

# **Model Train Resource Guide**

## **Bonus #2**

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Model railroaders call model railroading the World's Greatest Hobby. With the number of different model trains, layouts, accessories, and information available, it is certainly easy to see why. Model trains and layouts come in many different sizes and from many different manufacturers. It can be quite confusing at times to know what parts go together and what you should buy for a model train layout. This guide will help clarify some of your questions and make it easy for you to get your model railroad started.

## **Gauge and Scale**

This seems to be one of the most frequently asked questions by people new to the hobby and it is confusing if you are not familiar with models. The question is what is the difference between gauge and scale? You will often see these terms used interchangeably when model railroaders exchange information on forums or speak casually between themselves. They know what they mean, but if you are new to models, you probably don't, so here is what they are talking about:

Gauge – refers to the space between the rails on the model railroad track.

Scale – refers to the size of the model train in relation to real life trains.

Scale is a term used in the world of model building in general. You will often see this term on model cars, model airplanes, and other models based on real life objects. Scale used a number ratio and refers to how much smaller the model is than the real life object it is based on. For example, a 1:64 scale model would be 64 times smaller than the real life object it is based on.

Gauge is specific to model railroading and refers to the distance between the rails on the model railroad track being used. This is again a ratio of measurement between real railroad track and the size of the model railroad track being used.

For the beginner, when purchasing model railroad equipment, the important thing to pay attention to is the letter scale marked on the model train track, cars and accessories. As long as this letter scale matches, your parts should fit together match size wise. This is not quite as easy as it sounds at first, as competition and cost cutting in the model train industry has created some branching of sizes within the letter scales of model trains. Here is a quick guide you can use when shopping for train parts that should help make you match your train parts up. The differences within a letter scale are important to pay attention to when purchasing model train track and cars. Scenery is a little more adaptable and can usually be purchased using the general letter scale.

G Scale – also called Garden Scale or Large Scale. These are the large trains that you see at garden shows. They are also the size of the very large Christmas train sets that are meant to run around your Christmas tree.

O Scale – this is the largest of the traditional scales and is often associated with the Lionel company, although Lionel is by no means the only company that manufactures O scale model trains. There are several different sizes within the O scale category, including O (17), On3, On2, and O27, as well as plain old O, so pay close attention when purchasing track and cars within this scale. In particular, remember that O27 is a slightly different size than the other O scales and does not quite match up with the other sizes.

S Scale – these trains are slightly smaller than O scale and are the size that many older toy model trains were. Sizes include S and Sn3. In reference to model scale, S comes out to the same size as the old ERTL toy tractors that are so popular with collectors right now.

HO Scale – this is the most popular and most widely used of the scales. The HO industry standardized its measurements some time ago, so parts from any manufacturer will fit and work together without much difficulty, making it easy for hobbyists to build large layouts. Sizes include HO, HOn3, and HOn2.

N Scale – growing quickly in popularity, this scale is small, so a reasonably sized layout will fit on a spare table or even an old door. Sizes include N and Nn3. As N scale is quite small, consider your vision and dexterity before deciding whether or not N scale is the right size for you, but if you love miniatures, you will be interested in this scale.

Z Scale – the smallest of the small! This scale is very tiny and can be used for those desk top layouts. You must be good with miniatures and magnifiers to work with this scale.

### **Model Railroad Clubs and Organizations**

There are hundreds of model railroad clubs and organizations in existence today. Probably the largest and best known in the United States is the National Model Railroad Association. Founded in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1935, this organization promotes the development and enjoyment of all areas of model railroading. Their website has numerous resources and can be found at: <http://www.nmra.org>.

Many local clubs also exist and there are sure to be some in your area. The best way to find model railroad organizations close to where you live is to check with local hobby shops that promote model railroad events. Your local yellow pages may also have a listing. RailsUSA is a model railroad link site that includes links to 350 model railroad clubs. The URL for this part of their website is:

[http://www.railsusa.com/links/Model\\_Railroad\\_Clubs/](http://www.railsusa.com/links/Model_Railroad_Clubs/)

## **Model Railroading Books and Magazines**

Of course, when you start a new hobby, the first thing you do is read about it. There is a wealth of literature about model railroading available from many different sources. Your local bookstores and hobby shops will have model railroading books and guides available for purchase. Online hobby shops that sell model railroad equipment and supplies will often also sell books and magazines, usually pertaining to the particular scale or brand of trains that they sell. The NMRA website listed above has a comprehensive list of online hobby shops that you may refer to. In addition, here are a couple of online resources you may find valuable:

**Model Railroader Magazine:** Model Railroader has been the world's largest magazine on model trains and model railroad layouts for more than 70 years. Their website features five magazines on model railroads, plus books, articles, forums, and more. Find them at:

<http://www.trains.com>

**Barnes & Noble.com:** Type in a search for model railroad and you will get 903 search results! Many model railroad guides and related items are available here.

<http://www.barnesandnoble.com>

**Amazon.com:** Amazon also has model railroad guides available, both new and used at discount prices.

<http://www.amazon.com>

## **Model Railroad Manufacturers**

When you hear model railroad hobbyists talk about their trains, you will hear them refer to names like Lionel or MTH or Bachman. These are the brands of trains that they own. Each scale of train has its major manufacturers. Which brands are the best is usually a matter of opinion and lengthy debate, so we will not promote any one company in this listing. What we have compiled below is a list of the major model train manufacturers, the scale or scales of trains that they produce, and their websites:

**Lionel Model Trains:** Manufactures primarily O and O27 scale model trains. Also produces a limited stock of G and HO scale products. <http://www.lionel.com>

**Atlas Model Railroad Company:** Manufactures O, HO, and N scale products. <http://www.atlasrr.com>

**MTH Electric Trains:** This company manufactures G, O, S and HO scale trains under the following brands – RailKing, Premier, Tinplate Traditions, and MTH HO.

<http://www.mth-railking.com>

Bachman Industries: Manufacturer of large product lines for HO and N scale, with smaller product lines for G and On3 and accessories for O.

<http://www.bachmantrains.com>

RFG: This company manufactures parts and accessories for American Flyer trains that were originally manufacturer by the A.C. Gilbert Co.

<http://www.rfgco.com>

Athern: Manufacturer of HO and N scale product lines.

<http://www.athern.com>

KATO USA Inc.: Manufactures HO and N scale product lines. The parent company of KATO USA is Sekisui Kinzoku, or KATO Japan.

<http://www.katousa.com>

LGB of America: Manufactures G scale products under the brand names PIKO G, Brawa, Noch, Emek, and Bridgewater, plus and HO product line under the brand name PIKO HO.

<http://www.lgboa.com>

Marklin Trains: Manufacturer of HO and Z scale product lines.

<http://www.marklin.com>

USA Trains: Manufacturer of G scale model trains and accessories.

<http://www.usatrains.com>

### **Model Railroad Forums**

The last resource we will give you here are model railroad online forums. These are great places to visit to gain advice from the experts, especially if you don't have time to join a model railroad club. There are numerous forums online and we have already given you the websites to locate them above. The best sites to visit to find these forums are the NMRA site and the Model Railroader Magazine site. Model Railroader Magazine offers forums, based on the scale of railroad you have, how old you are, how experienced you are, etc. These forums are all offered free. You must register with their site to post. The NMRA site offers links to forums included in their Directory of Websites page. Some of the manufacturers listed above also have forums for hobbyists that use their products. You can join these through their websites.

We hope that the resources we have given you here will help you with your model railroading experience and make your hobby more enjoyable. Happy railroading!