



John Sipple

# Sipple on Trains

## Atlas O Releases Alco RS-3 In New Trainman Line

**Railroaders can choose from Atlas O's 2-rail DC, 3-Rail AC and 3-Rail TMCC.**

The Atlas investment into their Trainman line continues with this Atlas O version of the RS-3. Though the American Locomotive Company (Alco) produced an incredible variety of diesel locomotives over the years from 1925 until it left the U.S. market in 1969, only one other machine outsold the RS-3. That was the S-2 switcher, which sold 1,502 copies to the RS-3's 1,370. No other locomotives ever came close.

You can tell a lot about an RS-3 by catching a close look at the exhaust stack. As delivered from the factory, the turbocharger was air cooled, something that would be upgraded fairly soon to a watercooled version. The air-cooled turbo had a stack that ran parallel to the tracks while the watercooled is perpendicular. A photo of the prototype of my sample in 1961 shows her with the watercooled crosswise stack.

Delaware & Hudson owned 103 of the RS-3 models, locomotives that helped the railroad to replace steam. It was part of a group of 10 purchased in 1953 from Alco, and 4127 was the third from the last numbered onto the roster. She bore serial number 80529 and served for about 25 years, a good record for any locomotive.

Apparently, most of her life was spent in one of my favorite railroad locomotive paint schemes, the Delaware & Hudson blue and gray lightning. She belched smoke and helped pull freights all over the D&H system. This found trains from Washington, D.C. to Montreal, and Philadelphia to Buffalo, though the main shops were in Colonie, New York, between Albany and Schenectady.

The secret to the Trainman line is interesting. O gauge, for example, can get fairly pricey in a hurry, but the Trainman line holds the price down without having to compromise the quality of the basic model. You come to



Coming at you on Atlas scale appearance 3-rail track, the RS-3 reveals the 3-rail pilot that must be free to swing. However, the hand rails, crisp mold detail and delicious paint work belie the lower price point. This ain't tin-plate, folks.

Atlas for a quality drive system, and you still get it with the Trainman. This model features a vertical motor with flywheel in each truck, and a die-cast chassis to supply excellent pulling properties. You have your choice of 2-rail DC, 3-rail AC or 3-rail with TrainMaster Command Control, all appropriately priced.

The cost savings doesn't even come in exchange for lower quality painting or injection molding. Nope. This is the same crisp Atlas molding and razor sharp painting. So just where did they cut the price? In a phrase, road-specific detailing. This RS-3 is a case in point.

Alco built the first true Road Switcher in 1939 with their RS-1, an underpowered, 1000-horsepower predecessor to the RS-3. By the time the first RS-3's hit the tracks in May of 1950, Alco had learned quite a bit about selling diesel locomotives to the railroads, and that meant providing options and upgrades. From the first one until the last in 1956, they fixed, improved and offered choices, all in an attempt to sell as many of their machines as possible. At times, it almost seemed as though no two orders of locomotives were alike.

The Trainman model is a good example of a stock, early RS-3 from 1950 to 1952. It has the aircooled turbocharger and the standard design fuel tank, a single Wabco air horn pointing long hood forward, and AAR standard M/U hoses. D&H, on the other hand, upgraded its fleet by 1960 with watercooled turbos, and had them delivered with long-range fuel tanks, tri-tone horns and high-mounted M/U hoses. The cost of making a special run for just the D&H would have raised the price on all of the RS-3's.

I think this is a trade that most model railroaders will make, under the circumstances. Indeed, if I hadn't pointed

out these distinctions, I doubt that most folks would have known. When they got to the cash register, they'd have figured it out, however. Between making the extra parts and doing all the differential installations, you'd be surprised how much this adds to the cost of a model.

### Operation

I used an elderly Lionel 1044 throttle pack, since that's a pretty good test of any O-gauge locomotive. The RS-3 will tool along at reasonably slow speeds, and the old 1044 has a reversing lever that works the internal standard reversing relays on the locomotive. One bump of the lever stops the loco and the second sends it in reverse, all without touching the throttle.

The model has what looks like the old dual Pyle National headlights, and D&H had several of their locomotives equipped with them at various times in their history. Atlas has apparently wired their headlights with a constant brightness circuit so that a low throttle level will see them on at fair brightness, which is then maintained across the throttle range. At the top end, the RS-3 will really move along. In real life, they were good to around 60 m.p.h. or so, depending upon their gearing.

The model comes equipped with the standard Lionel-type knuckle coupler, complete with the magnetic ramp uncoupler mechanism, if you are so equipped on your layout. This is a very solid implementation, a good thing since the locomotive is fitted with traction tires on the inward axle of each truck. Giving an additional boost in traction, these will make your RS-3 into a stellar puller. Atlas thoughtfully includes a set of replacement tires.

Operationally, the 3-rail version has a minimum curve of O-31 track, so don't count on it to make it through curves on the tighter O-27 layouts. The 3-rail version has truck-mounted couplers with a swinging pilot to assist in making the tight 31-inch-radius curves of O-31 track. The 2-rail version will swing through 36-inch-radius curves. This version has body-mounted Kadee-compatible couplers and fixed pilots at both ends, and they're complemented by scale profile wheels.

The 2-rail version RS-3 locomotive has DCC compatibility via a mounting socket included inside. The 3-rail version RS-3 locomotive offers the choice of the standard with horn and bell (the horn is a 3-chime) with relay reverse and so on. A higher cost version is also available, and it comes with TrainMaster Command Control, licensed from Lionel and requiring a throttle that is capable of activating those sounds.

Atlas O has joined the entire Atlas line in embracing the Trainman concept, and the model railroader and every hobby shop are the direct beneficiaries. Lower prices mean more units sold, and a greater number of happy and more active modelers. These new 1/48-scale RS-3 Trainman locomotives from Atlas O are bound to make a lot of people very happy.

For more information about the new RS-3 locomotives, Trainman and other fine model railroading product lineups, visit the Atlas O Web site at [www.atlaso.com](http://www.atlaso.com) or telephone Atlas O at 908-687-9590. For information about Atlas HO-scale and N-scale products, visit on the Web at [www.atlasrr.com](http://www.atlasrr.com) or telephone Atlas Model Railroad Company in New Jersey at 888-ATLASRR. **HM**



*Delaware & Hudson ran their RS-3's long hood forward, so this is the engineer's side of the locomotive. For what is supposed to be a low-priced, entry-level piece, this is a feature-rich and good-running model.*