

## Why Model Old-Time?

**N**OW that postwar model railroad manufacturing is producing an endless variety of kits of almost every new piece of prototype equipment as soon as it appears, why model old-time equipment?

Naturally, every model railroader should model the type of equipment that pleases him most, but if his preference is not already emphatically set, he might consider some of the advantages of the old-time pike.

A vast majority of model railroaders operate home layouts, either as lone individuals or as members of small groups. Home layouts are, of necessity, usually built in small areas. Sharp curves and small-radius turnouts are necessary and short rolling stock is, therefore, distinctly at an advantage. This is where the old-time railroad, with its stubby little freight cars and relatively short passenger cars and small locomotives, fits in admirably.

Since distances are short on the average model pike, grades must be steep enough to let one track climb over another. But modern prototype railroads with their vast array of earth-moving machines literally cut through small mountains in order to keep grades gentle for efficient handling of long, heavy tonnage trains. Hence, a steep grade on a modern model pike is out of place. But on old-time prototype railroads there was much less tonnage to haul, and the owners' purses were often too thin to indulge in expensive cuts and fills. So the tracks were laid to climb steep grades and to twist around sharp curves. Consequently, even short trains often were double- or even triple-headed. An old-time model pike can do so, too, and the resulting picturesque operation will be strictly to prototype.

There are other advantages in the old-time pike. Most old-timers were single track, and a single track appears to be longer than a double or a multiple track of the same length. Thus, a short train rolling slowly along this single track adds to the illusion of distance, while a modern long train would make the run seem ridiculously short. Remember — in spite of some breathtakingly fast exhibition runs, most old-time railroading was turtle-slow judged by modern standards, and trains moving slowly give the illusion that distances are greater.

In model railroading we use heavy Northern or Berkshire locos for regular runs with trains of eight or ten freight cars. Such waste of power would soon force a prototype railroad into bankruptcy. But a tiny old American or Mogul puffing along with six or seven short cars over steep grades and around sharp curves is entirely realistic. Moreover, such an old-time full-length train, consisting of short cars and a small loco, would be only about half as long as the average short modern train. Also, any section of track appears longer when occupied by a short train than by a long one.

An interesting and too-often-forgotten feature of model train operation is that the job of handling an engine should require skill by the engineer. Let your loco be loaded to the point where you find it necessary to use the coupler slack to start the train smoothly and hold down driver spin. Load the engine to its capacity so that it must make a run for the steeper grades and requires a skilled hand at the throttle to prevent excessive driver slippage or stalling. Only a few very large model rail-



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## at the THROTTLE



roads have sufficient space to handle adequately the 40- or 50-car trains, and some of the heavy modern model locos will haul such trains with ease. But the old-time engine with its limited power calls for real operating skill as it bucks short, steep grades, even with short trains.

Complicated electrical circuits might not be to your liking, and old-time railroading does not require them. Hand-operated blade or highball signals can be every bit as interesting as modern target or position signals.

Old-time stations and other structures were small, so realistic models of them take up little space on a pike, and their gingerbread detail provides modeling challenges galore. Narrow streets and roads point up the importance and necessity of the old-time railroad. Think of the fun of modeling in nostalgic, humorous "good old days," with swinging-door saloons, bouncy bustles, fringe-topped surreys, and colorful rolling stock! It can be fun to indulge in research and develop a legendary past for your pike.

Although considerable old-time equipment is now coming onto the market in kit form, the modeler who specializes in old-time railroading must still plan and build much of his own equipment. Scratch-building develops the real individuality of any model railroader — and of his railroad. It is doubtful if any old-time pike, planned and built with care, will ever look even remotely like any other model railroad, anywhere.

John Allen

### July 1950 article in Model Railroader magazine by John Allen

*I found this posted on a Facebook page and couldn't resist reading John's words of wisdom. I believe his words apply today just as they did over 70 years ago. Size and period of modeling is something for all of us to consider when planning our model empire.*

*In addition to John's ideas I would add: Consider thinking about how much time each week will be required, how many years will it take to reasonably complete the layout, how much help from other modelers will be needed, will it ever have to be moved, and how much will it cost. Consider what works best for you and then have fun building your model railroad. Thanks John, wish you were still around. Many of us miss your insights and modeling.*