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On30 questions

Fri, 2020-05-01 13:20 — Billsz [Getting Started](#)

I have been an armchair modeler for more years than I care admit to but am finally ready to actually start building something. I find MR's On30 Olympia intriguing but before I venture into On30 I have a couple of questions for those of you in the scale.

1. Do the locomotives (Shay, Heisler, Porter) run smoothly at low speeds? A small logging layout interests me but only if the locomotives run well. When I watch videos of the locos it seems then tend to stutter at low speeds. Is this typical?

2. Availability of locomotives/rolling stock. I was disappointed to learn that Bachmann no longer manufactures the Shay loco. I contacted them and it appears they have no plans to reissue it. It seems like Bachmann is a major supplier in On30 and my fear is that they will stop producing their items. After speaking with a number of individuals in N and HO scales it appears the hobby has become one of order now and you'll get it sometime in the future. Being recently retired I would prefer not to have to wait years for a product to be available.

I like the concept behind the Olympia railroad and feel it would be interesting to build but only if the locos run smoothly otherwise I would find it very frustrating. So before I switch my focus to either HO or N I would be very interested to hear the thoughts of those of you involved with this scale.

Thank you in advance for sharing your insights,

Bill

[◀ Need advice for future project once I level my scale modelling skills.](#)

[starting new layout in N scale ▶](#)

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My take

Fri, 2020-05-01 14:12 — p51

Simply put, On30 is NOT for everyone, nor is any narrow gauge.

You can't have interchange and most narrow gauge railroads ran on the edge of bankruptcy (most were gone by the 1950s). The main reason many train fans ONLY think of the Rio Grande are for narrow gauge is that it was still running, with steam, way past when almost all other narrow gauge lines were ripped up.

In other words, if you wanna model in On30, you should already be thinking in a narrow gauge mindset and you want an era during or well before the 1950s (I model 1943 and that's really quite later than many other On30 layouts I know of).

As for On30 in general, well, it's the red-headed stepchild of the hobby. Many within the hobby don't take it seriously, and Model Railroader only just started to using the term On30 and was using "On 2 1/2" as late as last year in print.

Many in the hobby think On30 is all about:

- Cars as short as they can get
- Curves as tight as they can get
- Layouts as whimsical as they can get (like a cartoon)

I know in my own case as well as a recently-sold On30 basement filler nearby, visitors often say, upon seeing attempts to model in On30 that aren't whimsical with shorty cars. The On30 Annual has done an amazing job of promoting the more 'serious hobbyist' nature of On30, but I think it's fair to say that in many cases, people get into On30 to escape the bounds of reality and want to do whatever they want.

Bachmann is clearly the primary vendor for the hobby. They've come out with new stuff every now and then (their latest was the Army Baldwin class ten 2-6-2 from WW1) but I think the market has sort of peaked for them. Some of their previous best sellers, they don't even currently make. I've asked Bachmann reps at shows, but they are evasive on the actual answers as to why.

With On30 or anything NG, you need to be able to make your own stuff to a degree. Yeah, you have structures and landscaping stuff suitable for O scale for those who make 2-rail standard gauge, 3-rail and the like, but a *great deal* of



On30 stuff is scratch-built or made from laser kits. Lots of On30 structures, I've seen, are made of real wood. As On30 really started out as a 'do it yourself' portion of the hobby, you'll find the older guys into On30 resent the RTR 'out of the box' nature that Bachmann brought to the table.

Some people get into On30 thinking it's just Ho scale with different sized figures. Not so. You have to consider the orders of magnitude for structures and any detail components, as it's twice the size of HO. Those spaces get filled FAST. I've noticed that generally, structures in any scale take up the same room. In other words, if you model N scale, you're apt to make a station a certain size in real life. If you go to HO, it's the same overall real world size but in scale, the depot is now smaller. In On30, it takes up the same room your N scale depot did, but for your O scale figures, it's now really small.

I hope some of this rambling response helps...

LEE



[My Flickr website with layout photos](#)

You can *never* have too much detail or too many trees on a layout.

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On30

Fri, 2020-05-01 14:24 — efeser

1: Running quality: both the Heisler and Porter from Bachmann run quite well, very smooth. The Porter does run into short wheelbase issues, but this is nothing good track work won't overcome. The Shay, when the gear issues are fixed, runs nicely. But, gear issues.

Availability: Heislars and Porters are common, and can be gotten at a reasonable price, much below msrp. What's can be found, but will cost more. And, gear issues.

on30 is becoming something of a craftsman gauge, although a lot of the stock is still available. Kitbashing, many times with HO mechs, is very common.

Also, don't discount some of the other locos for a logging line. Prototype loggers were well known for using whatever was available cheap. You could use the Trench loco, and even the mallets. The mallets btw are quite capable of running 18" or even 15" radius.

Finally, there are a number of groups on other platforms such as Facebook that cater to the Narrow O crowd and have a lot of ideas.

Eric

Modeling On30 and proud of it. There is a jar of rivets on the workbench if you feel the need to count.

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Good comments above

Sat, 2020-05-02 03:52 — Bagal

I have the Heisler and outside frame 4-4-0. Both run very nicely.

The Bachmann products are a mix of 36", 30", and 24" prototypes. This can make it a little difficult in selecting equipment, that is if you are concerned about such things. I have chosen to model 30" with a vaguely South American look. Whimsical perhaps.

But wouldn't it have been nice if they also had correct gauge 24" and 36" models? The Trench loco is a nice addition, I think it represents a 24: gauge prototype. Not sure what it would look like alongside the outside frame Consolidation?

For anyone starting out there doesn't seem to be a lot currently available, but Heislars are still available for a logging layout.

bagal

- [A Trip up Bingham Canyon.](#)
- [Track plan update](#)

[more](#)

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Thoughts From an Amateur

Sat, 2020-05-02 06:23 — f134kilmil

I'm a relatively new convert to On30 after years of inactivity in model railroading, and far from a master modeler. That said:

1. Are you a rivet counter? If so, On30 is probably not for you. On my model RR, there are only 2 rules:

Rule #1: The RR General Manager is always right.

Rule #2: When the GM is wrong, refer to Rule #1.

The only person I need to please is myself. I really don't care what the rivet-counter thinks, I'm not modeling a specific prototype. I'm in the hobby for fun, not frustration or criticism.

2. For On30 there are a lot of readily-available HO track products. Ditto on structures, ranging from ready-built to kits requiring various degrees of building skills. Even I can handle most of the laser-cut parts. S-scale bridges are well-suited.

3. Bachmann is indeed the main supplier. They have made O-Scale narrow gauge affordable. They have had gear issues in the past on some of their engines but seem to have resolved them. I love my Shay, and can't understand why they won't produce it again. It would be perfect for your desires. But marketing considerations drive productions. On30 is still a niche market.

4. There are a number of small-business suppliers who produce cars, structures, detail parts, etc.

5. On30 trains are large-enough for my geriatric eyes and hands to see & handle. While narrow-gauge engines & cars are about 3/4 size of standard-gauge items, people & buildings are not. Relatively-speaking, structures require more space, a factor you need to consider in your planning. But the tighter curves mean I don't need a mansion to have enough space to build something more than a simple oval.

6. Let practical considerations guide your track plan, and I had to break my HO-scale thinking, especially track-spacing. **DON'T PUT ANYTHING WHERE YOU CAN'T REACH IT!!** Don't ask how I know this. My tunnels have removable panels so I can retrieve the occasional derailed car.

7. I use RailPro vice DCC with battery power. On my few engines, other than the Shay, the components will fit in the tender. For the Shay, a dedicated battery car is required. I use a tool car as the Shay pulls a combination work train & mine cars. Battery power means I don't have to worry about insulating rail gaps or cleaning track and wheels. Limitations of battery power can be endurance (an hour is fine for my arthritic knees), and a derailment means the engine keeps running until it encounters something solid, like scenery, a structure, or the floor. The types of control and power are discussed elsewhere in this forum.

8. I have a Porter, which you seem to have under consideration. It's a "cute" engine & very practical for narrow gauge. However, it's very light & can pull only a few cars. I added some weight to mine for improved traction. I added a tender to hold the battery & RailPro components.

My 2-cents worth.

Steve Miller, Fredericksburg, VA

Steve Miller

Fredericksburg, VA

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Additional reading for Bill

Sat, 2020-05-02 16:23 — Oztrainz

Hi Bill, all,

The subject of On30 has been raised here in the past. For additional reading about some of the other aspects involved with On30 rolling stock and layout design. As a start can I suggest

1. <https://model-railroad-hobbyist.com/node/13238> - discusses some of the issues encountered when modelling On30.
2. Not all passengers rode in Bachmann type passenger vehicles - especially on logging and industrial lines, For inspiration have a look at <https://model-railroad-hobbyist.com/node/24262> Notice the cars at Puffing Billy. This is a REAL 30" gauge line. These cars are built on a 22'6" standard chassis that was used for flatcars, gondolas, boxcars, livestock wagons and passenger cars. Also not the knuckle couplers - when scaled to 1/48 the coupler dimensions (3/4 of full size standard gauge) go close to a KD #5 and are mounted at "standard HO height (as supplied "out-of-the-box" by Bachmann)
3. There were a lot of 30" and 750 mm railroad around the world. Remember 30" track gauge is only 6" away from both 2' and 3' track gauges. Again there were probably a lot of 3'6" gauge railroads that were built around the world than for 2', 2'6" and 3' track gauges combined. Locomotive manufacturers around the world can and did supply the same locomotive on different track gauges. When designing your model railroad, don't get too fixated on which locomotive

or wagon ran on what track gauge. For some other 30" gauge inspiration have a look at <https://model-railroad-hobbyist.com/node/13529>

4. You haven't mentioned Bachmann's other geared locomotive - the Climax. Again one of these actually ran on 30" gauge tracks and it actually still runs. Dimensionally it is very close to the Bachmann offering and the Climax appeared to avoid the worst of the gear cracking problems previously mentioned. The real one can be seen in action below

Climax Returns - Geared Steam Engine at Puffing Billy Rail...



At about 6 minutes in that's a real 30" gauge Shay (worked in Taiwan) and at about 8 minutes in, that's one of the 30" gauge 2-6-2 tank locomotives.

That ought to do to get things started,

Regards,

John Garaty

Unanderra in oz

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Hi Bill, I'll throw a few

Mon, 2020-05-25 01:02 — RGS Mudhen

Hi Bill,

I'll throw a few more thoughts on the table for you.

Although Bachmann led the charge in On30, lots of different manufacturers have brought lots of products to the marketplace. Bachmann's big drawback is found in the slightly undersized cars they put out. They are good models, but are smaller than other brands that offer a more robust feel. My entrance to On30 began nearly 12 years ago when I bought some Bachmann equipment from Ridge Road Station in New York as they were unfortunately going out of business.

First, I don't model a small railroad, meaning On30 has been the choice of many micro-layouts because there are several small Porter and diesel units, plus there are a lot of opportunities to scratchbuild (although those exist in any scale). As an example, I model the RGS (bet you couldn't guess that) and currently have many engines that were on the roster such as #40, #20, #455, #461 and a few other that would have been leased. I also have several D&RGW road engines that operated on the railroad before its demise. All of my engines are purchased and then many are modified. I only mention this as sometimes narrow gauge modelers flock to On3, but I don't have that kind of real estate. I have 32" max radius in corners and cinch down to 28" within yard limits and for turning wyes. I don't have issues with larger engines, but I won't run anything larger than a 460 series K-27 ever. If you wanted to get engines, EBay has been very nice to me and I have bought some items at shows. Sometimes people just want to dump their Bachmann items at train shows, so keep a weathered eye out for bargains (I went to Trainfest two years ago and a vendor was selling brand new cars for \$15- I didn't need any but bought a motorcar for \$20). Broadway Limited Imports and MMI imports are offered online from time to time. You just have to know what you want to spend and stick to it. Unfortunately, with everything now, even auction prices are crazy, so finding some bargains may be difficult, but they are out there. Also you can check some On30 facebook sites where people list items for sale as well.

When I started the On30 journey, Bachmann was king, but there are many options. First, I will tell you to stay away from EBay for rolling stock because people selling things there are insane! People will want \$20 shipping, making cars cost as much as \$60+ by the time you get them at your doorstep. Shop around. Also know you can purchase On3 cars and, with a few modifications (sometimes only wheelsets), have some good operating models. San Juan Car Company makes a mean On30 drop bottom gondola and high side gondola. I have also bought On30 and On3 tank cars and stock cars ready built and as kits from them as well. Once again, train shows are awesome for finding items. I offered to purchase 8 Gramps tanks for \$50 a piece from one vendor (and got them). I have purchased San Juan kits for \$20 because the seller wanted to get rid of them (they got some on trade for some HO equipment and didn't want to deal with it).

Another source of equipment is from Accucraft. They make a pretty decent tank, box, flat car and short caboose, as well as a hefty passenger car. A good model for the money, but will need some updates to look perfect, but is a good model to work with. Buy direct from Accucraft. I find them on EBay all the time overpriced with more outrageous shipping attached.

Accucraft generally has them in stock and shipping is very reasonable. I have bought them direct for \$34.95 a car and something like \$15 shipping, but I bought 12 box cars and ten tanks at one crack. And there are bargains to be had on the auctions. Be willing to make an offer. I have seen Accucraft passenger cars offered at \$95 apiece, but have used the make an offer price to get an awesome deal. I picked up 2 of them for \$55 apiece. You can only receive if you are willing to ask. Some people may think their offer is an insult, but sometimes if you ask the right way and they just want to part with them, they will make you a deal. Then also make sure they do combined shipping. That's how to make it worthwhile sometimes. The nice thing about the Accucraft cars is they are set up to use HO height or On3 coupler height (you just have to remove the shim on the coupler pocket).

And there are lots of other manufacturers making new On30 items every day, plus you can easily modify or adjust HO or Sn3 items with a bit of ingenuity. Be willing to call around too. Crusader Models, located in Philadelphia, has sold me some items at very good prices.

Track is readily available. One can use HO track, but it looks a bit weird and out of context, but you can pick up components cheap as well. I use Micro Engineering Code 83 On30 track and their #5 turnouts and they work well. But if you buy it, go to MicroMark. Sign up for their catalog and every now and then they run free shipping. If you buy 3 or more bundles of track, the price drops from \$44.95 to \$36.95. Once again EBay has lots of track available, but know what is a good price. I have bought lots of flex track for well less than \$25 a bundle. There is an auction right now where the seller wants \$50 for a bundle and \$22 shipping. That's ridiculous!!

Lastly, Trainland and other big dealers will run specials. I picked up a DCC 4-6-0 from them for \$79.95 and only \$10 shipping. I must say I love the hunt just as much as modeling. I have only bought ONE item ever for my railroad at full price and that was an extravagant purchase because it was my Christmas present.

As for operations, I haven't had many stalling problems, but my engines are a bit larger than most. I can only suggest a keep alive, which I have seen solve much of that problem for my friends.

Hope this information helps. I love the size, but have to admit you need some space as everyone else mentioned for structures, but that's part of the fun. It's a wonderful scale to make fantasy come to life. I really like many of the models I have seen people build over the years, but also know you can go full-blown if you also desire.

Daryl

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Hi BILL from another Bill

Tue, 2020-10-20 10:42 — WRGMILW

On30 is a good scale !

There are some nice engines out there .

I have been slowly collecting(Over 6 years) Engines & Freight cars & passenger cars .

I also run 3 other scales . O-3rail (lionel) , HO , & recently N scale.

I have some Buildings in O- scale & Ho Track . That is why I got into On30 .

I do Hope Someone makes a Shay again .

If you want to see On30 trains running , Go to You Tube & Type in On30 Train Layouts !

There are a few Great layouts to watch & see !

Enjoy the Train Hobby no Matter the Scale !

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Heights

Mon, 2020-10-26 11:51 — p51



[@RGSMudhen](#)

The nice thing about the Accucraft cars is they are set up to use HO height or On3 coupler height (you just have to remove the shim on the coupler pocket).

I did **not** know that. I have a handful of their boxcars and I haven't gotten around to stripping the Rio Grande markings off of them to letter them for the ET&WNC. I hadn't looked at the coupler heights that I can recall but the two AMS coaches I have do couple with my Bachmann ten-wheelers, I guess as they're made for the right height?

That's the big problem with a lot of stuff that's made generically for O scale narrow gauge, in that they usually space the couplers for On3 which mean you have shim the heck out of the coupler to get them low enough for On30. At one point I seriously considered raising my couplers to On3 height (and using On3 couplers) as the ET&WNC ran their cars the same coupler height as standard gauge cars. They ten-wheelers had a special design for swivel couplers which would couple to standard gauge cars to run on the dual gauge tracks from Johnson City to outside Elizabethton, TN.

The kits I've built of ET&WNC wood hoppers, caboose 505 and a couple of projects I've just completed for an older wood kit and a scratch built box car all have coupler height issues that I had to shim the heck out of those. They just look *odd* like that. The hopper cars, I used the lowest trucks I could find and lowered them as good as I could for operation, way lower looking than the prototype (though I think they look okay like that)



Check out the end of 505 here:



LEE



[My Flickr website with layout photos](#)

You can *never* have too much detail or too many trees on a layout.

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