

19th Annual Brotherhood of Live Steamers Meet

From Ken Shattock

The 19th Annual Brotherhood of Live Steamers Meet was held in Oakland, CA in September 1951 at the track of the Golden Gate Live Steamers. At that time, the GGLS track was located in Oakland's "Redwood Regional Park". It was the ONLY 'BLS' meet ever hosted by GGLS.

One month after the BLS Meet, the story appeared in October 1951 issue of Popular Science Magazine. I hope you enjoy it!



Outdoor Model Railroad Runs

Fantastically intricate models burn coal, operate on live steam and chug around California hills like big ones.

TO GET a ride on this railroad, you don't buy a ticket—you build a locomotive. One that runs. That's the club's way of keeping out the dabblers and the slackers—you have to work before you can play.

These rare model railroaders have another odd notion—they think steam engines should run on steam. Live, hot, high-pressure stuff, ready to blow its boiler's top if you'd let it. Hence the club's name, the Golden Gate Live Steamers.

Most any Sunday afternoon you can find its members in the rolling hills of Oakland, Calif., riding around a sprawling elevated track behind a locomotive that's never been on a dynamometer but whose drawbar pull is exactly eight grown men and two boys.

The only thing small is the scale. The

thrills are full-size. Side rods flash, and the stack spits black. You can feel the heat of the firebox on your face, and hear the labored chug on a long upgrade. You can smell the hot, moist pungence of live steam pushing up close to the safety limit, and the acrid odor of bearing oil running hot under a load many times the engine's weight. And all the time you keep your eyes glued to the rising needle on the pressure gauge.

There Are Breakdowns, Too

Then the heart-breaking moment when the crown sheet threatens to run dry and the boiler is in danger of blowing, or an injector valve fouls and the water pressure drops. Back goes the engine to the club's repair yards—the basement workshop of the club's originator, Vic Shattock.

Shattock, a Southern Pacific plumbing supervisor, got the idea for the club when he was tooling locomotives in his basement.



Biggest live-steam locomotive is 0-6-0 Southern Pacific switcher that hauls 10 men on four flatcars. Built to one-inch scale, engine and tender weigh 250 pounds, measure five feet long.

on Real Steam

He wanted an outdoor setting, where his engines would have light and air and space, and he wanted only members who loved steam locomotives well enough to build one.

Railroad Donates Timbers

Shattock asked his friends and turned up a handful who showed interest. The Eastbay Regional Parks Board came up with a site in Redwood Park just outside downtown Oakland. The Southern Pacific Railroad donated discarded rail ties and bridge timbers for construction of the big track.

Then the work began. Scott E. Gordon, present club president and professionally a railroad civil engineer, mapped the site. From his plans, the track took shape. A total of 147 wood piers rose on beds of crushed rock. Bridge ties became beams to support the track, and light aluminum rails were spiked down on slender wood ties.

That was three years ago. Now the club



Special four-rail track takes three gauges of locomotives—2½-inch gauge for ¾-inch-to-the-foot scale; 3½-inch gauge for ¾-inch scale; and 4½-inch gauge for the big one-inchers.



Tiny boiler tubes must be periodically scraped clean with gun rod to keep them from fouling. Use of distilled water cuts down scale deposit.



Most models are reproductions, but this dockside switcher is an original design. It weighs 100 pounds, burns wood alcohol instead of coal.

boasts 49 members and 1,331 feet of continuous track. The trestle's 30-inch height permits engineers and passengers to ride side-saddle behind their chugging engines on cushion-padded flatcars. Four rails laid side by side take locomotives of three gauges—2½ inches, 3½ inches and 4½ inches.

Down long straightaways and around

carefully banked curves glide precision-built scale models of prototype locomotives—the big compound articulated Mallets, mountain-climbing Mikados, Pacifics, Hudsons, and the homely dockside switchers.

Engines Take Thousands of Hours

All of them run—there are no non-operating showpieces on this railroad—and they all run on steam. Normal running pressure is around 100 pounds, with the safety valve set to open at about 120. Boilers, usually made of brazed copper or welded steel, are first tested at 200 pounds or more.

Most engines burn real coal, either crushed or in the form of briquettes, while a few burn alcohol. On most, all of the parts are fully operating, from the Johnson bar—which does for a steam engine what a gear-shift does for a car—right down to the sand domes and the steam-driven water injectors. And each represents a spare-time investment of 1,000 to 5,000 hours in the most exacting work with lathes, drill presses, hand files—and ten-thousandth-of-an-inch tolerances.

Indoor Tracks Test Locos

Inside Shattock's basement workshop are more examples of the railroaders' craftsmanship. An authentic reproduction of a trackside water tank fills a waiting New York Central "870." An electrically operated turntable reverses locomotives, while a roundhouse shelters a pair of 4-6-2 Pacifics flanked by a pair of 2-8-2 Mikados. Short lengths of test tracks, set up around the walls of the cellar, hold an assortment of engines and



Aluminum rails are spiked down on eight-inch wood ties. Continuous 30-inch-high, 1,331-foot-long trestle is made of old railroad bridge ties, donated by Southern Pacific, resting on 147 piers.



Firing up. Loco gets help from small electric pump that draws air through stack to fan flames. Once fire is going, steam jet creates draft.



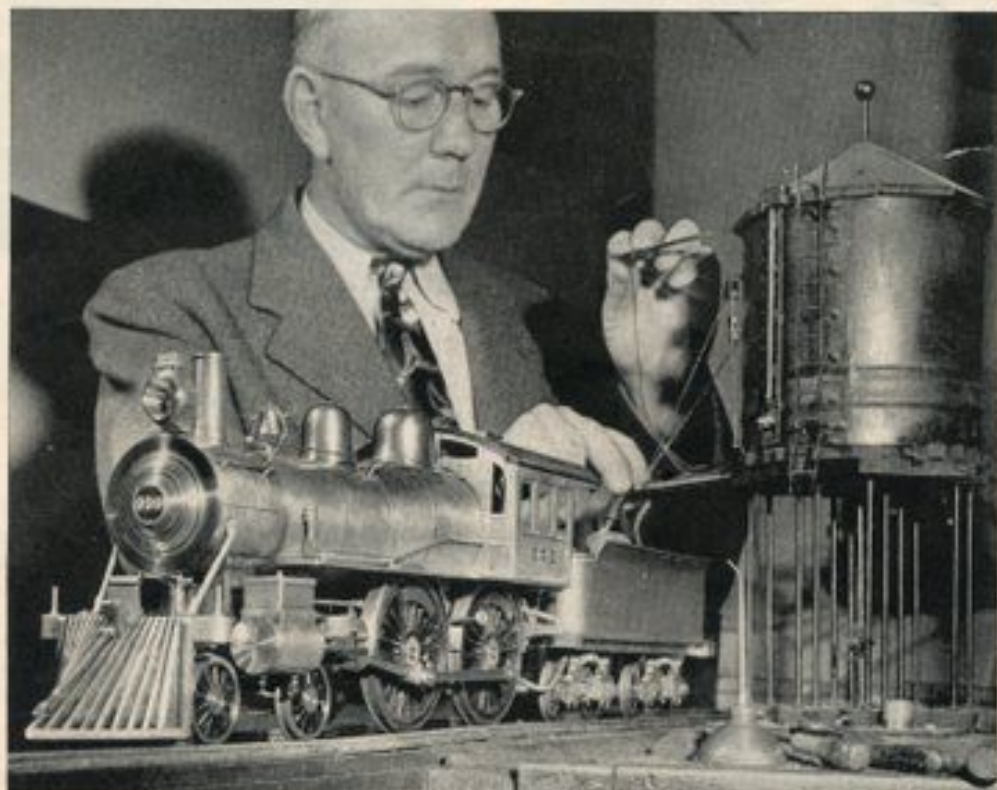
Ready to hit the high iron, this mighty 2-8-2 Mikado blows steam as she gets up pressure. Throttle and steam-pressure gauge are in cab.

running gear in various stages of assembly.

But the real railroad is outdoors, where papier-mache and cardboard are no match for the natural scenic beauty. And it runs

like any self-respecting railroad should—under its own steam. END

Read how one man runs his mammoth model railroad like a real road in P.S. next month.



In club's basement workshop, famous old "999" takes on water from replica of familiar

trackside tank. Larger version of water tank will be built for use by members on outdoor track.