

7 BASIC MODEL RAILROADING

N SCALE

While HO scale continues to dominate the hobby by a very wide margin (its four major advantages being the great variety of available ready-to-run and kit equipment, ease of handling by youngsters, its economy of space, and a physically comfortable miniature scale to work with), N scale is now second in popularity as a result of great improvement in the selection of equipment and the enormous strides in miniature technology of the past decade or so.

N (for Nine millimetres) Scale came of age in 1960 after a preliminary Gauge OOO designation when the first push-along trains appeared in this size range in 1956. It has a track width of 9 mm, and a scale of 1:160 (North America). The principal advantages of N Scale are for those modellers

either – with rather limited space for their hobby;

or – for any given amount of space, a larger layout to provide better opportunities for substantial scenery, a layout focus with more distance between points, and such features as more extensive marshalling yards, to provide more operating challenges and opportunities.

Keys to a successful N scale layout, especially in a limited space

- Careful track-laying is the key to N scale operational enjoyment. N scale, much more so than the larger scales, does not take kindly to indifferently laid track. It has to be perfectly level and straight, and where there are curves on gradients, they must be carefully banked so that 3-axle trucks can negotiate them without derailing. As with all scales, laid track should be carefully tested with a variety of motive power and rolling stock to ensure that the clearances are adequate, and that the wheels perform well through turnouts and crossings.
- While they can be a little fiddly to instal, N scale Microtrains™ (formerly Kadee™) or other magnetic couplers make a vast difference to the appearance of an N scale train, and the couplers, properly installed, do work remarkably well. In any event, quality N scale equipment is now usually equipped with this superior coupler.
- There is no disgrace in 9" radius curves, but creative scenery design can hide or disguise those unprototypical sharp curves. However, do ensure that no radius anywhere is less than 9". If you can wangle it, try for a 10 or 11" radius at a minimum for main-line operations - some equipment with longer wheel-bases may have difficulty with 9".
- Study the track formations and turn-outs offered by different track manufacturers. While No. 6 (medium) or No. 8 to 10 (large) radius turnouts are definitely preferable to No. 4 (minimum radius) anywhere on any layout, compromises do have to be made, but if at all possible, if you have to use No. 4 turnouts, confine them to the yards where your chosen switcher will have no difficulty negotiating them.
- A great advantage of N scale is for those who have limited skills for scenery and structure making to produce a credible railway environment and an attractive model.
- When designing your scenery, remember the importance of perspective. Background buildings should be closer to Z scale (1:220), or even smaller, depending on the implied distance.

As with any layout, ensure that you can reach any part of it to uncouple or re-rail, and that you can get at whatever you enclose for repairs and maintenance, whether this is by means of a "pop-up" or "lift-out".

In summary, N scale has much to offer for a modeller intent on an expanse of scenery, and who has the requisite fine motor skills to work in a more miniature dimension. However, good eyesight, a firm hand and lots of patience are prerequisites. Not recommended though if young children are to be involved.