

## You're Never Too Old To Play With Electric Trains

BY SUSAN USHER

Like many a child, Bernard Hanke enjoyed playing with electric trains as a young boy. At about age 16, like many a teen-ager, he put his trains aside, giving them to younger cousins.

It was only as an adult that he rediscovered the pleasure of model trains.

Nearing the end of his first stint in the U.S. Navy, Hanke's ship returned to its homeport in New York. At a bingo game at a nearby Army base, the prizes weren't the usual cash. Instead they included assorted gifts.

Hanke won the electric train, and kept it, with a potential recipient in mind.

"Myrtle was expecting our first child at the time," he recalls.

The train crossed the Atlantic Ocean several times aboard ship, running on its small track in Hanke's quarters.

"As the children came, the trains multiplied," he said.

Today his O-gauge (1 1/4-inch between the rails) collection includes about 280 cars and 70 engines dating back to 1929, primarily Lionels. It's still growing. He and a son are splitting the cost of a new engine.

Hanke continues to follow the "trials and tribulations" of what was once among the most familiar household words in the United States. "People give them to me—a sort of give-them-a-good-home kind of thing," he says.

These days Hanke, a former chemist and teacher, and his wife, Myrtle, a former U.S. Navy WAVE, are retired, living in the Holden Beach area and pursuing hobbies that include boating, golf and involvement in civic and fraternal organizations.

Hanke isn't ready to retire his trains. Instead, he shares his hobby with family, friends and fellow model railroaders.

His first joy in model railroading was and remains "strictly running the trains on track."

Wearing an N & W Railway T shirt and hat and a big grin, his hands on the controls, Hanke still gets excited. First the Broadway Ltd.—a New York-Philadelphia commuter train—and then the Chicago Northwestern begin moving along the lines.

On a third railroad the Brookshire chug-chug-chugs as it picks up speed.

In all he has four railroad main lines, double tracked, tucked in layers on a layout that fills much of his 21- by 12-foot train room.

It's the fourth model railroad layout built by Hanke, and it's still in progress. With every visit, there's something new to see—a building here, a trestle there, added touches in the scenery.

Set high in the mountains somewhere in the Northeast, the tracks run through hills dotted with fall foliage in bright hues of purple, reds, oranges, yellows and browns. They disappear into tunnels, cross trestle bridges and come to a halt alongside a water tank, a cabin Hanke describes as Henry David Thoreau's mountain retreat. After all, there's no Walden Pond in the layout.

Some of the stops are figments of Hanke's imagination, but many are places where he's visited or lived, bits of transplanted nostalgia.

While running the trains remains a delight, Hanke takes pleasure these days in finding ways to incorporate everyday items in his layout. It's a challenge to his creativity, his ingenuity, to see what he can come up with using locally available materials.

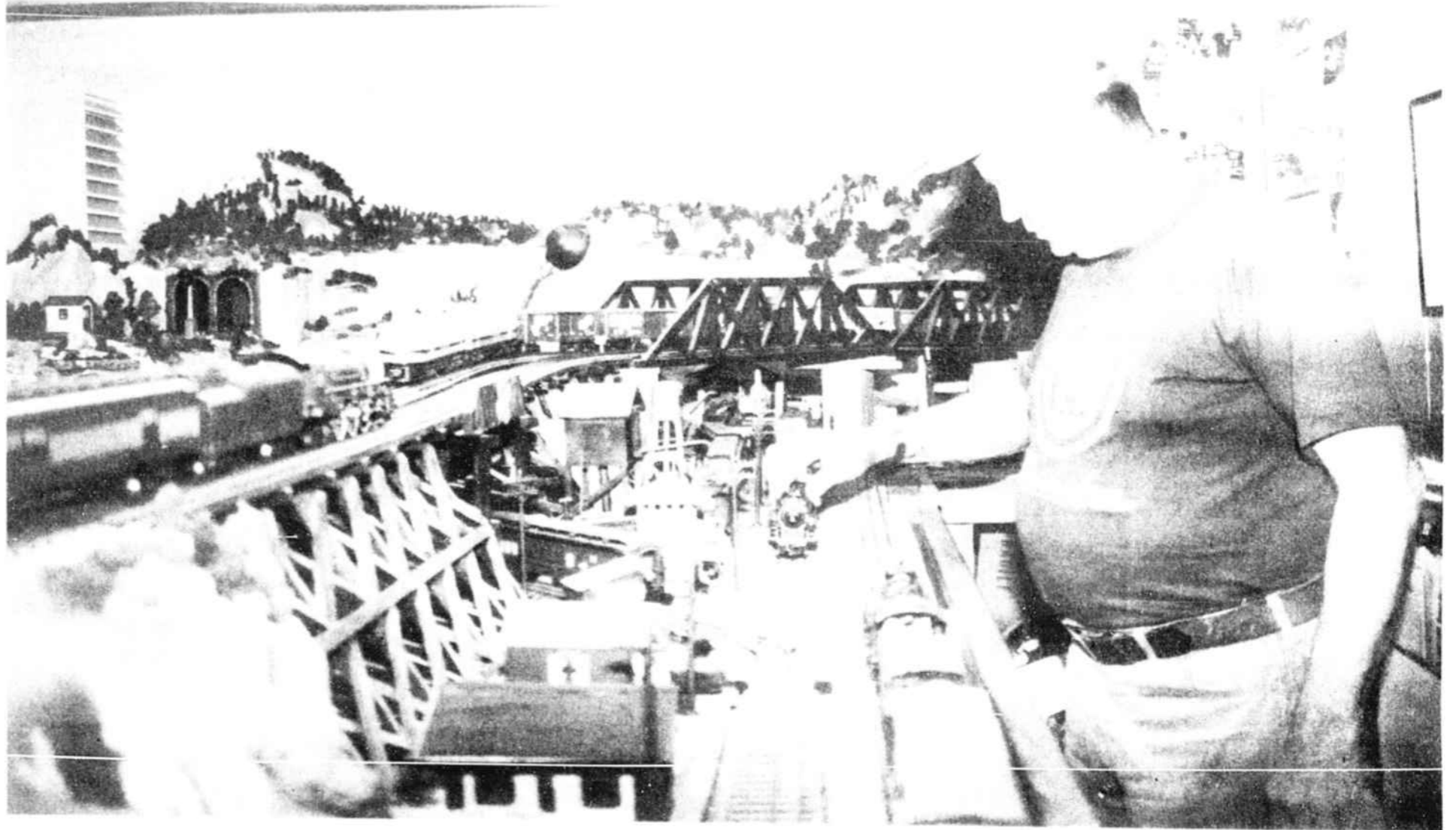
That beautiful fall foliage, for example, is made of primarily of goldenrod and lichen, dried, spray painted and then sealed with "cheap hairspray that has a lot of lacquer in it". Using that simple technique he's made 2,800 trees.

Vermiculite serves well as ballast along the tracks, while oyster shells work well in place of rock when building tunnels and walls.

"The fun part is, say you need a culvert. A toilet paper roll is perfect..." says Hanke. "You're only limited by your imagination."

Hanke's first two layouts were basic. With the third he began getting more into equipment, construction and scenery, a trend continued with the fourth.

That's one thing about model railroading—interest in creating an authentic layout, for example, can lead to related fields such as history and economics. Constructing



MODEL RAILROADER BERNARD HANKE points out a feature of a train stopped at the water tank.

your own infrastructure requires picking up basic trade skills such as carpentry and electricity. Someone who works with landscape can develop quite an artist's eye for color and design.

To fashion buildings Hanke uses whatever's available—cardboard stock, light wood, bits of celluloid. "The doors work, the lights burn—just like a real engine house," he said. Everything is built to scale—one-quarter inch to the foot.



THE BALTIMORE AND OHIO F-7, with its sleek, modern lines and accent stripe, whisks along a higher-elevation track.

"You're only limited by your imagination. The more ideas you have, the more of this stuff you can make from nothing."

His layout is intentionally not perfect, as it is intended to mirror nature.

"Nature's sloppy; you don't want it to look too neat," Hanke says. As a result, weeds and other small plants pop up between the rails. Rocks look like they just tum-

bled down the mountain. "You become something of an artist; you begin to look at color, proportion, perspective," he continues. "It's almost like painting in oil."

A hobbyist can choose to do everything from scratch, or can pick and choose. One railroader may specialize in construction, another in custom design of car, another in landscape work.

Hanke came into the hobby with some prior wood-

Hanke likes being able to choose among different projects when he comes downstairs to play with his trains. He can run engines and cars, customize a car like his "Prince Spaghetti" unit, or work on some aspect of the layout.

Being versatile helps, because the opposite—focusing too much on one area only—can kill enthusiasm, like the man who decided he would make all his own track. Months later, the line still wasn't ready for a train and his interest had flagged.

What direction a hobbyist goes if interested in model railroading depends on several factors, including interest, skill and available time and space.

And today, especially, says Hanke, "it's a question of economics: What can you afford?"

Instead of developing their own model layout, some people pursue "armchair" modeling, collecting books and magazines and catalogs, or even videos of favorite railroads.

Others, where the climate permits, may choose garden railroading, creating backyard layouts with trains sometimes big enough for kids to ride in.

Layouts can be simple or extensive, homemade or built from kits using materials that range from basic to exotic. In any case, it takes planning to make sure all the elements you want included will fit in the space available and remain attractive and functional.

"Change can be expensive if it doesn't fit," he cautions.

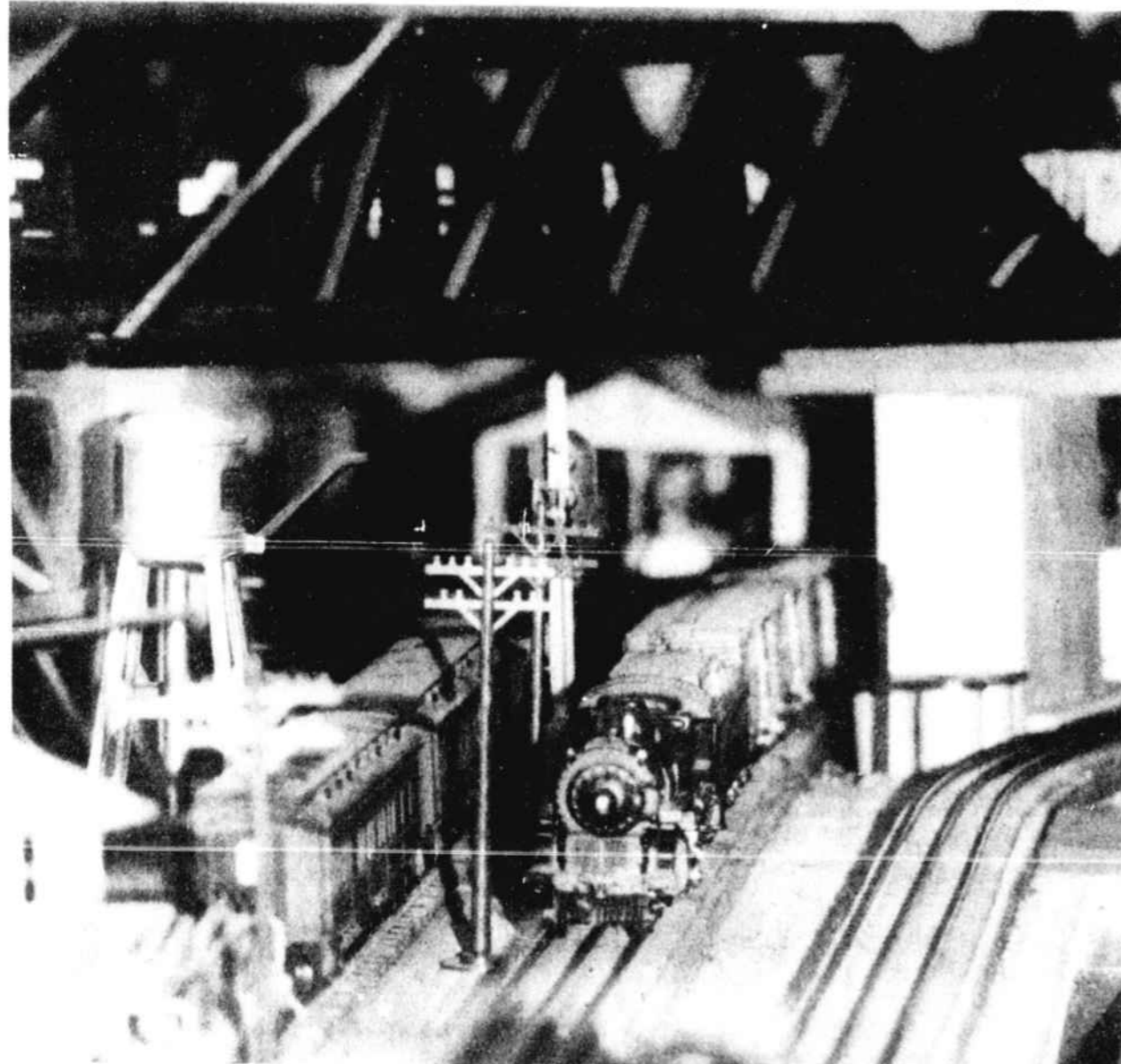
Economics is an increasingly important factor in model railroading.

Hanke says it is no longer a kid's activity, with collectors paying incredibly high prices for certain originals and special edition manufacturers coming into the foreground.

"It's a rich man's game now, unfortunately," he says.

Still, Hanke says, a youngster—or an adult for that matter—can "build a nice model and have fun," starting at around \$100 to \$150.

It could be the beginning of a lifetime of enjoyment.



COMING OUT OF THE TUNNEL, the Broadway Ltd., a commuter train that ran between New York and Philadelphia.



THIS WORKHORSE, the Brookshire, was a "peddler" train, hauling goods on short runs.

STAFF PHOTOS BY SUSAN USHER