevated bridges, which have varying elevations and a realistic yet colorful appearance.

The drawings on page 11 show the parts and dimensions. I'll explain how they fit together. If I were to build them again, I'd assemble them in my workshop and install them on the layout using these steps.

Track support

The track sub-roadbed is ½-inch plywood. Because I didn't have the necessary track on hand when I began construction, I used engineering tools to draw the curves on a sheet of plywood and then cut it with a saber saw. (If you have the track, use it to draw the lines

on the wood.) For roadbed under the track, I used extruded polystyrene foam ("blue board" house insulation) on top of the plywood.

For bridge sides, I used plywood wall paneling, cutting 2-inch strips with a table saw and a fine tooth blade. This ⅛-inch thin wood may splinter a little as you cut it. To reduce splintering, lay masking tape along the cutting line. To allow me to bend the plywood around the curves, I scored the finished side, which faces inward.

To create the appearance of steel-fabricated bridge sides, complete with seams and supports, I cut and glued two different sizes of balsa wood to the unfinished side of the plywood. Then I painted the assembled sides with a 2-inch roller and latex house paint. The inside does not need to be painted.
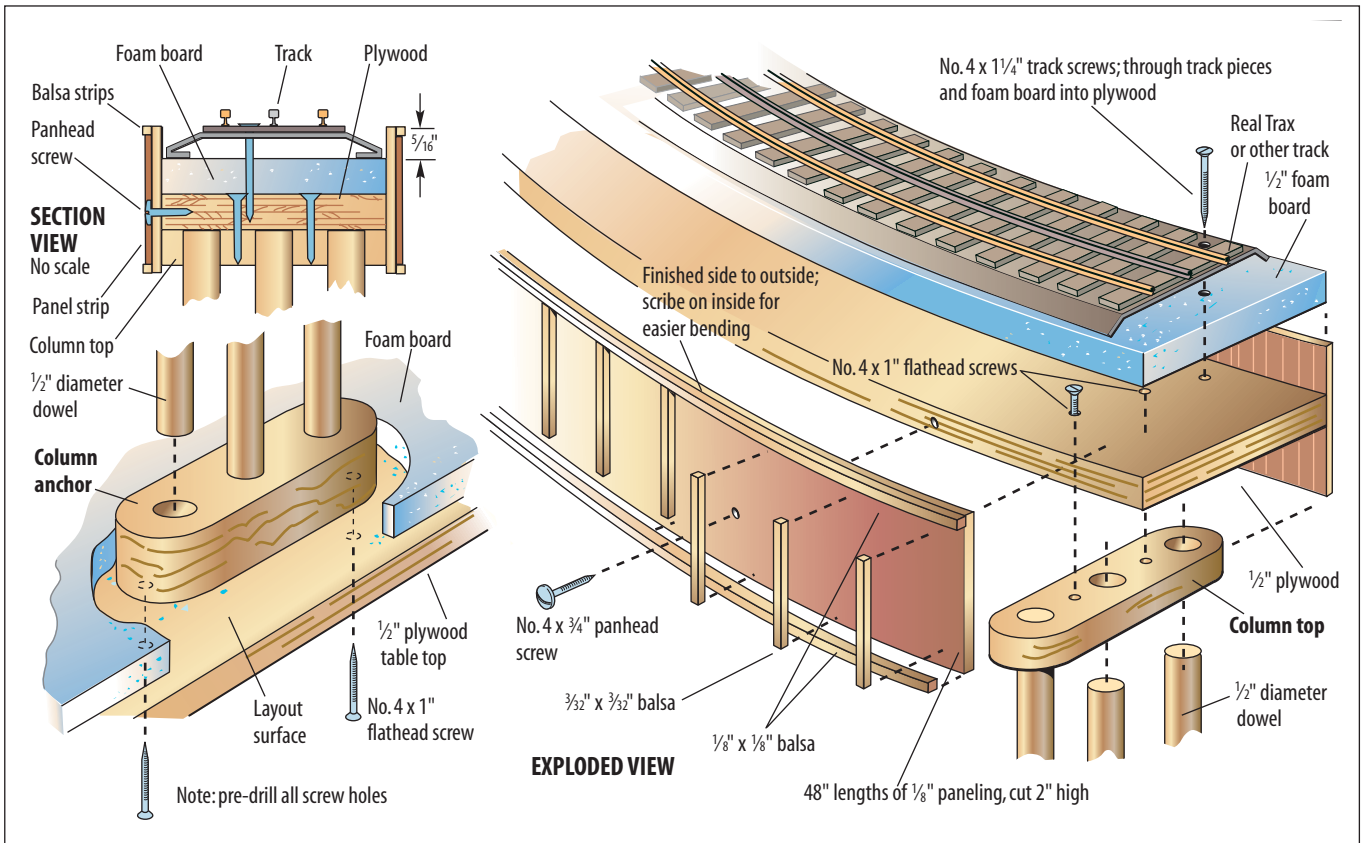
Concrete columns

I made the concrete column anchors with 1½-inch square ash (which machines well), cutting the ends round with a band saw and drilling holes for the columns. I also sanded the edges to give it a finished appearance.

The column tops are also fabricated from ash in the same manner, except I used 1½-inch by ½-inch wood cut an inch shorter than the anchors.

The concrete columns are wood dowel cut to varying lengths. (Don't cut the dowel until you're confident of the exact length.)

Before cutting the dowels, I cut some temporary supports that were roughly the same length that I thought the dowels would be. I laid the sub-roadbed on these temporary supports, shimming and shaving the supports in

SECTION VIEW
No scale

Foam board · Track · Plywood

Balsa strips

Panhead screw

5/16"

Panel strip

Column top

1/2" diameter dowel

Column anchor

Foam board

1/2" plywood table top

Layout surface

No. 4 x 1" flathead screw

Note: pre-drill all screw holes

No. 4 x 1 1/4" track screws; through track pieces and foam board into plywood

Real Trax or other track

1/2" foam board

Finished side to outside; scribe on inside for easier bending

No. 4 x 1" flathead screws

No. 4 x 3/4" panhead screw

3/32" x 3/32" balsa

1/8" x 1/8" balsa

EXPLODED VIEW

48" lengths of 1/8" paneling, cut 2" high

1/2" plywood

Column top

1/2" diameter dowel

places until I was satisfied. Then I set these supports aside to use as a guide for cutting the dowels.
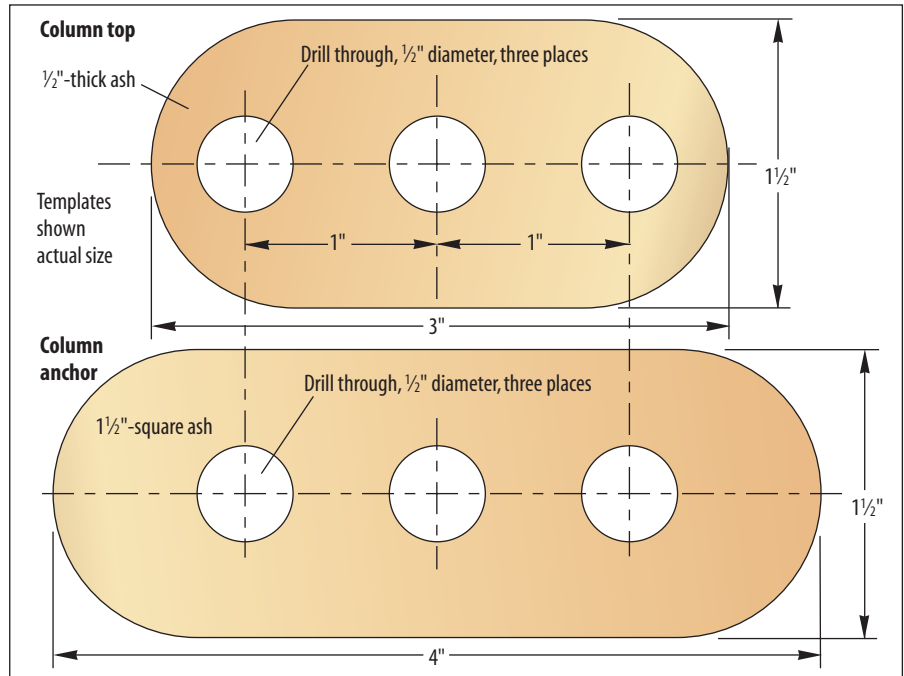
Putting it all together

Once I was done creating the parts and bridge subassemblies, I erected the bridges in earnest, working from the bottom up.

First, I cut the dowels to the various lengths I needed. Then I inserted each dowel all the way through an anchor and a top piece, using carpenters glue for long-lasting wood bonds. I painted the finished column assemblies with gray craft paint.

Before permanently installing them, I positioned the columns onto my layout, loosely laying the roadbed atop the supports. I marked their position by penciling in an outline around each oval base, then removed the bases so that I could drill holes for the flathead wood screws through the table. Then I put the bases back in position and screwed them in place directly to the wood table, not to any foam board or other softer surface such as Homasote, to give it a firm footing.

Likewise, I then drilled holes through the roadbed and screwed the sub-roadbed to the columns from the top down.

At this point, I glued and screwed on the side pieces, this time using panhead

Column top

1/2"-thick ash

Drill through, 1/2" diameter, three places

Templates shown actual size

1" · 1"

1 1/2"

3"

Column anchor

1 1/2"-square ash

Drill through, 1/2" diameter, three places

1 1/2"

4"

Illustrations by Robert Wegner

screws. Clamps held the sides in place temporarily as the glue dried. If any balsa pieces came loose as I was bending the sides, I re-glued and clamped the pieces in place. (If you're considering using curves that are tighter than 54 inches, you might want to experiment first.) I painted the screw heads and touched up other areas.

Finally, I glued the blue foam board

to the sub-roadbed and screwed the track through the foam board into the sub-roadbed.

My completed structure has good eye appeal and has proven to be quite strong. Because I designed specifically for my needs, the elevation is just right in all places around the layout. It's worth a try for anyone who has similar bridgework in mind.

Better ballasting

Ray Stuber uses tape, paint, and ballast to add realism to tubular track

I N ITS LONG HISTORY, tubular track has often been the focus of a grand coverup. Even Lionel, whether through images of beautifully ballasted main lines in 1950s catalogs or in modeling efforts put into showroom layouts, joined the conspiracy by trying to hide the toy-like nature of its three-tie, three-rail track.

When I started building my original Santa Fe Southern layout nearly 30 years ago, I was determined to achieve that realistic "catalog look" with my O gauge tubular track.

I added ties and plywood inserts between the existing metal ties. But those time-consuming efforts didn't satisfy my sense of esthetics.

Then I tried a new technique using masking tape placed over the ties and covered with ballast. My novel approach, which also limited the

amount of ballast I needed to buy, turned out to be quick and easy, and it effectively covers up tubular track's most obvious toy-like flaws.

View from the ground

The high profile of the ties on Lionel O gauge track can form a natural roadbed for your main line.

Because with my technique the ballast completely covers the ties, you might be afraid the result isn't very realistic. But take a close look at the well-maintained main lines on today's railroads. From the side, you can't even see the ties, which are almost entirely submerged into the ballasted roadbed.

This side view is important to consider on your own layout, and may help you avoid the extra work of ballasting track that no one would ordinarily see.

My rule of thumb is this: For track

that runs at an angle or perpendicular to the edge of a layout, ballast the track's center and both sides. For track that runs parallel to one edge of a layout and is more than two feet away, ballast only what you can see. There's no need to ballast the far side of a section of track when you can't see it.

The steps in my technique are described below, and the materials and tools you will need are listed in the accompanying table.

Painting the track

Actually, the first step in the process isn't about masking tape or ballast, and it applies to any track you want to look more realistic. I simply painted the rails to eliminate the all-shiny look that is non-existent on real-world track.

Your choice of color will depend on the type of track you are modeling.

1. Before laying track, I painted the sides of the rails using Floquil Rail Brown to create a more prototypical appearance.

2. Masking tape is put between and around the rails before adding ballast. Note how the tape is secured to the lip on the outer edge of the bottom of the rails.

3. The final step in the process is to apply the ballast over the tape. I use an artist's paintbrush to smooth out the ballast before applying glue.

Yard tracks, or seldom-used sidings, may have a rusty appearance, while mainline rails will be cleaner.

For most of my track I used Floquil Rail Brown, which I brushed on undiluted straight from the jar. To achieve a more oil-stained look, you may want to add a little flat black in places.

Paint three or four track sections at a time, using a rag soaked in paint thinner or paint remover to wipe off any paint on the top of the rails. Be careful not to paint the connecting pins. Neatness isn't particularly important, since the ties will be covered anyway.

Once the paint is dry, go over the tops of the rails with an abrasive block, such as a Walthers Bright Boy track cleaner, to ensure good electrical contact as well as a realistically shiny top.

You can paint all the sides of your rails in this manner or only those that are visible. It's up to you.

Masking-tape roadbed

If you haven't already secured your track to your layout, do so now. Then it's time to apply the masking tape.

Find some 1-inch-wide masking tape, commonly sold in paint and hardware stores. (The typical roll of masking tape found elsewhere is narrower.)

Apply the tape to the outside of edge of the track, stretching it so the tape doesn't sag between the ties. Make sure you don't have any ground cover too close to the track; you'll want a relatively smooth surface for the tape.

Place the inner edge of the tape on the outside rail flange and run your fingernail along the tape to secure it. Drape the masking tape over the ties and adhere the outer edge (about ⅛ inch) to the tabletop. Again, use your fingernail to secure the tape.

To ballast the center of the track, apply parallel strips of ½-inch-wide masking tape between the rails. Center it as close as possible so that no gaps are left for the ballast to slip between the rails and the edge of the tape.

Applying the tape on straight sections is relatively easy, but the curves take a little practice, especially if you use 31-inch curved track.

Adding ballast

With several ballast suppliers and even a greater number of color choices available, you should have no trouble finding a product that suits your tastes and needs.

I used Woodland Scenics brand coarse light-gray ballast, which is readily available in most hobby shops, and it matches the limestone ballast used on many eastern railroads.

Apply the ballast using a paper cup. Bend the lip of the cup slightly into a "V" shape, then tap the cup lightly with your finger to spread the ballast over the tape. Use a suitable brush to smooth out the ballast evenly over the tape and along the sides of the track.

Once you are happy with your efforts, spray the ballast lightly with "wet water" (a spray bottle full of water with two or three drops of dishwashing detergent added to it). This will help the glue flow evenly into the ballast. Don't worry if you spray the rails with water; as long as you lightly wipe off the tops with a clean cloth, you won't cause the rails to rust.

I used Woodland Scenics Scenic Cement, but you can use matte medium (sold in art supply stores) as long as it's thinned 50 percent with water. Even more commonly available white glue, diluted 50 percent, can be used.

Pour the glue into a jar with a relatively wide mouth. Using a turkey baster with a ⅛-inch opening or a similar device, such as an empty white-glue container, flow the glue over the ballast before the "wet water" has had a chance to dry. Have a rag or some paper towels handy to soak up the excess. Because of the wet water, the glue should sink down into the ballast, instead of balling up on its surface.

If you are applying ballast to the center and both sides of the track, work over a two-foot area at a time. If you are doing only one side, work over four feet. The matte medium should dry overnight. Don't fret if some of the ballast runs off, leaving the tape exposed – you can touch it up the next day. Be sure to rinse your turkey baster in clean water, or it too will be glued together by the next morning.

When you're finished, your handiwork should result in some nice-looking Lionel track that would have made catalog artists and display layout builders proud.

Materials

- Floquil brand Rail Brown or similar paint
- Paint thinner or remover
- 1-inch masking tape
- ½ inch masking tape
- Ballast
- Dishwashing detergent
- Matte medium or similar glue

Tools

- Paint brush
- Bright Boy
- Paper cups
- Wide-bristle brush
- Spray bottle
- Wide-mouth bottle
- Turkey baster
- Paper towels
- Rags

Fender bending

Darryl White makes quick-and-easy junked cars with foil

TOP: After wrapping foil around your "master" car, burnish in the details using a dull flat head screwdriver or similar instrument. With scissors or a hobby knife, cut away the excess foil. ABOVE: Some paint and an opened door make the model more convincing. Windows can be represented with gloss black paint.

FEEL LIKE YOU'VE BEEN foiled in your efforts to find realistic, inexpensive scenery details? Well, junk autos – thoroughly dinged, dented, rusted, and stripped – can be yours for the low, low price of a roll of aluminum foil. Of course, you'll have to junk 'em yourself, but this easy project won't strain your how-to skills in effectively detailing your layout.

This simple method uses household aluminum foil placed over an existing toy or model car, which creates a shell that you can transform into a junkyard model. You will need heavy-duty aluminum foil, gloss black paint, your choice of flat colors, a hobby knife, a small, dull slot-head screwdriver, a pair of small scissors, and your choice of model cars for use as "masters."

To get started, cut a sheet of foil approximately 7 by 9 inches and lay it on the table dull side up. (The shinier side on the exterior will represent chrome parts once you're done.) Select the model car you want to reproduce and place it roof-down on the foil.

Next, pick up the foil and car and begin wrapping, continually holding the shaped foil in place. Wrap the car from top to bottom as tightly as you can without tearing the foil. Then, using the blade of the slot-head screwdriver, gently burnish the surface of the foil until the car's finer details show through the foil.

When you're satisfied that all the details are adequately represented, remove the excess foil using your knife or scissors from the car's fender wells and all around the bottom of the vehicle. With the screwdriver blade, smooth away as many wrinkles as you like (but remember it *is* a junk car).

Finally, carefully peel the foil off. You may have to loosen it from the bottom of the car to do so.

At this point, you have a raw model that you can customize further. Bend or bash the body to suit your trashy tastes and then decide how you'd like to paint the exterior.

Use black gloss paint directly on the foil to represent the windows or, if you prefer, carefully cut away the foil with your hobby knife.

Paint the inside of the shell flat black or a color resembling old rust. (For rust, I prefer Apple Barrel Nutmeg Brown no. 20521, a water-based brushable paint available in craft stores.)

To simulate chrome trim, you can leave certain areas, such as bumpers and windshield moldings, unpainted.

To create a more convincing look, use your hobby knife to randomly open doors, hoods and trunks. Leave just a little foil to represent a hinge.

In just a couple hours, you can create a whole junkyard's worth of cars. That's a "lot" of scenery, all for the price of a roll of foil.