

USA Trains

"Charles Ro goes big with Large Scale Trains"

USA Trains began producing Large Scale model trains 22 years ago with the introduction of one boxcar decorated in six different railroad paint schemes. You may ask yourself, how did Charles Ro take a small family-run business from one boxcar and make it one of the world's largest manufacturers of American prototype Large Scale Trains?



Everett - where it all began.

The story begins in 1972 with Charles Ro, Sr. collecting Lionel Trains as a hobby. He saw it as a diversion from his beauty shop business which consisted of four salons and sixty hair-dressers. With one showcase of trains in the hairstylist store and a single phone on the wall, Lionel Trains were sold both locally and through mail-order. Mail-orders were handwritten, packed, weighed on a bathroom scale, and shipped all over the world. The sales of Lionel Trains expanded until the mid-80's when Lionel decided to move its production from Michigan to Mexico and did not produce any model trains for nine months. As the current stock of Lionel Trains began to dwindle, Charles Ro turned to selling German-made trains to help fill the demand for model trains. These German-made trains were larger than Lionel and were suitable for outdoor use, but most were of European prototype. Realizing that these outdoor trains were becoming popular in the United States, Charles and his son, Charles Jr., decided to form a second train company, USA Trains, to manufacture American prototype "garden sized" trains. Hence, the story begins. Charles quickly realized that manufacturing was radically different from retailing. To manufacture trains, he first needed a toolmaker so off to New Jersey he went and contracted a toolmaker to create tooling for the very first Large Scale boxcar to be manufactured in the United States. This turned out to be a learning experience that he and his son would never forget - a promise of "test shots" in six

months stretched out to a year. In the meantime, manufacturing space had to be leased, and decorating equipment ordered, delivered, and in place ready to produce the first six boxcars. Many trips were made to New Jersey in an attempt to move the tooling process along, and finally in December of 1987, the first six American prototype boxcars were shipped to hobby shops and consumers all over America. USA Trains was now producing colorful, American prototype trains. Over the next two years, USA Trains added new products to their line which included a woodside reefer and a work train series. One of Charles's goals was to offer products that no one else was producing in Large Scale. Hence, the woodside reefer was decorated in many turn-of-the-century billboard paint schemes. He was the first manufacturer - the pioneer he says - to make multicolored cars. These colorful, well decorated cars were well received in the marketplace and really added variety to Garden Railways across the United States.

Over the next few years, USA Trains began to expand its production to meet customer's needs and eventually outgrew the space it was currently leasing. At the same time, Charles Ro Supply Company, the retail operation which sold the Lionel Trains, was expanding as Lionel was back into production with its product line. In order to manage both operations, Charles and his son decided to consolidate operations "under one roof". Both companies moved into a newly built facility at 662 Cross Street in Malden. The new, one block long building had three floors and over 50,000 square feet of space providing USA Trains with more space to produce its new products which consisted of a rotary snow-plow, two-tier automobile carrier, centerbeam



The new, one block long building in Malden, Massachusetts is home to USA Trains.

flatcar, and piggyback flatcar. Production was now in full gear with over ten different styles of rolling stock being produced in many different paint schemes. USA Trains began to emerge as one of the premier manufacturers of Large Scale trains. In 1995, Charles made the decision that if USA Trains was to continue to grow, it need-

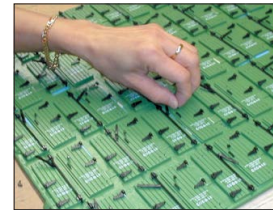


Charles Ro Sr. & Jr. with operating layout at Malden facility.

ed a complete product line including locomotives and track. The decision was made to manufacture locomotives off-shore in order to quickly meet the needs of the expanding market. The first locomotive designed in America but manufactured in China was the NW-2 diesel switcher. Even though the NW-2 took close to two years to bring to the marketplace, it was well received by the Large Scale modelers because it was highly detailed and ran flawlessly. Demand for locomotives increased and consumers began to call looking for future locomotive offerings. In 1998,



USA Trains uses a pad press to transfer ink onto the railroad car. They have a reputation of having the best printing in the business.



USA Trains products are very detailed and include many small parts which have to be hand applied.



This looks like a freight yard but is actually the staging area for final inspection and boxing.

the EMD GP7 and GP9 were produced and they won the Model Railroader's Readers Choice award for that year. The world had now recognized USA Trains as a leader in the manufacture of Large Scale Trains. The production of additional diesel locomotive styles increased over the next few years with the introduction of the 44 Tonner, F3A and B, GP38-2, SD40-2, GP30, PA-1 and PB-1, and more recently the new S4 and SD70 Mac Diesel Locomotives as well as a die-cast metal Dockside 0-6-0T Steam Locomotive just being released as this article hits the newsstand. Again, USA Trains received awards for its locomotives with the GP30 claiming the Reader's Choice Award for 2002. The garden model railroader now had a variety of American prototype locomotives and road names to choose from - there was something for everyone. Oh yes, don't forget the USA Trains slogan, "The quality of brass at a plastic price." This says it all because all of the USA Trains' locomotives are loaded with detail parts and feature characteristics of brass models costing thousands of dollars, yet USA Trains locomotives are priced at around \$200.00. No wonder they have produced so many different styles and road names - the market demands it.

As the Large Scale modeler began to run his high-detailed locomotives, there became an increasing demand for more modern, highly detailed rolling stock to run behind their locomotives. Charles and his "brainstormers" foresaw this and had plans to produce what is now called the "Ultimate Series" - a series of highly detailed rolling stock cars. In 1998, the first in the "Ultimate Series" cars was released, the depressed center flatcar. Over the next four years, USA Trains would release ten additional style cars which would consist of Bay Window Caboose, Extended Vision Caboose, Intermodal Container Car, 40 Foot Boxcar, 50 Foot Boxcar, 40 Foot Steel Sided Reefer, 50 Foot Mechanical Reefer, 70 Ton Coal Hopper, Tank Car, and Woodchip Hopper. More recent additions to the "Ultimate Series" has been a Modern Tank Car and a Modern



4 Bay Covered Hopper. Also during this period of time, a complete trackline was being offered. At this point, the product line was quite extensive with not only a number of different styles of rolling stock, but also all the paint schemes available within each style of car. The model railroader consumer now has hundreds of choices and they all are American prototypes.

In 2001, USA Trains began to produce highly detailed die-cast steam locomotives with the introduction of the World's Largest die-cast metal J1e Hudson. This new series of locomotives was labeled the "Prestige Series" and represented the most detailed, largest die-cast metal locomotives ever produced. The Hudson was well received in the marketplace as it was highly-detailed, durable and a smooth runner. Over the next 5 years, USA Trains added the GGI Electric and the U.P. Big Boy Steam Locomotive to the Prestige Line. The GGI can be coupled up with our Streamlined Alluminium Passenger Car to make the famous "Congressional" train. Imagine a die-cast GGI and ten three foot long aluminium cars each illuminated running on your layout - that's a 40 foot long train. The Big Boy is almost five feet long by itself and weighs almost 65 lbs. It is the largest die-cast locomotive ever produced.



World's largest die-cast Locomotive - the Big Boy

Future plans include more "Ultimate Series" rolling stock pieces both in the 50-60's and more modern eras. We also plan to announce more "Ultimate Series" and "Prestige Series" locomotives over the next few years. We are "keeping it going" by making as many new items as fast as we can and we hope that our customers enjoy each new introduction. Now you know the story of how one boxcar and 22 years of hard work by a lot of people who work "behind the scenes" making sure USA Trains produces the best product possible grew into a leading manufacturer of Large Scale model trains. Charles loves his trains, and he loves his work. But as we all know, working with trains is not like working at all.