



About the Editor



Charlie Comstock has been a regular columnist, author, and editor of *Model Railroad Hobbyist Magazine* since its inception.

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EDITOR'S SOAPBOX: Running in the dark

Hey! Who turned out the lights?



My good friend and ex-yardmaster Terry took Amtrak from Klamath Falls to the Portland, Oregon area for a visit. I offered to host a BBQ for him and a few other close friends.

After dinner we ended up in the train room. I'd agreed to run foreign power that night – normally foreign power is excluded during formal op sessions but this was informal. John B. brought over two locos, so on the track they went. He ran them around solo for a while before I suggested he couple onto the reefer express in Salem staging. Soon he was heading upgrade to Oakhill with 24 reefers and a caboose.

After watching a while I thought (or perhaps Horace Fithers told me to) I should switch to night lighting. John's locos had nice bright headlights. Click, click, click, click, click.

"Hey! Who turned out the lights!" echoed through the room. The moonlight (blue rope lights in the ceiling) seemed really dim but after a minute eyes adjusted and we watched headlights flash on and off while passing through tunnels 2 and 3.

Five minutes later the reefers arrived at South Jackson and the

Superintendent of Nearly Everything suggested running the train back up the hill. That's when things got interesting. It seems there were too many reefers for the motive power and we'd need to add a helper. By moonlight.

I've never run a night session on the BC&SJ so there aren't any flashlights laying about. Uncoupling the caboose and locomotives in the moonlight proved a challenge but someone pulled out a cell phone to use as a flashlight and John managed get coupler picks into the coupler knuckles and run around his train before heading bravely toward the hill.

Joe B. fetched another throttle, dialed up the 2-10-2 helper engine, and set out after the under-powered reefers.

The reefers barely made it past Deschutes Jct. before the power started slipping wheels. The BC&SJ doesn't permit pushing on occupied cars, so the train eased down the hill and set out the hack on the Mill Bend siding just

as the helper showed up, backed onto the hack, then pulled forward to couple onto the rear-most reefer.

This time the assault on the 2.8% grade succeeded. Joe cut off the helper at Oakhill using more cell phone illumination to see what he was doing with his uncoupling pick. The reefers continued on to Salem and the helper returned down the hill to South Jackson.

Surprisingly, a good time was had by all. Both the crews and the onlookers enjoyed themselves immensely. In fact, it was strongly hinted that I should use night lighting during a 'real' op session – a request I'd figured would only come once in a blue moon. With a supply of LED flashlights letting crews see to uncouple and read car numbers, perhaps night operations would be feasible? Of course, the moon did happen to be blue that evening ...



Cutting off a helper in Oakhill using a cell phone to augment the moonlight.