

PGRS TRACKIN'



Newsletter of the Piedmont Garden Railway Society

April 2021

Editor: Scott Williams

Greetings PGRS club members. Springtime is Highballin' our way and we're starting to look forward to spending more time outdoors with our trains again on those warmer spring days!!



Well, spring is on its way and I've already mown all or parts of my lawn a few times to try and keep up and begin that love/hate relationship with green grass once again through the summer months. My pea vines are coming up but it's still weeks from thinking seriously about tomatoes.

The vaccine rollout is going well and after the huge spike in coronavirus cases from December to February we are dropping back down more like where we were last fall. We're heading in the right direction but a recent climb in new cases reminds us we're not out of the woods just yet. It

looks like we're on the right track and if people continue to be careful as more and more people receive the vaccine I'm hopeful that this summer or maybe fall may look a lot more 'normal'. If people stay conscious of social distancing protocols, even outdoors, then Garden Railroading still looks like a safe activity even for older folks and people with less robust immune systems.

Stay safe, and get outside and play with those trains!

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A Perfect World' Around Every Miniature Bend

The pandemic has helped Märklin, a 162-year-old company that makes model trains, discover a new audience.

Christopher F. Schuetze, [New York Times](#), March, 18, 2021

BERLIN — Last spring, the managers at Märklin, the 162-year-old maker of model trains in Germany, were surprised by something unexpected in the sales reports.

“We started to notice a serious uptick in orders,” said Florian Sieber, a director at Märklin. The jump continued into summer — a further surprise, he said, because that’s “when people don’t usually buy indoor train sets.”

But buy they did. In November, Märklin’s monthly orders were up 70 percent over the previous year. The [company’s video](#) introducing its new trains and accessories, posted in January, has been viewed over 165,000 times.

Along with baking and jigsaw puzzles earlier in the pandemic, model trains are among the passions being rediscovered while people are cooped up indoors. Several companies that make trains are reporting jumps in sales. For many people, the chance to create a separate, better world in the living room — with stunning mountains, tiny chugging locomotives and communities of inch-high people where no one needs a mask — is hard to resist.

“Outside, there is total chaos, but inside, around my little train set, it is quiet, it is picturesque,” said Magnus Hellstrom, 48, a high school teacher in Sweden, who has indulged in his hobby while working from home during lockdowns. “It’s a little piece of a perfect world,” he said.



On the ground floor of the Märklenium, a museum and exhibition space that is a shrine to the brand, stands a 1,000-square-foot train set that can be used for workshops or product presentations. Credit... Felix Schmitt for The New York Times



Tobias Blessing, a Märklin employee, working on a model train landscape at the workshop.

Mr. Hellstrom is one of many Märklin enthusiasts. The company, which filed for bankruptcy protection over a decade ago, is now for the first time in years hiring new apprentices to learn the precise work of making super-detailed tiny trains.

“We’re booming so much it’s hard to keep up,” said Maria Huta, 64, who has assembled trains for 38 years at the company’s main facility in Göppingen, a town 25 miles southeast of Stuttgart, where the company was founded.

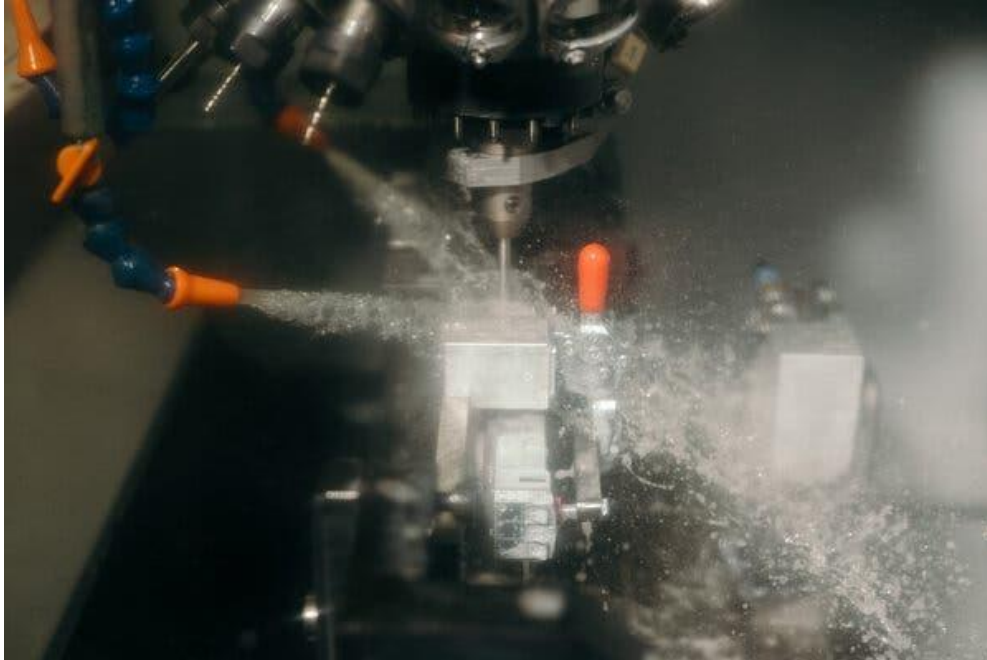
The factory building is more than a century old, and touring the facility is a trip back in time: a factory floor with skilled manual laborers toiling over workbenches. Ms. Huta and her colleagues often use a microscope to attach tiny details like bells or handrails. The company employs about 1,170 full-time employees in its two locations in Göppingen and Gyor, Hungary.



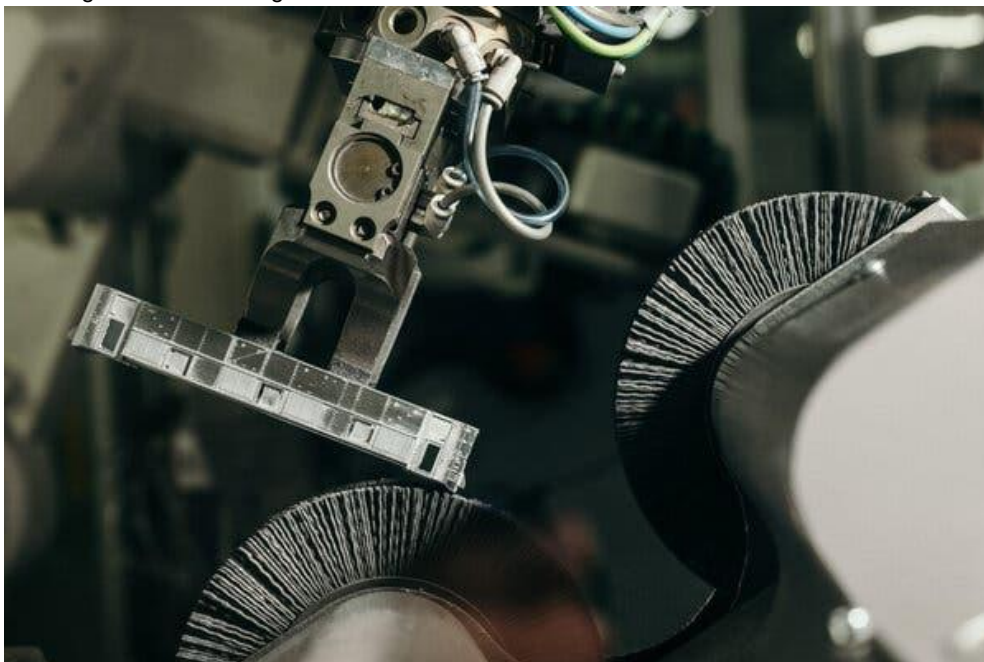
Liquid zinc alloy is filled into a tank before being cast with an industrial metal press.Credit...Felix Schmitt for The New York Times

“We used to contract some of our parts abroad, but we found mostly it was not worth it, the filigree of some of our parts was so fine that we often had to return things,” said Gerhard Tastl, the plant’s production manager, during a factory tour conducted over video.

The Märklin trains come in three scales, with H0-gauge models the most popular. A high-end Gauge 1 locomotive, made up of several thousand individual parts, can cost up to \$4,200 new (and much more if the train becomes a collector's item), although lower-cost locomotives, composed of about 300 parts, sell for about one-tenth of the price. Märklin also makes LGB trains, which are larger and designed to be set up outdoors.



A milling machine creating windows in a model train chassis.



A train chassis being polished with the help of a computer-controlled robotic arm.

Most H0-gauge trains are built from scratch out of basic elements — zinc alloy, steel, plastic pellets and paint — in the Göppingen plant, allowing Märklin to mark these models “Made in Germany.” Parts for other models are made in Göppingen and then assembled in the Hungarian plant.

“For our customers, it’s less about saying it comes just from this one factory in Germany and more about the Märklin signature,” said Mr. Tastl, noting that some of the electronics in the modern trains might come from Asia.

Although the trains that leave the factory floor might resemble the models produced here decades ago, they hide features that were unavailable back then. They now include tiny speakers that reproduce scores of digital chugging noises and whistles (recorded, if possible, from the original), and interior and exterior lights that can be controlled separately. Another feature simulates how actual trains leave the station (very slowly, then gradually gathering speed) and later slowly decelerate to a stop.

A new feature is the remote-controlled raising and lowering of electric pantographs, the apparatus atop a train that connects with overhead wires. Real steam coming out of the steam locomotives has been a feature for years.

“What’s really changed during the last 20 years is the focus on truly replicating the original,” said Mr. Sieber, the director.



A stamp printing machine that applies detailed small prints to the casings.

The trains can be controlled by computer console or by a phone app, with different trains on the same track going different speeds or traveling different circuits. Märklin even added the option of controlling the trains via train engineer simulator software, allowing devotees to control their little model train as though they were sitting in the engineer's chair. "It is a traditional toy that through digital functions, like sound and light, has become more and more like a real train," said Uwe Müller, who was a product manager at Märklin for 15 years and now runs the [Märklineum, the company's museum](#).



A worker examined a model train casing after it was painted and prints were added to it.

Founded in 1859 by Theodor Friedrich Wilhelm Märklin, the company first sold doll accessories. After the founder's death seven years later, the company grew under his young widow, Caroline Märklin, who was one of the company's first traveling saleswomen, covering territories in the south of Germany and Switzerland.

The company started producing windup model trains in 1891, and continued to be owned by different branches of the family until 2006, when it was sold to Kingsbridge Capital, an investment firm. But the company was losing money and had to lay off many hundreds of employees, and in 2009 it filed for bankruptcy protection. Then, in 2013, [the Simba Dickie group](#), a privately owned German toymaker, bought the company, trying to salvage what it saw as an important brand.



Märklin's smallest series is called Z-gauge, which is scaled at 1:220. This model train of a locomotive BR 85 is a bronze cast.



Anna Steiner, who joined Märklin in 1989, said she enjoyed working on the smallest trains, including the Z-gauge series. Credit...Felix Schmitt for The New York Times

Mr. Sieber, whose father founded Simba Dickie in 1982 and who is now co-chief executive of the group, said it took a few years to sort out Märklin's finances. But he said the workers were a critical resource.

"When we first had a very serious look at them, we were so surprised at what we found — the technical know-how of the staff was just unique in the industry," said Mr. Sieber, 35, who fondly remembers playing on a Märklin set as a child with his grandfather.

By 2015, things were looking up. Orders were coming in again and the new management had sought and won new customers with social media outreach campaigns. (The Märklin Insider club, which counts more than 50,000 members worldwide, helps the company keep track of its customers.)



Modern model trains can reproduce dozens of digital noises.



Heike Fuchs serves as quality control: Every train is inspected and test-driven before packaging.

“I have to admit, things are looking better now than they did years ago,” said Ms. Huta. She is part of a board representing the workers in negotiations with the factory owners, and remembers vividly when many of her colleagues were let go when the company’s future seemed unclear.

The boom in sales from the pandemic has led to shortages of some parts, like rails. Certain special models have sold out, like [a model](#) of the 078 series, a steam locomotive used by the West German national rail in the 1960s and 1970s. In a first since Simba Dickie took over the company, the company is training new apprentices to join the roughly 700-strong work force in Hungary.

The company is betting that many of the people drawn to Märklin trains during the pandemic will stick with model trains afterward. "Because it really is not the kind of hobby that you do for two weeks and then abandon," Mr. Sieber said.

Editor's note: The hobby is booming overseas. Let's hope the Pandemic has also helped encourage others to start, or revisit their model train hobbies here in the US too!! The above article referenced Marklin crediting success through their social media outreach so share those Garden Railway and other model train Facebook pages with anyone you meet who might be interested in model trains!! With luck, the younger generation's fascination with social media and also digital command control via cell phone or laptop and lifelike sound might help fuel more interest in model railroading in the United States too!!

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Doc Watson recently shared this website as a nice source for LEDs, mini and micro, flashing, lots of colors, etc. and if you don't like soldering in a resistor yourself they have them available already to go. Not the cheapest way to go certainly, but you're paying for convenience and selection.

<https://evandesigns.com/>

Larry Williams adds this link. He says this is the only place he has found Sunny White and Golden White which he finds more authentic for railroad lighting.

<http://www.richmondcontrols.com/>

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Tim Wagner had a table at the February WNC Ag Center train show and says:

"Pretty good show. According to comments at the end, I think attendance was down about 10-15%. I was able to sell a bit. FYI: One buyer wanted a steam engine. Main focus was on HO & O.

I'm planning on getting a table at the Hickory show on April 9-10."

Tim has many items of his and Bob VanWagner's for sale. If interested reach out to him: timwagner2012@gmail.com

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Dave Smith says:

“I have a mainline switch stand and a small outdoor mine car with one track section that I no longer want.

A club member who bought my turntable said he'd be interested in the switch-stand but I don't recall his name.

(that switch stand is tall 7' and HEAVY!)”

Dave Smith, Fort Mill SC, 803-322-6820, sunnyfield@aol.com

Dave is asking 150.00 for switch stand and 50.00 for the ore car.



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Peggy Keyes says:

I plan to open the museum after Easter. [[The Right Track Toy Train Museum. Lake Lure](#)] (I'll let you know the exact date when I know).

There will be fewer days each year than previously, no Wednesdays in 2021, so:

Thur. - Sat 1PM -5PM
Sun. 2PM-5PM

2021 - EVERYTHING that is for sale in the museum will be 10% off.

FUTURE PLAN:

2022 - everything that is for sale in the museum - 20% off. Closed Thurs.

2023 - everything that is for sale in the - 30% off. Closed Fri.

2024 - EVERYTHING in the museum 40% off. Closed Sat.

My plan is to close the museum at the end of the 2024 season and sell the building but as the saying goes, man (or woman) makes plans and God laughs.

Take care and stay safe,
Peggy

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Doc also shared his fondness recently with me regarding **Alclad II paint**. He was sharing the natural metal finishes and hues you can get using these and they are very impressive and can simulate most any type of metal in ready to go airbrush lacquers. It's a nice website complete with FAQ and How-To section.

Take your project to the next level.
See the full line of natural metal model finishes. Our airbrush ready, fast drying finishes can take your next project to a higher level of quality.



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Scenes from the workshops:

This photo came to me from a cell phone number with no contact information, just a phone number that I couldn't match on the club mailing list.

There was just this quote: "Here are a couple of photos. One is the RR under winters coat of leaves etc. The is my work room/junk depot."

This was the only photo that came through though. **But**, if I had to guess I'd say it's Jon Bole's workshop.



J.R. Snider sends these photos from his station building trackside of his garden layout:







Thanks Folks!! Keep those **workshop photos** coming so we can see where you work on your train projects.

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MEMBER PHOTOS:

Bill Huntman says:

“Having completed a couple of 1880s WestSide Carter Bros flat cars I started work on another bucket list project. This is WestSide snow plow #2 nicknamed the Powder House plow. I am working from the instructions for an HO/O kit with some drawings in 1/4 scale. The instructions/drawings have obviously been copied multiple times and it is sometimes a guess whether the part is 1’ or 8” or 9” or 1’2”. Just staying busy.”



*Editor's note: This plow looks great Bill. I researched a few others that folks have built and this is an excellent example of it. Looking forward to finished photos.



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Please send any idea, project, photo, something you found surfing on the Internet, etc., no matter how great or small they may be to your newsletter editor. We all love trains so...if it's about trains, and you've got it on your computer, chances are you won't be the only person who might enjoy viewing it.

Send your photos to: srwavl@outlook.com

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Trivia Question: What is the longest North American railroad tunnel?

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Membership:

Please consider sharing this newsletter with friends who might be interested and if they wish to become members ask them to contact our PGRS Secretary/Treasurer for a membership form.

Don Watson
125 Mistletoe Trail

Hendersonville, NC 28791

docwatson@morrisbb.net

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Train Lovers Luncheons:

...have been postponed until things get safer with the Coronavirus.

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Trivia Answer: Cascade Tunnel at Stevens Pass on BNSF and built by the Great Northern in 1929 and is 7.8 miles in length. Originally electric locomotives were used in the tunnel but electrification was removed in 1956, after a ventilation system was installed to eliminate diesel fumes

The current Cascade Tunnel is in full operation and receives regular maintenance from BNSF Railway. The new alignment is a straight-line tunnel running between Berne and Scenic Hot Springs. It is currently part of the BNSF Scenic Subdivision between Seattle and Wenatchee, and Amtrak's *Empire Builder* runs through it. Because of safety and ventilation issues, this tunnel is a limiting factor on how many trains the railroad can operate over this route from Seattle to Spokane. The current limit is 28 trains per day. Speed through the tunnel is 30 mph for passenger trains, 25 mph for freight trains.

The gradient in this tunnel is 1.565% (1:64), with the rise from west to east. The gradient is 2.2% on the west side from the town of Skykomish. Most recently, telecommunications assets and track sections inside the tunnel were improved.

Ventilation operations

Because of the length of the tunnel, an unusual system is used to ensure that the air inside remains breathable and reduce problems with excess fumes. For example, as a train enters the west portal of the tunnel, a red-and-white-checkered door closes on the east portal and huge fans blow in cool air through a second portal to help the diesel engines. As long as the train is within the tunnel, the fans work with reduced power to avoid pressure problems. When the train is approximately halfway through the tunnel, the door opens in earnest.

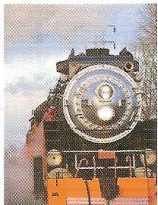
Once the train has cleared the tunnel, the door closes again and the fans operate for 20 to 30 minutes with maximum power to clear the tunnel of exhaust before the next train passes through. In the opposite direction, the door opens when the train is within 0.6 miles. The fans are powered by two 800-horsepower electric motors, clearing the air through the seven miles of tunnel within 20 minutes. Present-day train crews carry portable respirators for use in the event of a fan failure or a train stalling inside the tunnel. In addition, there are emergency/safety stations spaced 1,500–2,500 feet apart,

depending on the location within the tunnel, that provide additional air tanks and equipment to be used in the event of a ventilation/other failure. The tunnel door is protected by an absolute signal near the east portal; on the west side, another signal with dual-flashing lunar aspects indicates to eastbound trains that the tunnel fans are operating.



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Businesses associated with our club:

	<p>Jim's Train Sales O & G Gauge New & Used Trains Jim Hendley Etowah, North Carolina 28729 <i>Lionel, MTH, USA Trains, PIKO, LGB Bridgwerks Power Supplies, Bachmann Split-Jaw Rail Clamps, O & G Gauge Track</i></p>
<p><i>Garden Railroad Design Old Trains Wanted</i></p>	<p>Email: jhh1218@att.net Phone: (828) 891-7570 Fax: (828) 890-3346</p>

**** Jim Hendley has moved.** To reach him use the following number:

828-333-2523 and if the email above does not work try hendleyjim4@gmail.com



Peggy Keyes
Owner / Chief Conductor
RightTrackTrainMuseum@gmail.com
828/625-5551

The Right Track Toy Train Museum
A non-profit museum to benefit Pancreatic Cancer
research
2414 Memorial Hwy (Rte 64/74)
Lake Lure, NC 28746
Find us on Facebook!

** Peggy Keyes announced on Facebook that due to Covid the museum would be closed. Check **The Right Track** Facebook page for further developments.

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