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All about Gunge

by Shane O'Connor

What causes the unwelcome black muck or gunge that adheres so tenaciously to the running surfaces of track and wheels? David Broomfield has offered a novel solution under his Track Cleaning in HOm, but I suggest there are other methods to avoid gunge developing on the track and catenary.

I imagine that many modellers have discovered Bemo's HOm in later modelling life, and that they, like myself, had worked previously in OO, HO, N or all three! They too will quickly have learned that Bemo track needs to be handled with care, particularly the points, have been delighted by the free running of the remarkably light coaches and impressed by the performance of the locos. Did they too conclude that only those using Marklin's AC system can be entirely free of this tiresome and persistent problem, which follows Sod's dictum; Gunge shall always accumulate on the most inaccessible track, especially when beneath catenary.

We should be concerned with treating the cause rather than its effect. I deliberately ignore one popular remedy the Relco unit (providing electronic controllers are not used) as this, whilst effective in improving poor wheel electrical contact, does not really eliminate gunge.

There are two factors that should concern us, track, and for those using live catenary, the conductor wires, as both can develop poor conductivity but the causes are not identical. Incidentally I assume the contact springs against the wheels have already been checked and cleaned.

1: Dust and Human Hair

The Cause: You cannot prevent dust accumulating, it is always in the air and will settle at every opportunity. You can reduce the volume by having a carpet in the railway room that does not throw out fine particles, also avoid

wearing man-made fibre cardigans and the like. Every time you bend over the layout, a number of hairs are shed from your head.

The Remedy: Regular dusting of the entire model railway with a clean soft brush, followed by careful vacuum cleaning, preferably using a miniature type such as those recommended for cars. If a long-haired cat lives in your home, try to persuade him not to inspect the layout at close range, better still, encourage him to forget about visiting the railway room altogether, something easier said than done!

2: Oil and Grease

The Cause: No locomotive will run satisfactorily without occasional lubrication to the axles, gear chain and motor bearings. (Some makes claim that the bearings are greased 'for life' which could be the basis for interesting litigation - consider what is meant by 'life'.)

The Remedy: Keep the mechanism clean. Avoid excess, use dedicated oil whenever possible (never 3in1), as an alternative try a silicon lubricant. Vaseline or similar petroleum jelly will suffice for parts which should be greased, avoid motor car greases as they contain elements harmful to plastics. Remove any excess before returning the locomotive to work, tissue and cotton buds help, as do woolly pipe cleaners.

3: Traction Tyres

The Cause: These harbour any oil that has seeped from the axles. This combination of black rubber and oil is the prime basis of deposited gunge, sometimes accumulating very quickly on the track and coach wheels.

The Remedy: All wheels should be checked and cleaned as appropriate, it is worth checking the track for alignment and level if gunge persists. Ideally, remove all locomotive traction tyres by replacing wheel sets. Bemo offer suitable replacements. Unless your railway has

gradients of truly unprototypical proportion, there will be no appreciable loss of adhesion. Incidentally, Bemo's more recent releases do not have traction tyres!

MITTELWALD's metre gauge section has existed for almost a decade. In this period it has grown extensively (to the expense of the standard gauge) with circa 40% of the track in tunnel. The population, apart from benefiting from the constant fine summer weather, staff remaining constantly at their allotted positions, enjoy very frequent services. I have yet to find it necessary to remove gunge from the track, which is laid on cork and ballasted with Woodland Scenics ballast.

4: Catenary

All electric locomotives use the Sommerfeldt catenary as the return, enabling two locomotives to be controlled in one section. Catenary sections are controlled by feeds through the Bemo point switches. Correct conductor wire height above rail, adequate tension and minimum zig-zag from top dead centre (not exceeding 3mm either side) are essential requirements. Trouble-free performance can be anticipated with regularly used through tracks, but sidings can produce hesitant running.

The Cause: Dust, infrequent use, poorly assembled catenary, slow running speeds, coupled with varying strengths of upward spring pressure by the pantograph will contribute to poor conductivity. This is especially noticeable with single arm pantographs having a narrow contact surface and/or a near scale length collector pan.

The Remedy: Remove dust, check the catenary and re-assemble if necessary. I would not advise any attempt to alter the pantograph spring pressures but I would check that the pantograph was true in its relation to the locomotive. The most drastic cure is to replace a recalcitrant pantograph with that of scissor format. Usually an application of electrician's cleaning fluid such as Servisol (not WD40, because it dries leaving a protective coat) to the

contact surface of the conductor wire, using a cotton bud dipped in the fluid, will clean a dirty surface and leave it lubricated. Avoid any excess fluid as this in turn attracts dust and the conductor wire will develop a furry appearance. The pantograph collecting pans should also occasionally be wiped in the same manner, as these too accumulate gunge. If this is not entirely successful, use a silicon rubber (available from radio-ham suppliers), and rub this along the underside of the wire, removing any rubber residue afterwards. Finally, run a locomotive along the whole length of the siding(s) a number of times to really bed in the now cleaned small contact area of the wire(s), without any stock attached. I can guarantee a performance reliability of 99.999% if you adopt these remedies (a failure risk of .001% always remains, according to Professor Sod!)

Golden Pass

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to enjoy a leisurely lunch on Lake Brienz and avoid the need for restaurant facilities on the trains.

Any courier worthy of the name ought to be able to shepherd his/her charges over a couple of changes and enliven the turnover with a suitable bit of spiel. The serious traveller will, of course, have no difficulty. There is moreover the point that for many people, a break in journey at Interlaken would be welcome in its own right.

From the railway viewpoint, the advantages are obvious, there is no capital outlay and considering the frequent livery changes on railcars these days, the cost of any repaint can be lost in normal overheads.

Some of the publicity budget could be well spent on stressing the benefits of an occasional change of coach on a long journey. The only question remaining is passenger's luggage. What luggage? I never had any bother when transferring a party over this route, it goes on ahead on a pallet and is waiting at your destination, having gone the quick way round.