THE OAKVILLE CENTRAL

A small HO layout that's interesting to operate

While visions of full basements may dance in our heads, the realities of modern life often dictate that our model railroads be fitted into much smaller areas. The area available for the Oakville Central was but 3′1″ x 5′10″ — the dimensions of a trundle bed drawer designed to slide out from under a regular bed. Not only was the area restricted but also the vertical clearance was limited to 2″ or 3″ by a requirement that the layout fit on top of the trundle bed mattress. Flat terrain was obviously indicated.

Despite the cramped conditions, it was still possible to get some interesting operation worked in if 15″-radius curves were used. Looking at the plan which evolved, it's easy to see that the emphasis was placed on switching cars to and from various industries. A continuous route was also included for those times when just plain running trains is the order of the day.

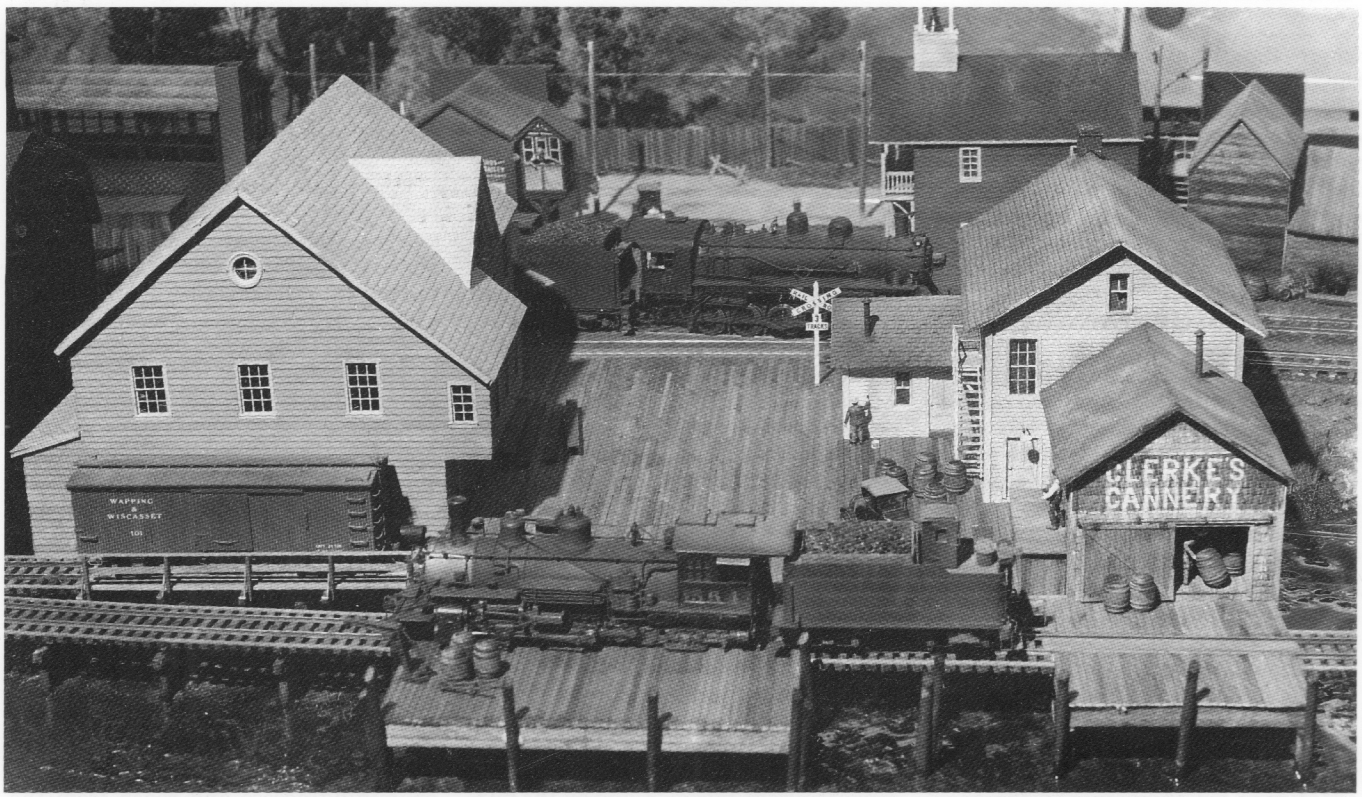
Some comments about layout design planning are pertinent to the task of trying to achieve a reasonable operation in a small space. Clearances between track and structures have to be plotted to closer tolerances than for larger layouts, as there is less room for adjusting things by eye during the actual construction. Double-line drawings give a better feel for the width of the track than do single-line drawings. Either method is acceptable as long as proper clearances are maintained on both sides of the track. Templates are handy to use when drawing plans for small areas, especially when sectional track components are to be used.

Critical trackwork should be located first, as it will determine the location of the rest of the track. The two end curves and the passing track/crossing area turned out to be the critical locations on the Oakville Central. There are no hard and fast rules for determining what will be critical; look first at tracks near the edges of the layout and at areas where there are a lot of turnouts in proximity to each other. Be prepared to do a fair amount of trial and error fitting before things fall into place. Of course, there should be some sort of rough sketch made of the layout idea before detailed planning is started.

When working in small areas, track and structures have to be located concurrently unless the buildings are going to be scratchbuilt or kitbashed to fit. Templates for structures were prepared to the same scale as the track templates, using dimensions listed in the Walthers catalog. Track positions were shifted and alternate structures were fitted until a workable scheme developed.

Clearances were plotted to allow 1½″ between the track center line and buildings on curves, and 1″ on straight track. These figures were interpolated from NMRA Standards and Recommended Practices based on the 15″ radius used and the type of equipment to be operated.

Short cars, short locomotives, and shortline operation are what the Oakville Central is all about. Freight cars should be selected from the many 40- and 50-foot types available. Shorter cars will obviously make things easier; longer cars should be avoided, as they tend to create all sorts of problems on the short-radius curves. Locomotives should



Al Kalbfleisch photo.

Like the Oakville Central, industries, big and small, with rail service are one of the characteristics of Don Cleke's Wicasset & Maine railroad.

Layout at a glance

Name: OAKVILLE CENTRAL
Scale: HO
Space: 3'1" x 5'10" x 3"
Location: Under bed
Operation: Switching oval
Emphasis: Small radius curves

be similarly restricted in length. Steam locomotives should have a short wheelbase, which means four driving wheels or some very small six-driver locomotives. Diesels should be limited to B-B types or industrial locomotives meeting the same criteria as the steam engines. A low-budget short line, particularly one that is involved mostly in local switching operations, would probably operate without a caboose to its name.

One or two locomotives could be used to handle the Oakville Central's business. The insulating gaps depicted provide plenty of flexibility for simultaneous operation of two trains. Note that the spur to the lumber company could be used as a lead for switching the yard in complete independence of any operation on the main line.

Some form of car order system should be used as a basis for directing car movements. Several of these systems have been described in past issues of MODEL RAILROADER. A more readily obtainable description of car movement systems is contained in the book HOW TO OPERATE YOUR MODEL RAILROAD by Bruce Chubb. Any car order system will add interest to operation on the Oakville Central by giving some purpose to the switching movements. The problems that occur in sorting out the cars add enjoyment much like solving crossword or jigsaw puzzles.

Switching movements mean that the cars will have to be uncoupled from each other frequently. Use of uncoupling ramps would be difficult, at best, because of the many uncoupling locations and the sharp curves being used. Uncoupling tools can be made or purchased to assist in this task.

In line with the theme that the Oakville Central is designed for operation, all of the buildings represent industries which have rail service. Available real estate is at too much of a premium to have houses or similar nonrailroad structures taking up space. The existence of nonrailroad buildings is suggested by the roads leading off the edges of the railroad baseboard.

Selection of the structures was based on several premises. Industries served by rail have been mentioned. A mixture of plastic, cardstock, and wood construction was chosen to provide a variety of modelbuilding interest. As templates were essential to the design process, only structures with known dimensions were included. (It's too bad that model manufacturers don't print dimensions on the outside of their packages.) Low- and mid-price range kits were specified to minimize costs. The resulting buildings had to be fairly sturdy, as they will undergo frequent handling. The restricted vertical clearance means that all buildings and rolling stock have to be removed before the layout drawer is rolled back into the stored position. The Oakville Central is truly a low-overhead operation.