



# The DERAIL

The Official Monthly Publication of the San Jacinto Model Railroad Club, Inc

May 2014

Volume 45, Issue 5

## President's Message

Richard Louvet

### What it's All About

In last August's President's Message, I tried to highlight the level of expertise belonging to the San Jac Club. Not only do we have real experts, but experts who are willing to share both their time and expertise.

Abraham Tolbert's thank you presentation (See 'Teamwork Makes the Dream Work' in this issue) is an excellent example of that camaraderie in the club. Abraham was able to make his dream come true with the help and advice of other club members.

I know our website and the Derail are read by many more people than just club members. I couldn't let this moment go by with inviting any Houston area readers who are not club members to come to a meeting. We meet the first Tuesday of every month as shown in the last page of the Derail.

Maybe membership is all you need to may your model railroad more than just a dream.



(From left: Members Gil Freitag, Jim Long, David Shafer, Abraham Tolbert, Ray Byer, Loren Neufeld - Abraham also got help from member Don Bozman and from Jim Thompson) Photo by Bob Werre

## Teamwork Makes the Dream Work

(Editor's note: The following was presented to Gil and Virginia at the April meeting. It is self-explanatory.)

April 1, 2014

Since I was a young boy and, as far back as I can remember, I've had a dream of becoming a model railroader.

Once I started on my own layout, I didn't know what to do. I asked so many people so many questions. I had a dream but I needed H-E-L-P to bring it to fruition. Gil, my friend, that is where you came into the picture and helped to make my dream a reality.

It was you Gil who crawled into that little tiny crawl space in that little wood frame house and created the electrical wiring I needed.

It was you Gil that helped me to build the infrastructure of the entire layout.

You taught me the "what" the "why" and the "how-to" of model railroading. Without your help Gil, my

dream of being a model railroader would have remained just a dream.

Virginia, I can't forget how instrumental you were in getting my layout on its first tour. It was you Virginia, who gave me the courage to put my small and very underdeveloped layout on the tour circuit. You said, "*People need to see layouts in their infancy. That encourages and inspires those that will come after you, Abraham*". Those words of wisdom inspired me to put my bland layout on that first tour. That too, was a dream come true and it's been full steam ahead ever since.

So Gil and Virginia, I just want to say, **"THANK YOU FOR HELPING TO MAKE MY DREAM OF ACTUALLY BEING A MODEL RAILROADER COME TRUE."**

I will ever appreciate your kindness!!!!!!

Your friend,  
Abraham Tolbert

## Unstoppable Movie Review

David N. Currey

Here's a railroad movie review:

Review of the Movie "Unstoppable":

Action/thriller

Based on a true story

Starring:

Chris Pine, as young train conductor Will Colson

Denzel Washington, as veteran railroad engineer

Frank Barnes

Ethan Suplee, as yard hostler Dewey

Lew Temple, as shop welder Ned

Rosario Dawson, as railroad yardmaster Connie

Hooper

Kevin Dunn, as her boss Galvin, VP of Operations

Kevin Corrigan, as Federal Safety Inspector Scott

Werner

"Unstoppable" is an entertaining movie with a railroad subject, and is mostly unspoiled by the ridicu-

lous special effects common to many modern day movies. The destruction caused by a train colliding with other objects is terrifying enough not to need amplification. I commend the movie makers on this aspect of the movie. All things considered, I would definitely recommend it worth watching.

That said, the movie does have many issues with its believability. It is almost always the case that railroad-themed movies never resemble reality. Things happen during the course of the movie that simply could not happen on a real railroad. I would guess that such movies never hire an expert to review the railroad aspects of the movie for realism, or if they do, they eventually decide that they can't abide by the expert's recommendations because it would mess up the plot of the movie too much—the root of the problem probably being that the writer of the screen play or

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book the movie was based on really knows very little about railroads and how they are operated.

Let's start with the "Based on a true story" line. If a movie is billed as "a true story", that usually means it's "based on a true story". If a movie is billed as "based on a true story", that usually means it's mostly made up. That seems to be the case with this movie, as there are so many instances of impossibilities and improbabilities, that the actual "true story" would have to have been considerably different.

Here are the issues I had with the movie, and I do have to admit, it was great fun picking this movie apart:

1. The hostler who caused the problem is so stupid and dimwitted, he would have never been able to pass an engineer's training program, which involves months of intense study and on-the-job training. Hostlers are engineers in training.

2. None of the railroad people really act like real railroad people. This is one of the things about the movie that really irked me. Chris Pine and Denzel Washington perhaps come the closest. Real railroad people generally try to get along and certainly would not laugh at a tragedy in the making.

3. At the beginning of the movie, it is made to seem that most people working in train service on a railroad are not members of the union. On most railroads, there are almost none in such service who are not members. When I was on the Kingsville Division, I knew of nobody not in the union.

4. In one scene, the Denzel character asks the Rosario Dawson character if there is another "rip" track ahead they could go into. Nonsense! In actual fact, an engineer must know

every inch of a railroad territory like the back of his hand, and would certainly know where every track is.

5. The scene involving the rip track is further flawed in that a "RIP" track is where a car is "Repaired In Place". Such tracks are located in yards, not strung out along a mainline. An appropriately named track along a mainline to spot a short train would be a "house track", "team track", "siding", or "spur". This is probably an example of where the writer of the movie script simply liked the term, and decided to use it regardless of its definition.

6. In one scene where the rescue crew is switched from going onto a side track at the last minute, as the train passes the switch (turnout), a derail can be seen sitting on one rail of the side track, indicating it is not a track that a train would be routed down in such a situation. To have done so would have resulted in a derailed train. This probably indicates that by this time in the movie, the railroad expert had been let go, because it is highly unlikely he would have approved of such a ridiculous scene.

7. The scene where the rescue locomotives in front are somehow switched onto a siding while the runaway continues on down the "straight track" is beyond being unbelievable, it is in actuality quite impossible to happen. It was stated that the runaway "jumped the switch", an impossibility. An entire train "jumping a switch"? And landing back on the rails after this incredible feat? That couldn't happen once in a trillion universes of trillions of trains attempting to jump switches trillions of times every trillionth of a second. The writer must have had a little bit too much Jack Daniels before dreaming up that idiocy. Trains can "split" facing point switches, and "run through" trailing point switches, but not do what happened. It would also be impossi-

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ble to line the switch between the two sets of locomotives fast enough to cause what happened. Switches are designed so they cannot be lined when the weight of a train is on them. Not only that, but the lining of a mainline power switch is about as slow as a Tortoise switch machine, so the time frame involved also makes it impossible. This scene receives my vote for the 'Absolutely Worst Error' in the movie.

8. Denzel's engine was a 3,000 HP SD-40, not a 5,000 HP engine as stated by the Denzel character. I guess we could forgive the writer for making this mistake, but I'm not in a forgiving mood. I sentence this writer for this mistake to ten thousand lines of "An SD-40 has 3,000 horsepower. An SD-40 has 3,000 horsepower. An SD-40 has 3,000 horsepower."

9. The Rosario Dawson character should be titled something like a "trainmaster", since she obviously has some authority over a section of mainline. "Yardmasters" (or "yard managers") have authority only over a yard. This might be splitting hairs, but if this is based on a "true story", why make such stupid asinine changes from the real event?

10. The siding where Chris and Denzel's train would not fit was more than long enough to hold their train. I'm shocked and chagrined, mortified and stupefied from further comment on this blasphemous issue.

11. The personnel on the engines that tried to slow the train down from the front could have simply walked to the back of their engines and crawled over to the runaway engines. By this time, the writer must have been on his fifth fifth of Jack Daniels in order to overlook this absurdity, the railroad expert must have been threatening a lawsuit to keep his name

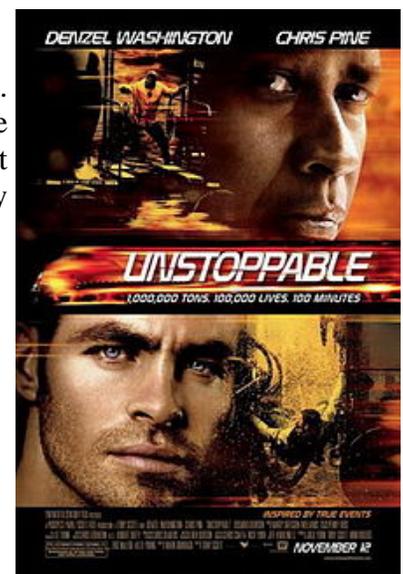
off the credits, and the director was probably directing with a paper sack over his head.

12. There is no reason why the rescue locomotives should have been constantly bumping into the runaway. Once the locomotives in front had slowed down slower than the runaway's speed, there would be no more than an initial bump or two. Same for the Denzel engine from the rear. But then that would have been less exciting, so what we have here is the old tried and true movie-making technique of, "if the scene is not exciting enough, make it ridiculous." Hacks are not always a caboose.

It would be really nice to see a realistic railroad movie, but Hollywood has constantly proved they cannot produce such a movie. If you can get past the above issues, or are not bothered by them, this is a movie worth seeing. It does have a lot of nice railroad scenes and scenery, interesting railroad structures such as truss bridges, and a decent plot. It'll keep you engrossed, but at the minimum, it will give you loads of fun finding all the things wrong. Keep a note pad handy as you watch, and contact me with any additional errors you find. Thanks.

One last little note. I think this movie would make a great party movie for a group of model railroaders and railfans. They would have a blast watching it and pointing out all the errors. Please invite me if you throw such a party.

Let's tie this one up. The movie may be "Unstoppable", but my writing certainly is stoppable.



Former SanJac member, Detmar Tom Dieck, is now living in Virginia and is building a new layout at the age of 94. He got his start with Marklin trains in Northern Germany as a boy in the 1930's and continues to operate Marklin trains.

Today, similar to his previous layout in Houston, his trains resemble those of his youth and feature black and red steam locomotives, green passenger coaches and brown, two axel freight cars including some with brakeman's vans. His engines are antilog, and based on his previous layout, I believe everything operates very smoothly.

Building a layout at 94 is remarkable but it's even more so for a man unlucky enough to be born in Germany in 1920. He was drafted out of college and ended in an armored unit on the Russian front. He won an iron cross for his actions on the front but later was seriously wounded and sent to a hospital in Paris for an extended period of treatment. By the time he was ready to be sent back, the Russian front had been lost and he was sent instead to Norway to operate a mine laying boat in the North Sea during the last months of the war. When the war ended, the boat was converted into a British mine sweeper and the dangerous work continued.

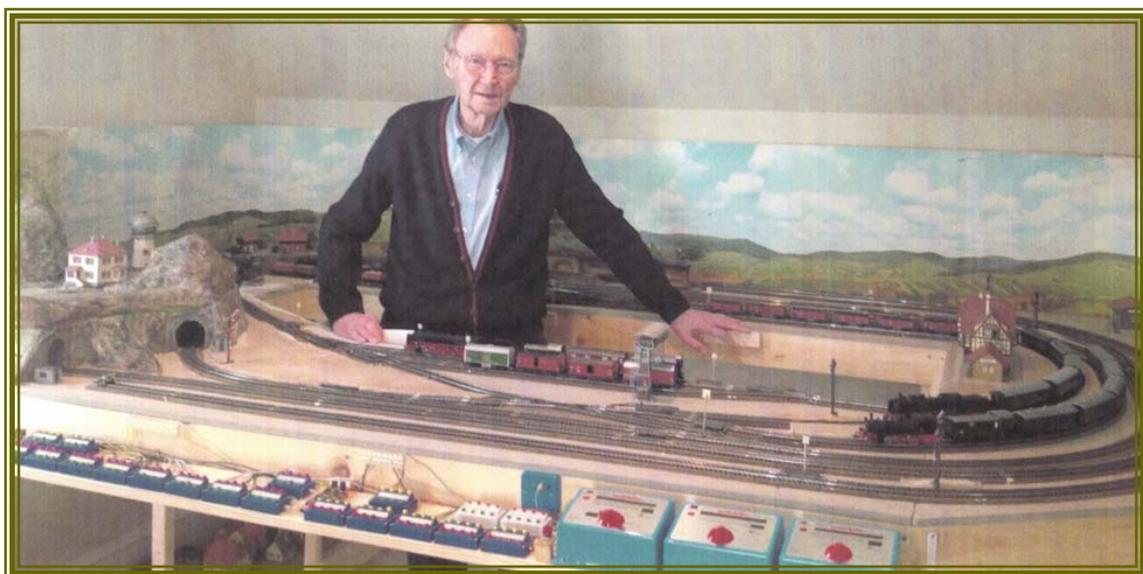
During the war, his home was destroyed by bombing and he met and married a woman who also had been

left homeless. Years later they were able to immigrate to the United States, ending in Houston. He worked for a geophysical company analyzing underground formations before the age of computers.

Detmar still had an interest in model railroading and the first model railroader he encountered was the late Ken Caulking, who at that time I believe lived in Galveston. He was also interested in ship modeling and had built a replica of a sailing cargo ship from old family photographs. When space became available, he built a layout in a spare bedroom.

I met Detmar much later at the Marklin booth at the 1993 NMRA Conference in Houston. At that time Detmar had retired and his wife had passed away. We visited each other's layouts many times over the following years and Detmar was very helpful in my understanding of both Marklin trains and railroads in Germany. I saw less of him when I married and moved to The Woodlands in 2004.

In late 2012, Detmar became concerned with his health and accepted his daughter's invitation to live with her and her husband who had both retired and had moved to coastal Virginia. They had an extra room and the photograph shows the layout he is building. Unlike his much larger previous layout, the present one is level. The mountain at the left of the photograph is removable for access to the track.



Meeting minutes April 1, 2014

President Dick Louvet called the meeting to order at 7:00PM and welcomed all current members and 3 visitors.

Abraham Tolbert made a presentation thanking all those who got help get him where his is today on his home layout, A special thank you presentation was made to Gil Freitag for all his efforts.

Vice president Rex Ritz introduced this month's program by Dave Schafer on Heritage Steam Railways of Great Britain.

Dave showed many short video clips of mostly steam railroads that operating in Great Britain. Most of the videos were shot in 2000 and 2007 trips he made overseas. There were 8 different railroads and over 29 operating steam locomotives. The presentation started in Scotland with 0-4-0's. Most of these railroads are point to point with an engine run-around track at each end. These are mainly tourist railroads but some locals use them for transportation. The short wheelbase 0-4-0's and 0-6-0's made for a very "bumpy" ride in the cab. Most were in a very good state of repair. Lots of good video were shown from the many short line railroads.

Loaner copies of tonight's presentation are available from Dave.

Next month's meeting will be by Tom Palmer on MKT freight cars.

The minutes from last month were approved as published in the Derail.

Treasurer's report, Gilbert Freitag:

Expenses:

Federal Incomes have been completed and filed. We paid \$32.64 in taxes.

The Texas Franchise Tax Form was filled out and filled with the state.

Income:

none

\$11,701.40 Ending balance

New Business:

Rosenberg RailRoad Days will be Sat 12th. The "S" Scalers will have a display there.

Steve Sandifer is looking for a roommate for the upcoming LSR convention in Round Rock.

Website:  
no report

LSR:

The annual convention in in Round Rock is two months away.

Division 8:

Chili Cook off April 12th in Alvin, 10AM.

Derail: Bob Sabol

Remember the deadline in the 15th of the month.

Yahoo Group:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/groups/SJMRRRC>

There can be postings of people wanting to sell/give away RR related items.

NMRA:

no report

Refreshments were thanks to Tom Bailey and Virginia Freitag.

Steve Sandifer volunteered to bring them next month.

Meeting adjourned at 8:45 PM

General comments:

-Respectfully submitted,

Gilbert Freitag,

Secretary / Treasurer



San Jac RR Club Meetings take place  
the first Tuesday of each month  
at 7pm

Bayland Community Center  
6400 Bissonnet St. Houston, Tx

[Click here for directions](#)  
Visitors are always welcome!



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## Next Meeting

### TUESDAY, MAY 6

"MKT Freight Cars" by Tom Palmer

Refreshments: Steve Sandifer and Virginia Freitag

## Video Corner

### Railfanning March 2014

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zhVUPNsFYQs&feature=share&list=UUdie52gDMbHDkxdQTRou8w>

## Guess the Layout!



Answer to April's Guess the Layout: Jim Thompson