

Little Aire

RICHARD PRATT owned OO gauge models of Class 308 and 321 Electric Multiple Units but had nowhere to run them. This led him to design this West Yorkshire inspired layout, complete with overhead catenary, which was developed in conjunction with the members of Harrogate Model Railway Club.

Photography by Derek Shore

My interest in railways began with a layout created in the loft by my dad. Unfortunately, however, this model was dismantled following a

house move, which left me with a hankering to build something new. Many years later I became a member of Harrogate Model Railway Club and it

was this that presented me with the opportunity to fulfil my dream.

Setting the scene

Little Aire is a fictional location, but is nominally set in the Aire Valley in West Yorkshire. The period modelled is during the last years of British Rail ownership in the late 1980s to the early 1990s, just prior to Privatisation. The layout consists of a double track passenger station which narrows to single track at one end, a Traction Maintenance Depot (TMD), a wagon works and a fuel unloading point.

Much of the reasoning for the concept of the layout arose from the desire to





▲ A Regional Railways branded Class 321 (Bratchell Models) enters Little Aire station. Much of the surrounding infrastructure is from adapted commercial kits: the station is from the Peco office building, the stairways from Ratio and the catenary is a mix of Hornby International and Dapol products.

◀ A brace of English Electric motive power stands outside the MPD. The high yard lamps are typical of modern depots and the rarely modelled block of flats make an excellent end backdrop.

run my models of Class 308 and Class 321 electric multiple units. This pair of models had already been built, but at the time did not fit with anything else that I owned. This new layout also in fact facilitated several firsts for the Harrogate club – namely the employing of Digital Command Control, adding lights and sound, and the installation of (non-working) overhead catenary.

Traditional baseboards

The layout measures 2' wide and is just short of 20' in length which is split over four boards; the two end boards are 6' x 2' whilst the two inner boards are 4' x 2'. The baseboards were made by the club using MDF top surfaces with the frame and leg units constructed from 50 x 25mm softwood.

Control

Little Aire is actually two layouts in one with the station and passenger lines at the rear being completely separate operationally from the depot and wagon works on the front. This allows us to operate the passenger lines on regular 12V dc analogue power using a Gaugemaster hand-held controller at the rear of the layout and shuttling the passenger services up and down between the eight-road fiddle yards. The depot, wagon works and fuel unloading point at the front of the layout are under DCC power. I use an NCE Powercab with a master controller at the depot side and a slave controller at the wagon works end. Both these controllers operate from the front so there is no hiding from the public at exhibitions!

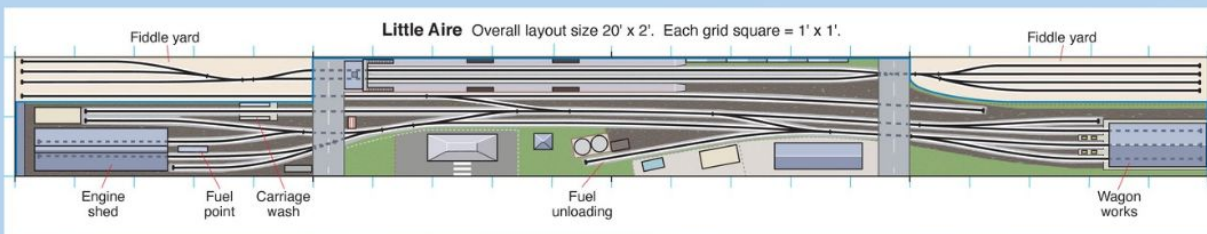
All the trackwork is from the Peco code 75 Streamline range, with the point tiebars operated using Peco twin-solenoid motors – controlled using traditional switches.

Operation

The layout requires a minimum of three operators, but extra hands are invited in for additional support at exhibitions, which usually ensures something is always moving on the layout. Generally speaking we do not stick to a fixed timetable or sequence, but there are eight hidden roads in the fiddle yards to hold passenger units and we usually



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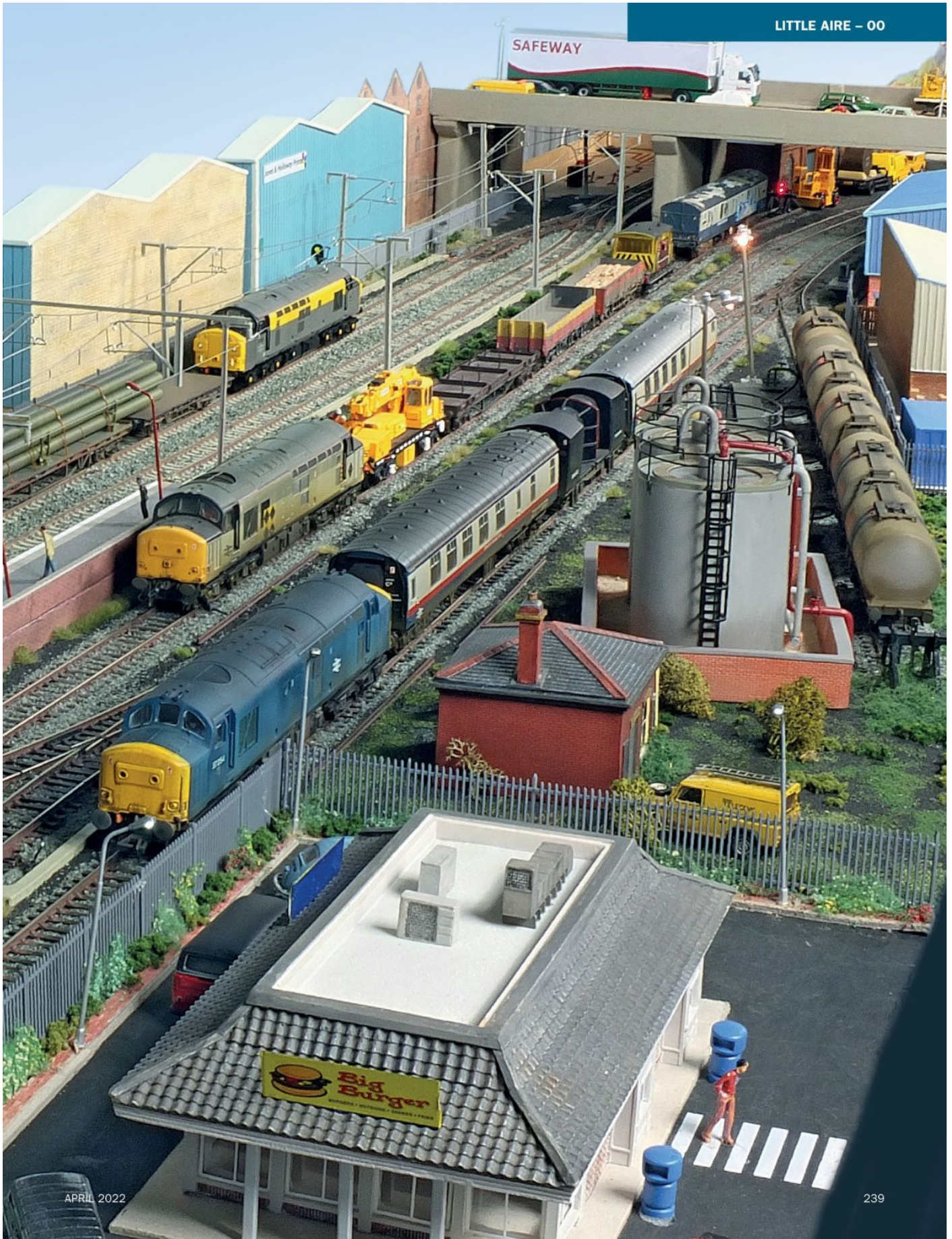


work through these in rotation.

At the front of the layout, the depot, wagon works and fuel unloading points are at the mercy of the individual operators who can run these areas as they see fit with random shunting and varied turns for the locomotives. However, in addition to locomotives running light to and from the depot, and carriages being conveyed to the washing plant, there are a number of works and engineering department trains that can be seen on the layout.

The main visual trick of the layout is that the rear passenger lines and the more industrious front section are completely independent of each other. The passenger services run through the scene and the locomotive and wagon traffic enters from the left-hand fiddle yard.





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English Electric Type 1 20 101 *Caroline* is seen, unusually, running in single loco format as it departs with a rake of empty tankers. Note the seldom modelled trackside driver instruction board.

have been gradually building up a collection of departmental and engineering wagons for the layout, including a structure gauging train. For the most part these have been converted from ready-to-run items.

Scenery

I have used a variety of 'ready-to-plant' buildings, largely from the Hornby and Bachmann ranges, along with some appropriate Peco kits (such as the office building).

Quite a bit of time was spent detailing the layout, which included the installation of the non-working catenary fitted to the passenger routes. These assemblies took some time to engineer and comprise a mixture of Hornby International items for the single masts, while the gantries were made by modifying Dapol masts with metal strip. Whilst the finished result may not be entirely accurate, the catenary has proven to be sufficiently robust to withstand the rigours of transporting the layout to exhibitions.

Reflections

Once the layout had been completed I naturally started to evaluate aspects that, in my mind, could be improved upon. For example, I wish I had paid more attention to the length of roads in the fiddle yard as only one is of sufficient length to accommodate a

Locomotives and rolling stock

Models of locomotives and DMUs are appropriate for the time period modelled, including the Class 308 from DC Kits and the Class 321 from Bratchell Models. With regards to locomotives, I have a particular preference for Heljan Class 58s and Hornby

Class 60s, and I try to ensure that all locos have working lights and DCC sound. All have also been subtly weathered.

We use the American Kadee magnetic coupling system for rolling stock at the wagon works, which enables hands-free shunting. For additional operational interest I



A Class 37 is employed on civil engineering duties with a structure gauging train, whilst in the background multiple units pass in the station.

The layout is profusely populated with appropriate figures. Here the track gang removes some time expired permanent way material with the lookout keeping a watchful eye on the passing trains.

four-car EMU. To get around this (and to allow flexibility when operating at exhibitions) we have had to add a small extension to one end so that all roads are capable of holding any of the passenger units. I also wish that more planning time had been given to constructing a frame for transporting the layout between home and exhibitions.

In terms of operating the layout, I am now considering changing the point control so that the tiebar operation can be controlled digitally from either end; currently the controls are split such that points can only be operated from one end of the layout. This would mean that run-rounds would be much easier and could be completed without having to walk the whole length of the layout. Certainly there are many things to ponder upon for the next project...



Further information

For further details about Harrogate Model Railway Club go to:
www.modelrailwayclubs.co.uk/clubs/north-yorkshire/harrogate-model-railway-club

Yet another brake van fire. A faulty stove or was it vandals perhaps?

A pair of Class 08 diesel shunters are stabled on the right while a typical mix of motive power stands outside the shed. Note the subtle weathering effects including the windscreen clean patches.

