

# My Achievement Program Journey

David Nicholson MMR® #684



Gupworthy Station looking west from the level crossing towards Ilfracombe to the left and Morebath Junction and Exeter straight on through the tunnel with the bay platform to the right - photos by David Nicholson MMR®

I suppose that my journey started more than seventy years ago, I just did not know it! Or that it would be in the closing years of my life that I would achieve such a goal, of which I am immensely proud.

I am profoundly dyslexic which in my youth was a serious handicap, branding one of little value to society. To maintain my self-esteem, I had to find something at which I could excel, that did not involve reading or writing, so I adopted the hobby of railway modelmaking. First with paper and cardboard, then progressing to wood and finishing with metal and plastics to support first an O gauge Hornby clockwork trainset and progressing over the next ten years through 4mm scale, three rail Hornby-Dublo system to a 3mm scale Triang TT layout, which was undertaken to earn my DoE award under the ever watchful eye of Cyril Freezer, the long serving Editor of Railway Modeller.

My parents were not wealthy, and all pocket money had to be earned. It was therefore a precious commodity to be husbanded rather than squandered. I soon learnt that purchasing raw materials made the money stretch much further, than purchasing kits of parts or finished products. Turning this limitation into an advantage was one of the best lessons I have learnt in life.

Schooling was a serious problem and my achievements a disappointment to my parents so at the age of twelve I was despatched to boarding school in

Torquay, with the hope that my spelling would improve under their guidance. One word describes my experience, miserable.

*I have sought to promote the hobby and to assist others wherever and whenever I can*

Shortly after I left home my parents moved house, leaving my layouts lost but secure within the roof space. However, I did manage to continue developing my modelmaking skills and due to the efforts of a more enlightened physics teacher discovered electronics, at which I apparently excelled.

Whilst attending this educational establishment I discovered "Georges model shop". George was a war trained Royal air force technician, and he encouraged his younger customers to expand their skills by providing a constructive critique of any kit bought from him and returned completed. If the effort was good enough, he would offer to purchase it back at twice the price you had paid for it and supply you with a new kit at a reduced price. This approach not only improved my modelling skills in an affordable manner, but it also developed my entrepreneurial skills.

After passing with distinction an experimental City and Guilds course at South



Scratchbuilt, servo operated, semaphore bracket signal with working lamps located on the station approach

Devon Technical college in electronics, I obtained a graduate apprenticeship with the Plessey company leading after a further seven years of hard labour and study to becoming an electronic design engineer. Along the way I met my wife June, bought a house, and started a family before moving to Somerset to work for a small company called EMI.

After a gap of some twelve years, I started to dabble in HO narrow gauge making a couple of scratch-built locomotives



*My stable of nineteen locomotives, thirty years work are mostly all hand built, a twentieth now nears completion*

and a couple of meters of track and two turnouts. The family grew in number and a third house move requiring considerable renovation once again pushed my modelmaking activities aside.

One day my youngest son came home from school clutching a bundle of old track and a non-working GWR Locomotive. The old grey matter started to stir and before long we had a considerable OO, 4mm scale layout built in the loft. My enthusiasm had been rekindled and early attempts followed to replicate a portion of the North Devon and Somerset countryside.

Two railways in the past had always held my attention, the GWR branch lines and the Lynton & Barnstable Narrow gauge line in North Devon and from an early age I had planned and replanned a layout, in various scales, to replicate my dream which I had never been able to implement.

My business at this point was thriving but looking to further reduce my stress level and moving towards retirement I cast around to invest in other products and eventually purchased a company called ZTC. This business which traded for twelve years until its resale brought about by my retirement.

ZTC was the only British manufacturer of early DCC equipment. Its acquisition put me in touch with many new friends including Rutger Friberg, who in turn introduced me to the NMRA and others such as Burn Lenz, Debbie and Stan Ames and Steve Dominguez and Nancy Workman of Soundtraxx. Over the following years I attended several conventions in America and joined the DCC working groups both in Europe and the USA.

Approaching retirement, I looked at the Achievement Programme with a view to becoming a Master Model Railroader and in May 2007 dipped my toe in the water by submitting three of my locomotives for assessment. To my delight I was awarded my first certificate, Master Builder Motive Power and initially encouraged to continue.

At this point my good friend James Lucas, also a member of the S7 Group visited and persuaded me to re-join the British Region of the NMRA just before the lockdown in 2020.

The 7mm scale S7 Layout is classed as a "might have been" and is based on actual proposals presented to Parliament by the two companies, the Lynton & Barnstaple Railway and the GWR. The lines were never built, probably due to

the cost and difficulty of construction involved through the difficult terrain of North Devon and Somerset. Almost everything on the layout is scratch built, and it will probably take at least another ten years to reach an acceptable stage of completion. (I share the view that layouts are never really completed). Having completed my MMR, I have now started on a new challenge, seeking to master 3D CAD, laser cutting and printing.

The journey to this point has been long but most enjoyable, there have been some cracks in the track along the way, but the latest chapter has raced by especially over the last twelve months. I have been encouraged and assisted by many people along the way, all of whom shared their knowledge, expertise, and patience with me. Most of all, none of my railway journey would have been possible without the support of my wife and family. To them and everyone else who has assisted me I offer my sincere thanks.

In conclusion: over the past forty years I have sought to promote the hobby and to assist others wherever and whenever I can. I will now continue to do so with more authority having become a MMR, because we are the hobby for now, but those just coming into the fold today are its future.

This wonderful, disciplined, and educational pastime, with so many facets to occupy each one of us needs new members and they must be nurtured, helped, and developed, just as we were, or the hobby will perish.

Certificates Earned  
 Master Builder-Motive Power  
 Model Railroad Author  
 Master Builder-Cars  
 Master Builder-Structures  
 Model Engineer-Civil  
 Model Engineer-Electrical  
 Master Builder-Scenery



*Scratchbuilt interior of the narrow gauge engine shed at Gupworthy yard*

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