



Sunday drivers

“I have for some time felt rather critical of the way in which many layouts are operated at model railway exhibitions. In my view, our standards of ‘showmanship’ are frequently appalling and could be much improved. Take, for example, the double-track oval with a through station on the public side and a huge fiddle-yard on the other—how often one finds all the drivers messing about in the fiddle yard, with not a moving train in public view! With a bit of thought about what the public has paid to see, we really could do better.”

It’s amazing how a sequence of events pans out, a few other members and I were sitting at Riverton talking about the way we as a club display the layout. While we were there watching, all the operators were “busy” in the fiddle yard for around five minutes with completely empty tracks at the front, not even a single piece of rolling stock parked in the station! As we observed several people came to look at the layout. Some just walked away, the more adventurous checked out the rear “just in case” but most only stayed for about one minute. Hardly surprising really, nothing was happening, we as modelers were falling asleep with boredom.

After discussing this I started to think about how we could do things better because I have seen similar situations at display days before and not only on our layout! The very next day at lunchtime I was reading an article on page 301 of the June 1991 issue of Model Railways magazine titled “Exhibition Operating Practices” written by Michael H. Walshaw. The opening paragraph (quoted above) shook me; the author must have seen our layout sometime! He was talking about us, even the track plan is the same! His answer was a different track plan (hidden fiddle yard to terminus station) with sequence running, not really suitable for us, but it did fire up the thought process again. Later in the article he went on to say: -

“The public does not pay to see drivers dithering and fumbling for the correct point levers and section switches and unfamiliar with the controller-switching system, and in my view practice sessions are an essential precursor to an exhibition appearance.”

This pretty well matches my thoughts exactly. The only thing I have to add is the way some rolling stock runs at times, some people obviously don’t prepare at all, merely tuning up and assuming all will be well! Hence the title “Sunday drivers”

I have therefore prepared a set proposed of guidelines and rules for display days. The basic idea is that one person (to be known as ‘God’) would have both the responsibility and power to ensure an enjoyable and fondly remembered experience. Please think about these, discuss them with others and if you feel they need any alterations then suggest them. They are not rules yet but I propose that they, or something very similar, become so before we display again. I will also put a copy on the notice board to spur on some discussion about this matter.

Catch you down the track...Tony Mikolaj.

Proposed guidelines for display days

- (1) On all display days a person will be declared 'God'. The length of their reign may vary according to availability and there may be more than one 'God' declared during any period of display, but only one at a time. Their duty and responsibility will be to ensure quality entertainment for the viewing public by: -
 - (a) Ensuring a continued flow of activity on all lines.
 - (b) Directing all faulty (uncoupling, stalling, derauling etc) stock be sent to "jail" (the repair shop)
 - (c) Reminding operators / members of their job / responsibilities as necessary.
 - (d) Being fair but firm in all decisions, keeping in mind (1a).
 - (e) Deputize someone for any absence.

- (2) On display days all operators will ensure interesting entertainment for the viewing public by: -
 - (a) Carrying out all directives from 'God'.
 - (b) Remembering that their purpose is to entertain the paying public, all else comes second!
 - (c) Ensuring good running qualities by cleaning all wheels, checking coupler operation etc. before placing rolling stock on the layout for display. Preferably yesterday!
 - (d) Providing a variety of trains / locos etc. to prevent boredom, if you don't have enough stock then work with someone else to increase variety (refer to 2b).
 - (e) Work together with other operators / members to provide quality entertainment (refer to 2b)
 - (f) Removing promptly any item of rolling stock that is not performing properly.
 - (g) Remembering that very long trains might be prototypical, but are also boring for the public if they only pass once per day /week.
 - (h) When in doubt referring to all above especially (2a and 2b).

Proposed rules for display days

- (1) 'God' is God therefore don't argue!
- (2) Any disputes on display days should be either:-
 - (a) Directed to the nearest brick wall, via a firm bash with the forehead or,
 - (b) Saved for discussion at a latter time when the public is not in attendance.
- (3) 'God' shall not be bothered about trains being prototypically correct only the entertainment value and promoting the hobby.
- (4) Difficult decisions about entertainment value should be swayed by the public interest at the time.
- (5) 'God' should normally be stationed on the public side of the display to assist with his / her perspective of proceedings.
- (6) If all else fails refer to (1) above.
- (7) Provided that 'God' has followed the directives set out above and believes a decision fair the committee will back that decision 100%.

Please read and discuss these with other members and suggest any changes you think necessary

Tony Mikolaj...Track committee.