

EVERY BOY'S DREAM

There was a time, and it is still within living memory, when every boy's dream was to own a bicycle, a football and an electric train, and not necessarily in that order.

That was back in the 1930s and into the early 1950s. To be given an electric train for Christmas was a rite of passage. True, parents had to be able to afford one, or perhaps it would be granddad or Opa who would play Santa Claus.

In North America it was American Flyer, Ives, and latterly Lionel; in the UK, Hornby (manufactured by Meccano Ltd., of Liverpool, England); and in Europe Märklin or Bing – all of them household words for that dearest of possessions.

In North America, back in the 1920s, it was Standard or Wide Gauge that predominated, and then Gauge 0 right through into the 1950s.

Across the Pond, however, “table top” or “00” or “Dublo” clockwork and (very soon after) electric trains started to replace Gauges 1 and 0 in the 1930s. (Gauge 1 never “took on” in North America, and “Standard Gauge” [or Gauge 2 as it was known in Europe] had already withered there at the turn of the 20th century.)

Actually, Bing introduced its “table top” (not to be confused with post-WWII TT Gauge) trains in 1924, and those were followed by Märklin and Trix in the mid-1930s, and by Hornby-Dublo just before WWII broke out.

After WWII, these “toy trains” transformed themselves into a new model railroad hobby for adults everywhere, with an increasing technological sophistication unimaginable in what is now fondly remembered as the tinsplate “toy train” age.

This layout is a “three-rail” Hornby-Dublo (“Dublo” standing of course for “00”, or half “0” that became “H0”, today still the most popular model railway gauge and scale). It was Hornby's entry into the market a year or two before the outbreak of WWII that persevered until 1960 when “three-rail” production, the hallmark of the “toy train age”, came to an end.