

Jeff Troy

Rail Truck, Part 1

Bachmann's Galloping Goose No. 1 arrives — ideal for a garden near you.



Bachmann Industries has added the large-scale 1:20.3 Rail Truck to its Spectrum line. It is based upon the Rio Grande Southern #1 Rail Truck, and one version is painted accordingly. Also available are unlettered versions, painted as follows — all black, yellow and black, red and black, silver and black, and hunter green and black.

Rio Grande Southern's #1

Before the shop began work on it, #1 was really a 1925-45 model Buick four-door touring car. Buick six-cylinder touring cars were noted for being able to maintain 60 M.P.H. highway speeds, so this was a good choice. RGS was trying to simply survive in a situation where regular trains pulled by steam locomotives were prohibitively expensive in Depression-wracked Colorado. The RGS Ridgway Shops had its work cut out. The Buick's rear axle had to be narrowed for the three-foot narrow gauge and a pony truck was cobbled up for the front end. Springs needed to be strengthened and the brakes were altered.

The truck was pressed into service after its June 1, 1931 completion date on a round trip from Telluride to Dolores, Colorado, a 130 mile daily schedule. A blizzard in February 1932 closed the line until May, by which time Motors 2, 3, and 4 were completed, all of them larger and more powerful than No. 1. Five, Six, and Seven would later join the roster, but One was retired that May, having paid for itself in a very short time. Karl Schaeffer has, however, recreated old Number One for the pleasure of tourists. Unless it's out joyriding somewhere, it can usually be found at the Ridgway Railroad Museum. You can see Karl's project at www.prewarbuick.com/id349.htm.

Bachmann's 1:20.3 RGS #1

If you chose not to operate it, this would make a very good bookshelf or desk model. It is just littered with interesting detail, all of it authentic. Buick sold 50,000

cars in 1924, and more in 1925 and later years until the Great Depression. This means there were a lot of them around, all well-designed and built. Almost any rail enterprise of the Depression years quickly figured a rail truck or bus was a good bit cheaper to own and operate than a traditional train, especially when only a few sacks of mail and a couple of passengers were involved. So while this is an authentic model of RGS #1, it can also represent rail trucks found all over North America.

My first impression was a sort of jubilant awe. It has a certain presence about it, from the prewar nose to the stakebed body. On one hand, it is a homebrewed contraption, and on the other, it represents American ingenuity. It's handsome and it's goofy and I love it. Any garden railroad can host one or more of these to the delight of all who watch.



Power board inside bed box, covered by snap lid. Power switch is on left while the rest of the board is laid out for easy access.

Our sample measures an extreme width of 4 inches, an extreme length (with the cowcatcher) of 12.5 inches, and an extreme height of 4-3/16 inches above the railhead. The modeled scale is 1:20.3, so the width would scale out to 6 feet 9 inches. This also makes the railhead to high point to be around 85 inches. If you put this Rail Truck among G scale 1:22.5 rolling stock, it would be about 94-1/4 inches. Around 1:24 scale models, it would work out to more than 100 inches.

Up front, the radiator is a wonderful duplication, and you have the choice of the barred cow catcher (installed from the factory) or a snowplow. The working headlamps are consistent with Buicks of the period. Behind them, on the flatboard fenders, sit the sanding pots, there to trickle dry sand down onto the rails, as much for braking as acceleration. Go ahead; open the hood panels. They not only swing up on piano-like hinges, the hood panels articulate the same way. Inside, you can see the Buick engine.

The Rail Truck is an interesting piece, and I'll have a lot more about it for you in Part 2, coming in the March issue of *Hobby Merchandiser*. **HM**