

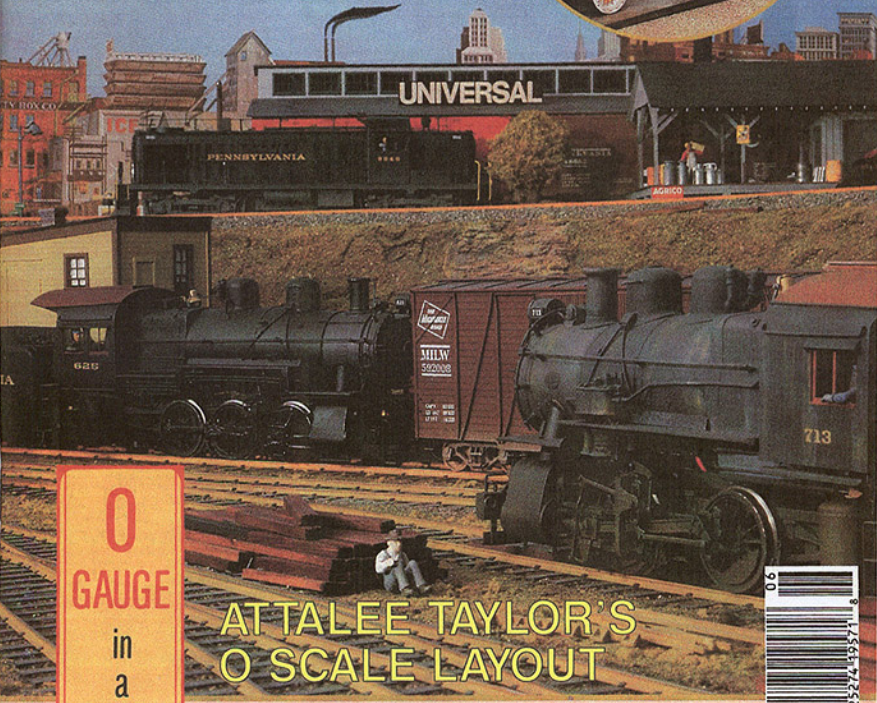
GAUGE

RAIL-ROADING

JUNE 1992

\$3.95 USA

MODELING A
CIRCUS



0 GAUGE

in a small space

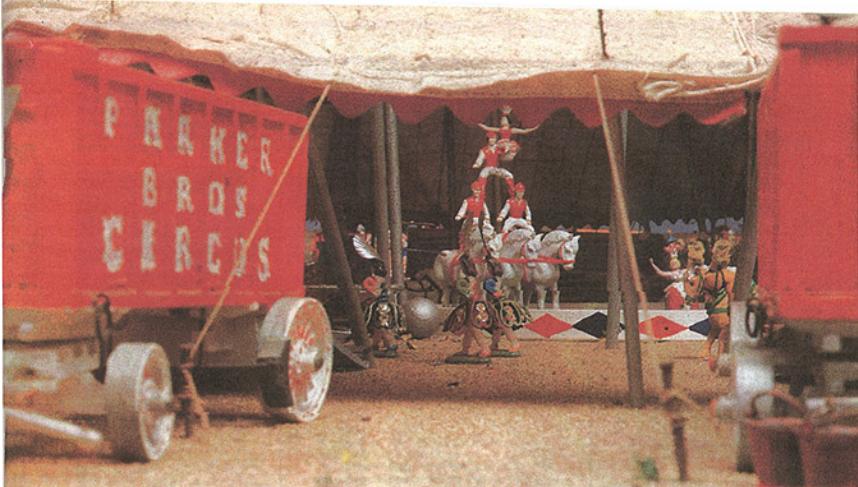
**ATTALEE TAYLOR'S
0 SCALE LAYOUT**

WHAT'S NEW

FOR '92:

**RIGHT-OF-WAY INDUSTRIES AND
WILLIAMS ELECTRIC TRAINS**





Take a peek into the Big Top. The show is in full swing and everyone is holding their breath as one exciting act after another performs in the three huge rings. If you want to model a scene like this, who better to ask what goes where than a retired professional clown.

A REAL CLOWN'S CIRCUS LAYOUT

by "DIAMOND JIM" PARKER
Photographs by Fred M. Dole



"Diamond Jim" Parker

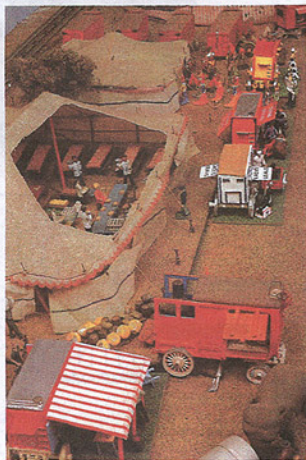
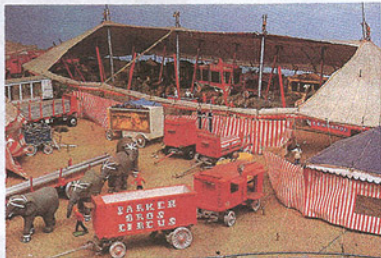
Almost everyone at one time or another in his life has had the desire to run away and join the circus. I am one of the very fortunate few who have actually been able to do that, and I have had an exciting and rewarding career with various circuses throughout the land as a clown, public relations man and front office staff member. Now that I am retired I have been able to combine my love for the circus with my other love, model railroading, and I have built a circus layout in my home. You may not be able to run away and join the circus, but you can become a circus owner via your model train layout.

Combining the colorful and exciting world of the circus with the power of the railroad has been in effect since the mid-to late 1800s and continues even today

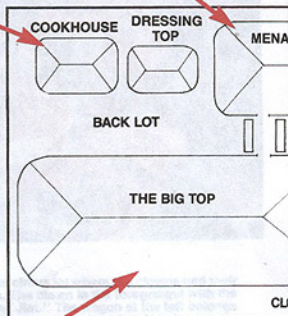
with the two complete Ringling Bros., Barnum & Bailey Circus trains.

As in all model railroading, you alone have to decide how extensive you want your model circus to be. If your layout is limited in space you may just want to build the ornate and colorful advertising car that would sit on a siding. The rest of the circus would then exist somewhere else, out of visible sight, on your layout. Or, if you have a long, empty siding you could build a fully loaded show train. This would represent a circus that had just arrived in town but not yet unloaded or set up. If you have the space, you might want to build a complete model of the circus, including the Big Top. This is what I have chosen to do, and my circus, complete with tents and everything else that goes with them, is

Right: Once through the Entrance Top, people go directly into the Menagerie Top where all the animal exhibits are on display. Note how circus wagons are strategically placed to block general access to areas of the circus lot not open to the public. Of course, there's always room for little boys to sneak through!



Left: The Back Lot of the circus is where the performers live and work. The Dressing Top and the Cookhouse Top are located here. Here, too, is where the acts assemble before making their entrance into the Big Top. Circus wagons that offer services to the performers and support staff are also located in this area.



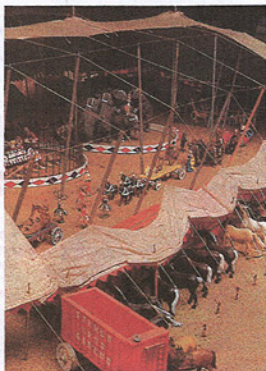
HOW TO MODEL A CIRCUS

If you are going to add a circus to your train, this is how a real circus sets up their show. Just as you would, the location of everything on a circus lot is a matter of convenience for performers and to funnel

This drawing shows the layout of the circus campsite and captions gives details of a spot when you begin building your own circus.

Remember that a circus is a self-contained world. It provides the lives of the performers, animal handlers, and not much opportunity for the circus people such as getting a haircut. The circus was the road required the show owners to make it to be successful.

Right: The Big Top is the center attraction of the circus. In the Parker Bros. Circus it contains three rings and an act may be going on in each ring at the same time. Jim Parker also has modeled the Grand March that takes place at the beginning of the Big Top show and it appears in this scene at the same time as acts are appearing in the three rings. Normally, the Grand March would have taken place first.



the focal point of my layout.

Railroad shows varied in size from a two-car show to 180 railroad car shows. There were many shows besides "The Greatest Show on Earth," including the Hagenbeck Wallace Circus, the Sells Floto Circus, the Cole Brothers Circus, the Al G. Barnes Circus and the Clyde Beatty Circus. Each of these shows had its own color schemes and styles of let-

tering. If you are going to build a model circus, you can model one of these prototypes, or you can develop your own logo, color scheme and type style. This is what I have done in my own "Parker Brothers Circus."

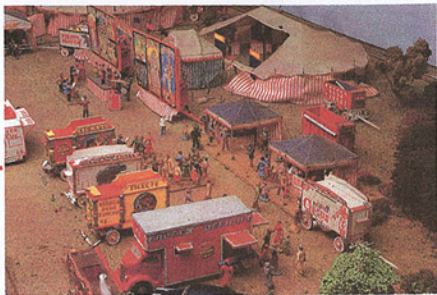
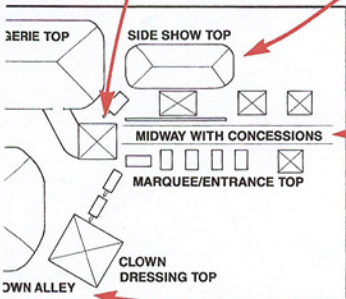
The circus train is divided into three main parts: the stock cars, the flatcars and the coaches. The stock cars come in two types: ones used to haul the

elephants and ones used to haul what is called the lead stock, which includes the horses, zebras, camels, llama, etc. The flatcars were loaded with the colorful wagons ranging from the gaudy cage wagons and ticket wagons to the work wagons that carried the canvas and props. The coaches carried the performers, working men and staff. If it were a really big show, the owner would have

Below: The Marquee Top and Main Entrance to the circus is located at the end of the Midway. Once people have moved through the Midway and Side Show they arrive here and enter the main circus lot.



Below: Once the circus parade from town reached the circus lot, the people moved toward the Entrance Top through the Midway with its various concessions. The big feature of the Midway was the Side Show, the large Top at the top of the photo. Here the circus freaks performed. Left: the entrance to the Side Show Top.



Below: Clown Alley was the area of the circus lot where the clowns had their Dressing Top and kept all their props. The clown in the foreground with the diamonds on his costume is "Diamond Jim." The wagon at the left belongs to the circus sign painter who is working on a sign for a local businessman.



A CIRCUS CORRECTLY

in layout one of the important things to know is putting a tent on the layout is not enough. was carefully thought out and arranged for the audience toward the Big Top.

us on Jim Parker's layout. Each of the photo-specific area of the circus. Use them as guides

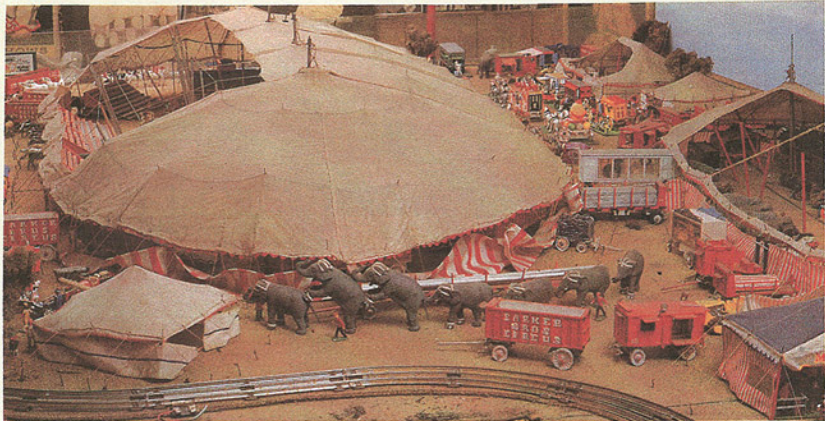
id city. All of the elements needed to support the circus and support staff are present as there was no time to go shopping or take care of other needs "Here today and gone tomorrow" and life on the set, the needs of their people if the show was

his own private car. One of the coaches was also the "pie car," or diner, and was the center of social life on a railroad show. All circuses except Ringling Bros., Barnum & Bailey Circus traveled as a single train. This show traveled as three separate sections, or trains. The circuses owned their own rolling stock but would lease motive power and train crews from the various railroads as they

crisscrossed the country. Most all the circus cars were of extra length because in the olden days the railroads charged the shows so much per car. Being good showmen, the owners decided that the longer they made the cars, the more they could put on them and the cheaper it would be.

I grew up in Hastings, Neb., where the biggest event in town was Circus Day

when any one of several shows would arrive in town. The Union Pacific Railroad and the Burlington Railroad were the lines that came through town. Circus Day was almost a holiday in town. Businesses, and sometimes schools, would close and everyone would go down to the railroad yards to watch the unloading of the cars. Then there would be a big parade through town, and finally



9 This overall view of Jim Parker's circus shows all the elements in place. Again, note how wagons and Tops are placed to create barriers or to channel the audience through the circus in an orderly manner, leading ultimately to the Big Top.

everyone went to the show itself. So, I grew up with a lot of circus in my blood and spent many happy hours as a boy hanging around the circus grounds and mixing with the crews and performers.

I got my first Lionel train set in 1948 and had a layout in my basement. I still have my first engine—a 2025—and run it on my circus layout. In 1957 I packed all my trains away and joined the U.S. Navy and spent the next 20 years traveling all over the U.S.A. and the Orient. I got involved professionally in the circus during my Navy career. A circus came to one of the cities where I was stationed and when I went to see it, I recognized it as one of the shows that had come to Hastings when I still lived there. Some of the performers recognized me, too,

and asked me if I would like to fill in for one of the clowns who was sick. And that's how my professional circus career began. I used all my leave time with the Navy to travel with the Ringling Bros. Circus as a clown (professionally, my name was "Diamond Jim") and I developed my own unique clown character and makeup. In 1973 I taught at the Ringling Bros., Barnum & Bailey Clown College in Venice, Florida. I retired from the Navy in 1977 and joined Circus Vargas, the largest tent circus then touring out of California, full time as a clown. I traveled with the circus until 1980, when I had to retire for health reasons. On a trip to Key West, Florida, I remembered that one of my circus friends lived in a town called Gibsonton

and I stopped to visit him. I didn't know then that Gibsonton was the winter home of many carnival and circus people, but I was delighted to find many old circus friends living there and decided to make it my home, too.

When I was in the military and with the circus I would always check out the hobby shops and toy stores wherever we were. Through all those years I gathered many wagons, figures and animals and packed them carefully away, waiting for the days when I would have the space to display them. When I retired to Gibsonton I was fortunate to get a job as the manager of a 10-acre circus winter quarters and was, after a couple of years, able to build a 12'x55' addition onto my mobile home for my circus memorabilia and my circus train layout.

My 8'x32' layout is divided into three parts. The first is a small town with the circus street parade going through it. The second is the railroad yards with the show train being unloaded. And third is the show grounds itself with the circus set up in its entirety.

The buildings are a combination of kits, kit-bashing and scratch-building. Circus figures were very hard to find when I first started gathering them; so many of them are by train townspeople converted into performers. My animals have literally come from all over the world, and the circus wagons were either kits, scratch-built or a combination of both. All of the rolling stock is authentic and is modeled on actual circus cars. I rely heavily on photographs of a prototype car or circus when creating a scene.

The circus lot itself contains the Midway with the Side Show Tent, the Menagerie Tent, the Big Top and the

10 The circus train is located on a siding that is as near as possible to the circus lot. If you don't have room on your layout for the circus itself, you could model just this scene, representing the arrival of the circus train, with cars being unloaded.



Back Yard, which contained the dressing tops, cookhouse and clown alley.

One of the things that most train modelers who put a circus on their layout don't realize is that every aspect of the circus had a specific order and/or location to it, and if you are going to model a circus accurately, you have to put everything in its correct order or location. For example, the cookhouse was the first tent to be unloaded and set up since it was one of the most important parts of the circus. The circus literally traveled on its stomach, and the quality and quantity of the food was one of the things that often determined which shows were popular with performers and therefore usually successful, too. A well-fed company was a happy company. Also, in the circus parade, the calliope wagon was the last one in the parade. It signaled the end of the parade and was the wagon all the townspeople followed to the circus lot. In the train makeup itself, the elephant stock cars came first since these animals had to be unloaded first so they could be used as part of the work force that set up the circus. The rest of the stock cars came next, followed by the flatcars carrying the many wagons. The coaches brought up the rear. It is important in modeling any aspect of the circus to get the various components in their correct order.

Inasmuch as my circus train is in the yard being unloaded, I have two trains that I can run for visitors. For the mid-1950s setting that I have created on my layout, I have my original 2025 steam engine and six freight cars on one loop that encircles the layout, and a 2023 UP diesel with three passenger cars that runs on the inner loop.

My current project is detailing the circus scene. I am always adding small scenes to the circus. One of the things I am presently doing is painting upwards



11 The circus parade through town marks the beginning of the show. The idea is to get the townspeople to follow the parade back to the circus lot and attend the show.

of 400 townspeople figures to put on the circus lot and to add to the city streets as spectators watching the circus parade. Again, how big and elaborate you want your model circus is entirely up to you. I wish I had more space than I do so I could make my circus even more intricate and detailed. But, after all, because of my career in the circus, I do have more interest in modeling it than the average modeler might. As I said earlier, a circus could be represented on a layout with only the advertising car parked on a siding.

There are several books about the circus that you can use as references, but

for complete coverage of the prototype I highly recommend one entitled "The Circus Moves By Rail" by Parkinson/Fox.

If you are serious about building a model circus you can also contact Circus Model Builders International for more information. Sally Weitlauf is the secretary, and the address to write to is 347 Lonsdale Ave, Dayton, OH 45419.

O gauge model railroading is great; adding a circus to your layout makes it even greater. You'll find, as I have, that circus life is a fascinating and exciting adventure in real life and on a model train layout.

