

Andrew's Musings Part 7

It's been three years since my last article in the AC Eurailer. Quite a lot has happened since, both worldwide and with lockdowns there has been the opportunity to push ahead with some model railroading. Not as much as I would like, admittedly, but I keep discovering that before I can do something, there's multiple things to do before that. Robyn must wonder what I do for days on end, because nothing seems to change on top.

As it was, I had been writing about my involvement with the modular group and building modules over the years, starting way back in 2007 with the viaduct, followed by the terminus station, quarry, Loreley Tunnels, Swiss dogbone and the inverse Swiss tunnel corner. I had a triangular layout at home squeezed into the garage, so that should be the end of building and onto the finishing work. And then the club's Bonn station came up for sale (they had another one which was more true to 1/87th scale . . . you don't notice it until you put a correctly sized platform in front). Well I've always been a fan of the Bonn Station so had to buy it . . . problem is where do I put it? Add to this a couple of EMUs that I had which look decidedly like subway trains and another module is starting to formulate – the Bonn Station on the mainline with the subway running underneath. Hmmmm, a loop of track underneath means expanding the module backwards, so lets create a city scene to compliment the station. Hmmmm, Benjamin's recently acquired Faller Car Starter kit – that would be cool. Oh and a Siku crane doing some construction work – wouldn't it be even better if the audience could operate the crane, and run the subway and operate the lift to get from the platform to the underground and why not throw in a functioning road crossing as well and a fountain that works, not thinking water but light threads blown by a fan. Light the whole thing up with a mirror glassed hotel at the back to reflect the city across more angles. Yep, the brain went into mass overload dreaming up more things for the audience to get involved with, being able to press buttons and move things, but all the controls are at the back. Controlled interaction to have people feel part of it all, rather than signs saying DO NOT TOUCH.

So breaking that all down. The city module (I still need to name it) is one module long (1220mm) but also 1220mm back to provide a separate double tracked loop for the subway trains below. The subway is using an old analogue transformer set by me at an appropriate speed, but stopped and started by the audience who hold in a button to allow power to the track. In this way they can stop the train at the underground station (fully visible through the front panel of the module) and start it off again once everyone is on board. Sounds pretty minimal, but the excitement of the kids to be able to actually make things move is great to see.

Up on the main line, the trackwork is very simple, the inside just being a single straight through line next to the Bonn Station building as platform 1, the outside separating into 2 lines (platforms 2 and 3) allowing shorter suburban trains (like my LINT27) to service the local passengers while the express trains travel straight through. The Bonn station "deserves more" in terms of train operations, but I think I make up for it with what will be the busy street scenes behind it (once I populate it with people and cars. I suppose I like to think "why is this train station here" as the focus (because there's a city full of people doing things), rather than the track and trains being the important feature.

If there is something special track work wise, it is the railway crossing, with the flashing lights and barrier arms. Get the wiring right with the isolated track sections and it is really effective. Try fitting it into a 1220mm module and it gets a little more tricky, given that you don't want the alarms going off when the train is stopped at the station, but going off soon enough when it is in motion again – that's one way (from right to left). The other direction is coming straight off the previous module to the left, so there's not a lot of warning of approaching trains from the isolated joiner track to the

actual crossing. Hey, the trains should be going slow while within the station limits – no high speed manoeuvres through here. That isolation needs to continue through the crossing to the start of the platforms . . . just happens to be a point in between as well. I discovered a lot about the intricacies of points when trying to isolate the two rails . . . there's some extra "assistance" by means of a long thin V shaped conductor through the point to keep the ground going while switching. I had to remove this and then isolate around the frog and re-join the track power so trains would not lose power. Hope I got it right, because now that I have ballasted between the tracks with the very effective "isopropyl alcohol and diluted PVA" technique, the track won't be coming up very easily anymore.

So I have a more olden day mainline station above with a modern tubular subway station down below. Wouldn't it be neat to have them joined by a glass lift (with person on board) that the audience can control? As per my previous animations on the quarry module, I didn't want it to be just press a button to have the motor do it for you. Instead it's controlled by a wheel, pulleys and levers which push the lift up from the bottom, with gravity helping with the descent. The actual lift and shaft are made of Perspex, with one corner of the square tube cut out to allow the lever to move up. It's not 100% reliable, so I will be revisiting it with a kitset lift by Faller, that is once I've got all my other modules at an exhibitable standard. I also need to build some stairs to get right down to the subway platform . . . too much to do!

That is only half of it, because behind it all is the city proper, consisting of the main thoroughfare with a square (triangle to be exact, including the "fan" fountain in the middle) in front of the town hall and a block going around a modern church. The church is actually an architect's model for St Chad's in Meadowbank – they didn't go with this design, but I was more than happy to save it for my layout. Driving around the streets is my first attempt at a Faller Car system. Hey I could have been easy on myself and gone for a loop, but instead it is following a flat figure 8 . . . just needed to make sure that there was sufficient difference in the angle where the wires cross over each other, since the intersection of the two is not at 90 degrees.

I mentioned the crane – Siku make a 1/87th scale gantry crane which looks great towering above the construction site and neighbouring buildings. The workers are still down in the depths pouring the foundations for the building (I just had to have some sort of concrete truck and pump somewhere on my layout, since my work life is heavily involved with them. Once again via a wheel and pulleys, the audience can operate the crane . . . well, lift and lower a load down into the pit at least.

The city is actually angled at 45 degrees to the train lines for a couple of reasons. It improves the perspective and 3D-ness of the city by not having it straight (a suggestion I learnt from a Lima catalogue 40 years ago, which said when building a layout to put the track down, and then angle it slightly on the board for a better look, as the trains come towards or away from you, rather than just flatly past you). The second reason is I have a home created modern international hotel at the back covered in mirror glass. The buildings to either side of it get reflected towards the audience, making the city even bigger, rather than people seeing their faces staring back at them. Turn the lights down and the magic of the street lights in the 1/87th world really make the layout come to life.

That's probably more than enough to ponder. However, one last thing that I just mentioned was the lighting. I must admit I was really nervous about LEDs . . . they all seemed to have complex boards linked to them, when all I wanted was a light. I have learnt a lot since then . . . basically they just need a DC current, so I've been using old "baby monitor" plugs to power them up, but with this module I bought some cheap Christmas lights one January which gave me the power source and 100 LEDs. Don't look under the layout at the maze of wires hiding there . . . on top it does the job!

So where are the pictures? I only have a couple to hand. One day I'll get it out of its box, once I finish off all the other modules I'm working on!



