

On filming

By Zach Bond

I've been asked, this year, to review the material for the association DVD. I believe it was assumed that students have too much time on their hands and that, consequently, I was an ideal candidate for the job... I do enjoy garden railway videos, indeed, I've uploaded 62 to YouTube over the past 6 years. Much like the articles in the newsletters, garden railway videos fall into several broadly separate categories and a variety is required to make up a DVD of interesting content.



The “How to”

These videos offer a clear way of sharing the intricacies of a garden railway project whilst making the process very clear to the viewer. These can be difficult to compile (the tendency is to photograph the project as it is completed rather than to video which can slow down the build process) and editing is mainly focussed leaving out the dull repetitive bits and stringing the rest together in a coherent fashion. The how to videos are very useful if the view wants to know about any aspect of your project but rather dull to all the rest. Because of this I would be less keen to include basic how to videos but would be interested in any covering the more “advanced” (or perhaps, less accessible) topics such as coal firing, casting components in concrete or plastic and miniature landscape gardening to name but a few.

The “Interesting project”

These videos tend to be made part way through or at the end of an interesting project (signalling systems, landscaping, loco building etc). They need a good variety of well thought out shots to show off the details of the project in question as well as providing an overview. A small amount of information is useful as titles on the video but care must be given to making these short, clear and easy to read. These videos are really intended to show off the work that has gone in and to make the viewer interested in further investigating your project. Perhaps a little footage could be included with a “talk through” of the interesting points interspersed with close up shots and helpful diagrams.

The “My Railway”

These videos should give a clear overview of your garden railway empire. There are often requests for track plans and overall shots to explain how your garden railway fits together so a clear diagram or a “walk through” of the journey will be well received. Try to include a typical end to end “driver’s eye” shot (strap a digital camera to a wagon and go for a ride!) of the railway and some low down “lineside” shots from vantage points a real life train photographer is likely to use.

It is best to avoid repeated shots from the same location (unless there has been a change of loco or stock) as these can become repetitive and dull. Remember that the attention span of the audience tends to be quite low so a variety of interesting shots should be used. Try to make sense of the train movements in editing; the clips should be in roughly the order of the journey. Take the opportunity to focus on parts of your railway which you find enjoyable or different, perhaps a quick explanation of your working scale timetable or miniature buildings would be interesting.

The “Steam up”

Sometimes it is fun just to record a typical steam up on your line. A lot of interest can be generated as part of the raising steam and preparation of a steam loco (or battery, or even diesel!). Coming off shed, turning, collecting wagons etc. all make for engaging videos if carried out at a sensible speed (there can be little more stressful than watching shunting done at 50mph with rocket like acceleration!). Again, journey is an important concept to convey to the viewer (after all, if not journey or purpose, what does a railway do?) and so consecutive shots of the train traversing different points on your line should be employed and much fun can be had thinking up new camera angles. Certainly I have to be quite inventive to conceal parts of my line which are very close together in the model but shouldn't be in real life so as to maintain the illusion of distance. An interesting variety of rolling stock can help in these videos and it is always fascinating to watch how others operate their garden lines.

The “Open Day”

Now, care must be exercised when producing an open day video. The danger here is that you will end up with a video chock full of narrow gauge trains “Whizzing” along at dangerous scale speeds following very closely behind one another. Whilst this practice can be exhilarating and fun to operate during the open day I have found it makes for uninteresting viewing and shows off little of the miniature engineering masterpieces that we enjoy so much to operate. I would like to avoid, in this year's DVD, any of this type of footage. If you edit together an open day video it could include an overall shot of members enjoying themselves in your garden, a line-up of the locomotives present, individual shots and interesting information of the visiting locomotives and rolling stock, as well as some well thought out shots of the railway in operation with the visiting stock.

The “Story”

There are some really wonderful examples of stories told through the medium of garden railways (Morton Pit Productions spring to mind amongst many others) and these can be delightful when well executed. I can speak from experience when I say that these take an awful lot of planning and time to film and edit. Fun can be had making extra props and many takes are often required to get the shots looking just right. There is also opportunity to play around with styles here. Parodies of transport films of yesteryear can be as pleasant to create as they are to watch. I would be very grateful for any examples of this type of garden railway video for the DVD.

I hope that you might find these few words of interest and use when compiling a video for the DVD. There is still plenty of time to make a video from scratch (certainly the colder weather makes for impressive steam effects – worth it if you can persuade yourself and your locos outside) or to edit one together if you have some footage sitting around from earlier in the year. I would like to issue the following general advice and reminders:

I would like all footage submitted not to be available elsewhere. (I realise I fall foul of this one myself as my very own “Chronicles of the Deben Valley” series was included, in modified form, on an earlier DVD)

Back ground music must be carefully selected so that there are no copy right infringement issues (if in doubt, let the locos do the talking...)

When you are filming a shot, start it before the train is in view and leave the camera recording until well after the train is out of shot – this give you plenty of excess to edit the shots together with.

Like fonts there are a wide variety of transitions available but only very few are appropriate to use. I find that fades are sufficient for most applications.

Trains should travel at sensible speeds at all times where possible.

Try to get some low down lineside shots – they can be much more realistic than “helicopter” shots as they show the train as a scale person might see it – you may even get to experience your garden railway from an angle not possible without a camera (from inside a station building or even from inside a carriage for example)

Have fun and be creative – I look forward to receiving the fruits of your labour.