

Model railroading is fun

What is it about scale model railroading that makes it such a great hobby? At the heart of it all is our fascination with miniatures of all kinds. We find a thrill in studying tiny duplicates of real objects. Even though a precision model of a locomotive is a work of art in its own right, placing that same model in the context of a complete setting makes it come to life. Building a complete model railroad that evokes a sense of time and place is the heart of this hobby.

Many scale model railroaders recall their childhood when a train set allowed them to travel through an imaginary world. As adults, they find they have the means and skills to bring that world to life.

Although there is a tremendous variety of fine-running, beautifully detailed locomotives, cars, buildings, and accessories available to scale model railroaders, this is still a personal and creative hobby.

There are no minimum requirements for entry, and people of all levels of participation, skills, and interest are welcome to join in the fun of model railroading, meaning there is a place for you.

Fun in all kinds of ways

So who are scale model railroaders? They come from all walks of life and enjoy the hobby in different ways. There are model



Narrow gauge railroads blend the mystique of the old West with spectacular scenery and the sights and sounds of the “iron horse.”



In the model railroad hobby, you have many choices of what you want to model. Many modelers prefer creating different eras when building their layouts. In this picture, the modeler went back in time and produced a 1950s layout.

railroaders who rarely, if ever, build a model. They enjoy reading about the hobby and dream about the model railroad they’re going to build “someday.” We call these enthusiasts “armchair modelers.”

Other hobbyists build detailed models of locomotives or cars. Some focus on building structures and scenery. For them, model railroading is a form of sculpture. They may even look upon the trains as a secondary consideration—providing movement in an otherwise static world.

Then there are those who focus on mechanical and electrical things to the point that they never build scenery.

The majority of model railroaders find the greatest enjoyment in combining all these approaches, tailoring the hobby to suit their interests.

An evolving hobby

Despite the variety of commercial products available, model railroading is a creative endeavor. If two model railroaders

started with identical track plans, their finished layouts would look nothing like one another. One might create a whimsical desert setting, while the other could end up with a busy urban scene.

The track plan is merely a blueprint, a diagram showing where the pieces should go. It provides a starting place but it takes the scenery and settings, and the creativity of the modeler, to breathe life into the layout and make it unique.

Starting small

Most model railroaders start small—a 4x8-foot layout is the most common size, at least in HO scale. They add a few buildings, some scenery, and additional cars and locomotives as the mood strikes.

No matter how big or small, no layout is ever really finished. There’s always some new technique to try and something to improve or change. A model railroad is a form of evolutionary art that changes and grows with its creator. 