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THE JOYS (?) OF EXHIBITING A LAYOUT by Graham Watson

One evening at our local model railway club we were discussing our forthcoming exhibition, about six weeks away. We are only a small club and we seemed to be a bit short of layouts of our own, bearing in mind the exhibition is a shop window on the club's activities. Although some of the N gauge group had continental layouts in their own homes, we had nothing continental as a club project, and so I suggested a reasonably simple H.O. Swiss layout, as I had quite a bit of knowledge and available reference material on the subject. One member came up with three old notice boards as a basis and away we went. Then came six weeks of hard graft in my garage, the car had to find other accommodation, fortunately the weather remained fair. Six weeks of amended track plans, cut and burnt fingers, sawdust, shavings, bits of wire and mysterious mixtures and potions from the 'scenery bod' followed.

At 1.00 a.m. on exhibition morning the last bits of scenery (or as much as we had time for) were added. So far, apart from a bit of panic during the last week, as we realised how time was running out, all had gone well.

At 7.30 a.m. on exhibition morning a convoy of cars and sleepy members arrived at my house to dismantle and load up the layout. Then disaster struck ! The board that had been worked on at 1.00 a.m. still had wet scenery on it, and yes, you've guessed, someone tilted the board to load it into the car, and the whole lot slid gracefully off the board and spread itself over the drive. There was a moment's stunned silence, there were only two hours before the exhibition opened! Then the 'scenery bod' in a masterful exhibition of self control and understatement, said 'By the way that scenery comes off !!!!! This broke the ice and we quickly loaded up and then unloaded at the exhibition, in the drizzling rain ! Inside the hall chaos reigned, layout boards, boxes of tools and odds and ends, suitcases of rolling stock were everywhere. It seemed impossible that the public would ever see anything actually working. However as the time flew by the layout was erected, wired up and the 'scenery bod' worked manfully with his pots and potions to repair the damage and cover up the disaster. We were ready to go, apart from the fiddle yard at the back which was still being constructed as the doors opened. Then disaster No. 2 struck. The point complex at one end wouldn't work. What could be wrong, it worked perfectly yesterday ? Someone hadn't covered the tracks when using hairspray to fix the scenery ! A further period of feverish activity ensued to 'ungum' the works and get electricity to pass and run trains, which was what the public had come to see. Eventually everything was working again tolerably well and as the fiddle yard developed we were able to run and show more than just two trains. The public showed considerable interest and our efforts earned not a few kind comments. However you do find the odd twit don't you ?

Conversation:-

Pompous twit (P.T.) 'Do you mind explaining why you are running on the wrong side ? '

Me: 'We're not'

P.T: But I understood that they drive on the right hand side in Germany ? '

Me: 'But this isn't a German layout'

P.T. 'Oh, what is it then ? ' (Despite numerous Swiss flags dotted about the landscape)

Me: 'It's Swiss and they drive on the left side the same as we do. '

P.T. 'Oh, I'd better keep my mouth shut then.'

Me: (under my breath) 'Yes please.'

.....followed by sly smile from 'twits' wife as if to say 'he's put his foot in it again.'

This was my first exhibition as a participant, and not a few salutary lessons were learned, the main one being I think, that time passes quicker than you think when building and preparing a large portable (?) exhibition layout, but I have no doubt we'll do it all again next year, (hopefully taking account of lessons learned), for the benefit of those who enjoyed and appreciated the work and effort that went into providing them with a few hours light relief on a dull and miserable day.