Sundry Snippets 22 - Trial by Exhibition

'Twas Mike Sharman who in the first place coined the title for this little feature on frustration.
Dave Booth' s amusing article on the trials and tribulations of exhibiting 'working layouts', which refuse to work on arrival at the show, made me think. I've been there, done that, and had it happen several times!

Having visited up to 10 shows a year on the Continent over the years, and just returned from a 2,500 mile trip Cricklade – Portsmouth – Le Havre – Orleans – Bremen – Calais – Dover – Cricklade, I have reached a few conclusions, some of which you might not like!

You/we will *never* eradicate derailments entirely, but you/we can minimise them to acceptable levels. Why not eradicate? The very nature of exact scale modelling – its 'exactness' set against the materials we use, like metal, wood, card, plastic, which all have movement for reasons of temperature, dampness, humidity, and uneven floors, prevents this. Now, how do we minimise? Well, we 'cheat' the system!

Baseboards
Baseboards come first, and we all have our favourite methods of construction. I have eleven boards in the current 'train set'. They feature 9mm lightweight framing, either 3 ft. x 2 ft. or 4 ft. x 2 ft., to a total of 36 ft., covered in ½ in. balsa where the track is, and are glued with the usual white wood glue. All over the framing, holes of 1¼ in. diameter are drilled for lightness and cable runs. The boards bolt to each other with two good old-fashioned coach bolts in 'oversize' holes. I *have* tried the 'precision' method, but cannot make it reliable to a few thou., and the result is too much in Scalefour. I have a spirit level and I have packing pieces to put under the legs.

The boards are always on the move, as the hall heats and cools, and the humidity changes with the people and the weather – lots of cold, wet raincoats in a hot, sweaty hall! If you have the odd fault at a join, slacken the coach bolt, a slight tweak and re-tighten.

Track
As a general guide, complex track formations should be soldered up as rigidly as possible and then cut in sections with rail gaps *wider* than you would like from the aesthetic point of view. Do the same at baseboard joins, say 010" – 015"; it's not pretty, but it works. For the 'normal' standard turnouts and open track, let the rails move with the temperature. Don't glue them rigidly into the chairs, apart from at the crossings and check rails. And don't be too slavish to the track gauges!

Use them as a guide, but a *slightly* over-gauge allowance can help – and under-gauge one never will.

Rolling Stock

Rolling stock is easy: spring or compensate everything. And when we weight models, make sure it is zero-ed between the axles, not biased to one end. Back-to-Back measurement of the wheels is the only *crucial* dimension on the whole railway – you can fiddle the track in all kinds of situations, but *never* the Back-to-Backs. This is your one constant dimension, and you fiddle everything else around that.

Construction and Operation

Now, a few bullet points on these matters.

- I know it is easy to say, but do try to build the layout in the 'warm', not a cold, damp garage or loft. It can halve your temperature problems. *Don't* go in for neat, tidy wiring. You can find a fatigue break at a joint much more quickly by being able to slide the cable about a bit until it comes 'free';

- Have a few lengths of wire, about 8 ft. or so, with small crocodile clips on the ends. Then you can often get the dead section quickly going again, leaving the repair to be soldered in the morning, before opening;

- Have a decent torch for poking about underneath;

- Have a separate extension lead for the soldering iron: it could enable you to make a repair, like a detached point blade, without shutting down the whole layout.

Above all!

Try to avoid multi-position, roundhouse-type turntables. They *always* get shaken up in the car – and the usual sadistic public will ask why you are not using it. Mine all go 180° one way, to a rigid stop, and then back the other way to the return stop. The drive wheel is made to slip, so when you get there, turn off the controller.