

Zeitschrift: Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal
Herausgeber: Swiss Railways Society
Band: 6 (2000-2002)
Heft: 3

Artikel: The modelling section : Surava - part of a dream
Autor: Simmons, Bob
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-854879>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 25.01.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

THE MODELLING SECTION

Bob Simmons

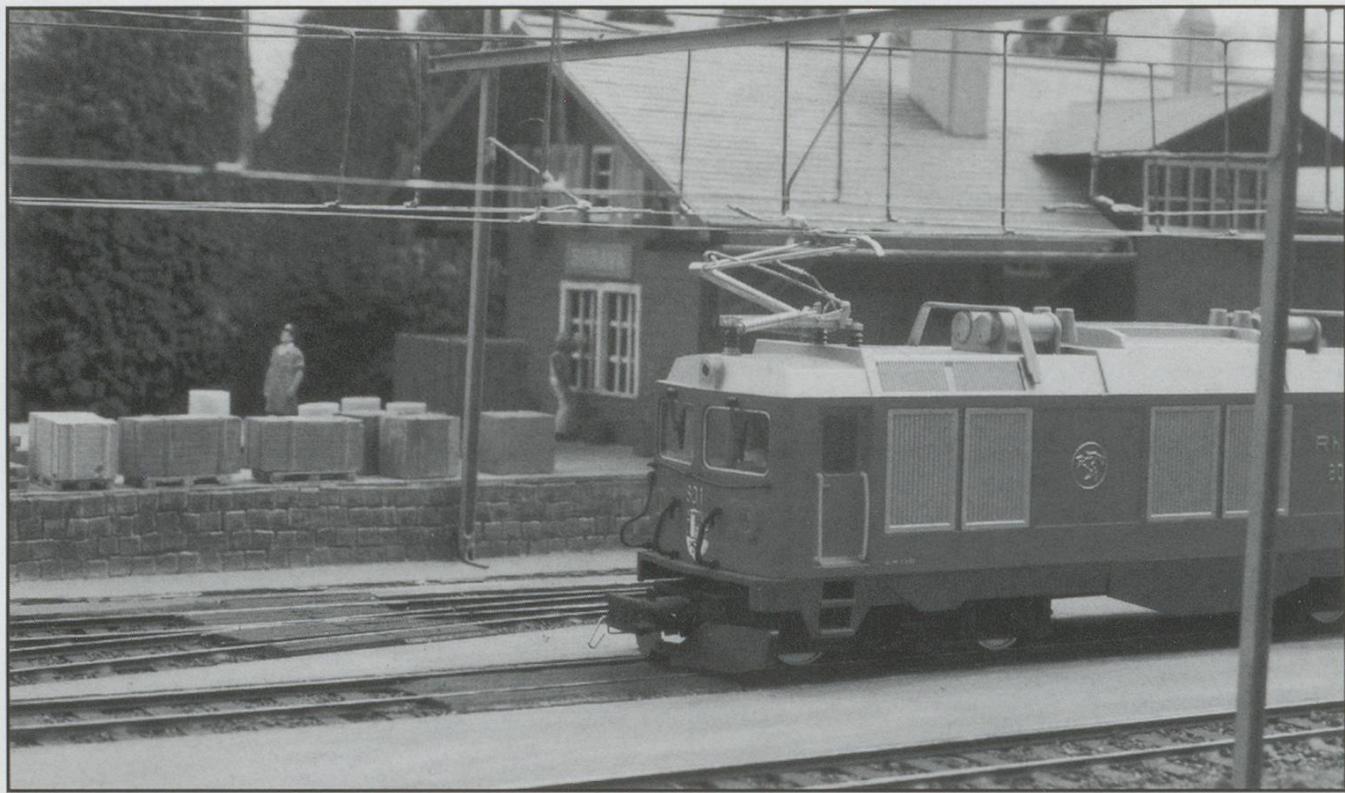
SURAVA - PART OF A DREAM



Switzerland has been a low-key part of my life since early teens. It crept in almost unperceived when a simple painting-by-numbers set arrived one birthday. It was the ubiquitous Swiss chalet in an alpine setting. Many years later I found myself dabbling in 'N' gauge, then 'HO' (via France and Germany, it has to be said) and finally up to 'Om'. Well I like a challenge - every scale I model usually has very little stock available but when I leave that scale, boy does the range suddenly expand. I

worth of rolling stock. First mistake ! The Swiss do not bother with proforma, they send the big box straight away, asking for payment by bank draft. Early arrival of the stock cost me a microwave oven, I seem to remember.

I had decided to make my own track etc as the cost, at that time, was prohibitive and limited to set track type curves of 58 cm radius. All right, it is supposed to be a toy for their home market. The quality struck me straight away; beautiful plastic injection



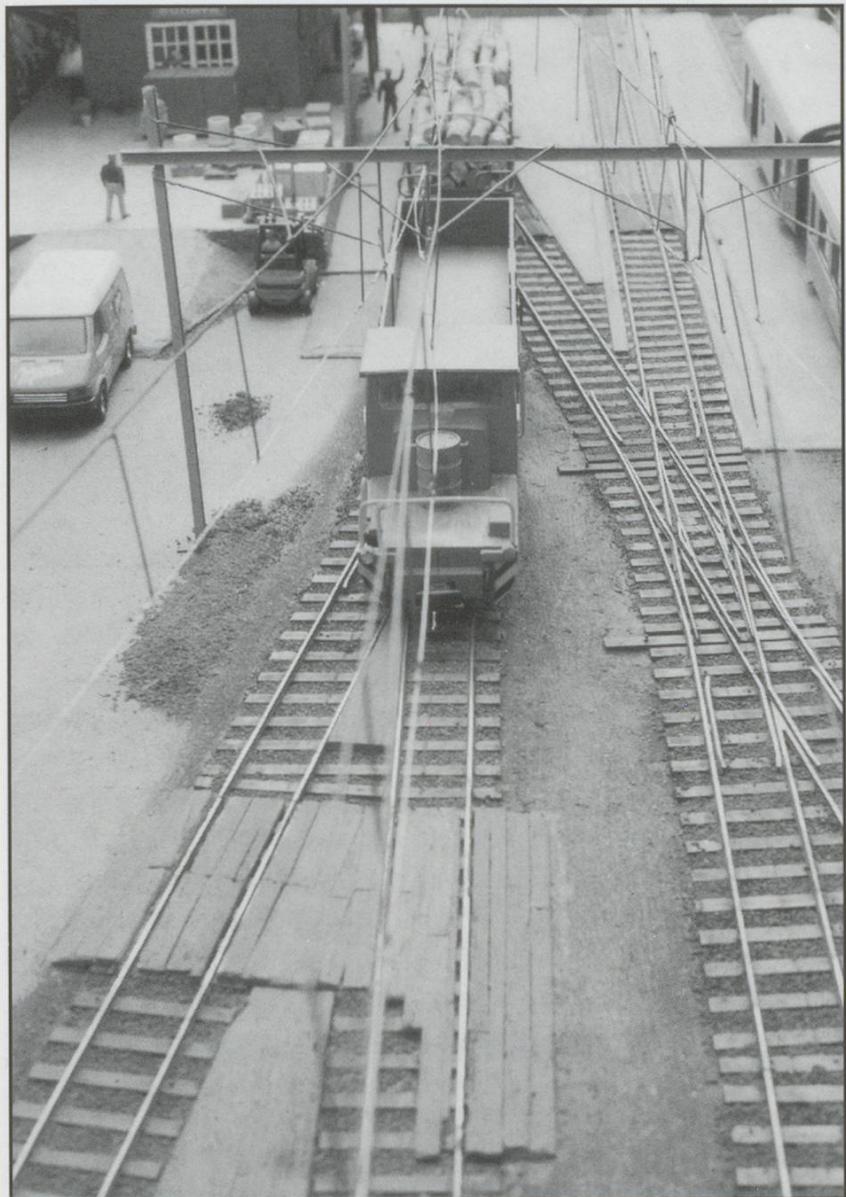
Surava station building has plenty of freight to collect as an RhB Gem4/4 awaits departure.

Remember N gauge with one loco from Minitrix and one from Roco plus the Rbe 4/4 motorcoach from Lima ? Then you recall HO with just the Fleischmann Re 4/4" and the Ae 6/6 from Roco ? My word, you won't see forty again!

So in the early part of 1984, whilst still taking the Swiss magazine, *Die Modelle Eisenbahn*, I saw the new Fama 'Om' range, built to 1/45th scale. I studied this from afar as no supplier was available in this country until late in 1987. In that year I decided to write to Georg Utz, the second Swiss owner, and ask for a proforma invoice for around £400's

mouldings with Buhler motors, chrome steel wheels and reasonable details including a good representation of the single buffer and coupling. Of course, the leaflet said it all; "These products are of the quality that you should expect from items manufactured in Switzerland".

So we started a small layout, around 14 ft by 4 ft. Single track continuous run, passing station with loop and two sidings. The layout was transported with a large van to the local Mablethorpe Exhibition and to some local venues. A second layout was a terminus using the same buildings and was featured in



Looks like the freight is about to be loaded. Both photos by the author.

European Modeller by kind introduction from Ian Futers, who described it as a small layout, 18ft by 3ft 6in at its extremities! A further article appeared in Continental Modeller and then, glory at last, it featured in the 40th Anniversary edition of the Gauge 'O' Guild Gazette.

And then the building fever took full hold. A new continuous run model (we call them big roundy-roundy layouts in this area) was planned and built during a long period without a job and has since been exhibited as far afield as Winchester, Bristol and Southend-on-Sea, in that order. If you take the layout far away, you usually get invitations from even further away, so it goes.

Anyway, the station building, a copy of 'Surava' on the Albula line has survived through the years and graces the present layout. It was made from advertising card using a half-size drawing in D.M.E

and so, although not many have guessed, is actually to 1/43 scale.

The present layout was constructed from 6mm ply on softwood framework and is mainly light and easy to handle, though rather bulky. The track plan is very geometric, I know, but designed for the public to see, since they constitute most of the fee-payers who pass through the door. Track and points were actually built by Marcway but the buildings remain my province and the scenery is steadily getting better with each passing year. I tend to make my layouts to be up-and-running very quickly and then sort out the problems, alter and improve afterwards. Catenary is always a problem; brass wire jig built sections will be the answer in the future, but the material is very expensive in 36" lengths. Presently the main posts are brass 'H' section with piano wire providing the rest. Someone muttered that I should tension the wire but I don't somehow think that steel sprung wire would lend itself to that application.

One improvement would be the introduction of point motors but I had designed the blade operation around a cork base utilising the natural friction and so, for the time being at least, this remains a dream.

And so we continue to make progress particularly after a holiday to celebrate our Silver Wedding Anniversary. My long suffering other half suggested we had better try to visit the country and so we spent three days in the Lugano suburb of Paradiso, with the bedroom window looking out over the Gotthard line before travelling from Andermatt to Chur on the Glacier Express itself, ex route to Austria, Germany, Luxembourg, Belgium and France. Yes it was a typical coach tour! The grass in Switzerland turns out to be all of the identical Summer Green shade that as British Modellers we seek to avoid, the barrow crossings are vulcanised rubber not wood and the sleepers are shorter and the rail section higher than the layout. Much room for improvement here. And the firm I now work for makes telegraph poles, stud fencing and gates - and wooden railway sleepers by the thousand!

The future. Well the rolling stock is a mixture of FO, RhB and BVZ, and the only RhB locos are electrodiesels from the Bernina Line so we have a challenge again. A first effort at a Ge 4/4^I of the first series is almost recognisable but is rather overshadowed by the excellent Alpinline HGe 4/4^{II} of the FO, of which I have purchased two examples.

Sadly the range is out of production again, having been deleted recently by Roco, its fourth owner in 16 years. I do hope that a small concern will take up the challenge; the potential is great even though the market may be somewhat limited.

The layout itself is the ongoing project that my layouts have always been. As an example, the current supply available to the motors was increased by the introduction of 1.5 amp controllers early in 1999. Subsequently problems were experienced with the spiking effect of small amounts of alternating current produced at low speeds, ruining the excellent low speed qualities and, indeed, burning out two motors. My co-conspirator, Steve, set to work with the support of e-mail contacts in the Gauge 'O' Guild and now we have two pure DC current con-

trollers, working off a single 1.5 amp transformer with twin windings. Just one example of the co-operation between differing branches of the hobby.

A short note about Steve. When I first came back to Lincolnshire, Steve had been a founder member of the Mablethorpe Club. Subsequently we have become the only members left and despite being severely disabled, Steve has been a real pal throughout the ups and downs of my life. He has an old van which we use for exhibitions and he is a wizard with scenery and with the electrical mysteries of 12 volts dc. I pay tribute to the man because he sticks with me through thick and thin and I hope that one day he will achieve his dream to model in 'O' gauge. In the meantime he perseveres with an EM gauge layout which we shall take back to Southend this Autumn.

So the future remains full of dreams; another layout is forming in my mind, perhaps a "townscape" of central Graubünden or possibly the Bernina line where some of my 'RhB' stock truly belongs. Either way the possibilities are endless.

(A note from Winco about Alpinline is on page 55)

David & Judith Riches

History:

Built as part of the original main line this steeply graded and twisting section was soon by-passed leaving Alpenhof as a quieter backwater with its branches to Rätsel and Helm. Its connections to the main line route have been maintained and the Alpenhof line can be very busy when engineering work takes place on the 'new' section of the main line. Strangely this coincides with exhibition days! The layout is modelled as for 1st of August 1988 (National Day).

Reality:

After helping to operate a British outline N gauge layout at exhibitions Judith decided she would like a model of her own. Switzerland and its railways being one of our joint interests it was the natural choice for the model. During the early planning stages of Alpenhof the idea arose that our Swiss and a friend's planned German layouts could be joined for through running, but the German layout never got off the paper. However, eventually we have built two new base boards which form the branch to Helm.

Space limitations at home meant that only a

ALPENHOF Switzerland in a small space

small layout was feasible and the 7' by 3' size is easily supported on a paste table with the new extension using a second table. The track plan for Alpenhof was soon arrived at from the criteria required by Judith and base board construction started using the traditional 2 x 1 inch timbers with chipboard tops.

Next to be tackled was the scenic side. The contours were built up with polystyrene tiles and semi-smoothed to requirements. This was then covered with plasterer's scrim and liberally coated with internal filler (i.e. white) as a light grey colour is easily achieved with the addition of small amounts of black and yellow poster paint. The retaining walls and abutments are inscribed filler suitably painted with powder paints. The snow shelter is made from hardboard, rough side out, and lightly washed with the same mixture as the plaster. For grassy areas the filler was given a wash of green powder paint of various hues and then half'n'half PVA (not forgetting the drop of washing-up liquid) spread over the area. A base of light green flock was applied and darker colours added with sponge flock for texture.

Bushes and trees made from garden cuttings and