

The following meeting summary was prepared by our scribe, forum member Ben Fiorello (Bluelinec4). Many thanks to Ben for preparing the following dialog. Any errors you may find are surely my additions.

This was the first meeting in our new venue, the White Rose Restaurant on the Fairgrounds. The consensus was that this venue was far superior to past locations.

Barry Broskowitz opened the meeting with a greeting and a thank-you to all who have purchased his book. He also noted that 18 dealers now carry the DCS O Gauge Companion. Barry then opened the floor to questions from all attending. Questions were answered by a number of people including Barry, Marty Fitzhenry, Dave Hikel and others.

1. Q - What is your experience with the new Rev L TIU while using the magic light bulbs?

A- MTH recommends that light bulbs and engineered filters be removed when using the new TIU. They believe light bulbs or filters should only be used in areas that have a significant signal issue

2. Q – Is there a time delay while measuring signal strength from the TIU to the remote?

A- There is a very minimal time delay in the transmission. It was explained that the little flutter on the remote's screen is the indication of the reception of data packets from the engine. Each little flutter indicates a refresh. Dave Hikel noted that you can hear this signal transmission with an AM radio on low frequency bands. The signal will make popping noises on the radio at every packet transmission.

3. Q – What does the signal strength on the remote measure?

A – The numerical output on the remote's screen equates the amount of data being transmitted and received between the remote and the engine into a number. It isn't a percentage but just posts a number based on the transmissions. For example, if 100 data packets are sent out and 96-100 are received back the remote will post a 10. If 100 are sent out and 89-95 are received back a 9 will be displayed. This will change with the amounts.

4. Q – A person in the audience questioned why a TIU would short out while driving 7 engines on 3 loops of track with a

Dalee Hostler transformer.

A – The panel was not familiar with this transformer but they suspected the power output of this transformer wasn't sufficient to power that many loco's.

5. Q – Why were certain transformers such as the Right of Way not recommended to be used with DCS when it was first announced?

A – The Right of Way in particular is capable of a very high voltage output. MTH was afraid that the high voltage could damage a TIU.

6. Q – One of the attendees asked why the Rev. L TIU is slowing the signal down to his engines?

A – A further explanation of this symptom was requested. This is not a symptom with which anyone present was familiar. The panel suspects that the user might have too many track joins on his isolated blocks. It was explained that blocks should be measured in track joins and not track length. The recommendation is to have no more than 11 track joins per block. The panel also explained that the more engines that are entered in a remote the slower it will seem because of the limitations of the remotes memory. Delay in a signal to an engine also varies from engine to engine.

7. Q – Can you test signal strength when running a lashup?

A – The lashup does not have a soft key for signal strength so this is impossible. Beta testers did report more data collisions when testing signal strength with multiple engines on a track not in a lashup.

8. Q – Does dirty track affect signal strength?

A – Dirty track will definitely negatively affect signal strength. It was also explained that dirty track will transfer dirt and goo to the rollers and wheels of your locomotives. When track is cleaned you should also clean rollers and wheels to be assured your track signal measurements are not being adversely affected.

9. Q – How do you actually go about measuring track signal?

A – Barry explained how to get to the soft key on the remote and how to toggle the track signal measurement on. The panel also referenced the appendix in Barry's book where the soft keys are defined.

10. Q – When running an engine a user wanted to know what

the D in the remote display means.

A – The panel explained this means the Doppler sound effect is active. Barry referenced his book and how to toggle this effect on and off.

11. Q – Many users were unfamiliar what the panel meant by the term Rev. L TIU.

A – The panel explained that Rev. is an abbreviation for Revision level. They explained how there were many different revisions of TIUs and most had a hardware difference from the previous revision. They also explained how to identify these revisions by looking at the sticker on the bottom of the TIU. All TIUs except the initial model have the Rev. level on a sticker on the bottom of the TIU. The unmarked TIUs are all Rev. G. The panel went into detail about some revisions. The Rev. G did not have any built in fuses, there were lighter duty traces on the board, and the signal generator had inadequate protection. The Rev. H corrected these problems. The Rev I TIU had many different levels such as I, I2, I3, and I3a. The Rev. I series TIUs had a 3 volt processor as compared to a 5 volt processor on previous models. The Rev. L added a USB port for configuration, better signal reception and changed the DSP chip from an ASIC to an FPGA. Rev. L TIUs need Windows Live Update enabled to be able to receive the drivers for the their USB ports. The appropriate Windows USB driver needs to be loaded to make it work. MTH has also posted the device driver for the USB port on their website.

12. Q – Why do some functions execute twice when pressing certain soft keys?

A – This may occur if there more than one DCS feed going to the same block, causing the engine to believe that it multiple commands, one from each DCS feed. This causes some signals to play twice. If all the blocks are isolated correctly this can also happen if a passenger car is bridging the isolated gap between two blocks. There is also an outside chance that an engine may have a corrupt sound file that will cause commands to execute twice.

13. Q – Why do some engines have different soft keys than others?

A – The sound file of an engine defines all the soft keys Some soft keys are not needed on other engines.

Andy Edelman and Rich Foster of MTH arrived and were introduced to the crowd.

Andy and Rich thanked Barry for all his efforts to help improve DCS. They also tried to convince the crowd that they are not the Evil Empire. 😊

The first question posed to the MTH team was really a concern of why there were not any steam engines in the new 2012 catalog. Andy explained that there many steam engines already announced that were not brought to market yet. Instead of increasing the backlog MTH thinks it is more feasible to catch up with current announcements before announcing any new steamers. Andy also explained that HO and European models are taking more of the capacity at the factory than was planned. MTH has relicensed the Lionel Corporation tinplate line and will continue production on these items.

Andy also explained that the new catalog does not have as many road names for all the different cars shown. MTH is starting a new policy called "train sourcing" where they will work using customer suggestions for introducing new road names in the future. These will be announced products outside of the catalog. There have been 20,000 items catalogued by MTH since 1992.

Andy talked about new products at the booth in York. He was very proud of the newly released passenger cars that are the mates to the previously released Brute engine. Andy spoke of the history of these cars and how they were originally designed by an Italian craftsman in the 1920's for Lionel but were never produced. All new engines in the 2012 Vol. I catalog will have PS3 installed including all Railking locomotives. The Railking steamers will also have the wireless drawbar previously available on the Premier steamers. PS3 engines are downward compatible and can still be lashed up with PS2 engines. PS3 boards have more memory and will eventually be capable of better sounds.

Andy then referenced submitted questions.

1. Q – What is the future of DCS?

A – DCS has been evolving but there are some things that are not economically feasible. The new Rev L TIU is a major improvement in

DCS operation. There are designs being developed now that will be capable of AC or DC Operation. The current design can not vary DC outputs. MTH is also working on a new remote that probably will not be out until 2013. It will have an LCD color touch screen and will do away with the thumbwheel. The future will also be better RF signals in all hardware. There are also proposals by Mike Wolf to add voice . Andy also explained that the Z4000 transformer is 1988 technology and is still the best selling product MTH has. They will not mess with its success. There is a plan to reintroduce the Z4000 Remote Commander receiver.

2. Q – Will four digit engine addressing be available?

A – Developers have said that this has been possible all along but there does not seem to be that much demand for it. The current remote is also limited in memory. The more engines added to a remote the slower it will go if the memory is tapped. This probably will not happen until a new remote is introduced.

3. Q – Will 0 volt startup be available on variable channels?

A – This is on the horizon. 5 volts used to be the minimal startup voltage on older conventional locos so this is why 5 volt startup was implemented. They are working on this and might be in a future software release.

4. Q – Why are we limited to 15 switch routes?

A – This is also due to the limited memory in the current remote. The next remote will have much more capability.

5. Q – Will we be able to type in a switch or accessory number in all associated menus on the new remote instead of scrolling?

A – Yes with the new remote.

6. Q – Will there be a stay option for labored chuff and drift?

A – Andy explained that everyone was surprised that this was not available already. It borders on a software and hardware issue and will be addressed.

7. Q – Why do we sometimes lose sounds on lashups?

A – The next version of DCS is expected to correct all of the lashup bugs, including this one.

8. Q – When will the Version 4.2 bugs be fixed.

A – Andy kidded that there aren't any 4.2 bugs. He explained that all currently known DCS bugs are scheduled to be corrected in the next software release, which is planned for April of next year.

9. Q – Will we ever have a computer interface?

A – MTH has discussed this and they really does not want to support it themselves, since they do not have the resources to be a software company. However, mTH is open to allowing a third party to do it as long as the third party supports it. They really aren't yet confident that enough people really want computer control of DCS. They are also considering the ability to control trains through a smartphone or iPad APP. They feel this would be more for switch control than train control.

10. Q – When will be upgrade kits be available?

A – There has been a problem getting PS2 upgrade parts. Events in Japan were a major factor. MTH will be able to get enough parts to last through 2012 and all should be available very soon. After these parts are exhausted they will probably offer PS3 upgrade kits. A PS3 upgrade is a major change and will need the installer to change just about everything outside of the motors. Lamps need to be replaced with LEDs, wiring harnesses changed, etc. There are certain older engines that will not be capable of a PS3 upgrade. The Veranda Turbine is an example because of the 4 smoke units and 4 motors.

11. Q – Will any more 5 volt boards become available?

A – Definitely not.

12. Q – Will scale Protocouplers be available in O gauge?

A – They are available in HO and there didn't seem to be much interest for these in O in the past. There seems to be more of a demand now and MTH will look into it.

Andy and Rich closed out the meeting and mentioned something that may be on the horizon. They called it a PS3 Lite board which would have the board installed in cars and accessories for PS3 control. This may be similar to the opening doors of the Coors Lite set.

All of the attendees picked up their copy of the new MTH catalog as they left the meeting.

Barry

DCS Ambassador & author of "The DCS O Gauge Companion 2nd Edition"

Train-Ca-Teers - All For O and O For All!