

S Gauge Model Trains

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The S-scale, known also as the S-gauge, for model trains is designed on the ratio of 1:64 [that is, 3/16 inches = 1 foot] and fits between the popular HO and O model train scales

. It met the demands for a scale which was larger than HO [which was considered too small by many model railroaders] but smaller than the popular O scale thus allowing track layouts to be constructed in smaller spaces.

Although S-gauge model trains had been around since the early part of the century, it began to boom with the advent of the re-designed American Flyer model trains first produced by The A.C.Gilbert Company in Connecticut, USA, during the late 1930s. The famous American Flyer model trains, which had been produced since the early part of the century initially as clockwork model trains, then later, as electric trains, were radically re-designed by Gilbert when he bought the original company. These trains were built to S-scale but ran on standard O-gauge tracks.

Some years later Gilbert introduced another of his radical modifications - he re-designed the tracks for the S-scale trains, moving away from the traditional three track rail used in model electric trains to that date.

The three track rail then in general use had the two outer tracks for the wheels to run on with the third, centre track, carrying the electric current to drive the model train motor. The new two track rails made the layouts seem more realistic as they now looked like 'real train tracks'. The development of these tracks to suit the smaller S-scale model trains also allowed track layouts to have curves of a different radius, more appropriate to the re-designed American Flyer locomotives and rolling stock.

Many, if not most, of today's S-scale enthusiasts had their first introduction to that scale with the American Flyer when, as a youngster in the 1950s, they received a set as a Christmas present. During that period, the Flyer competed directly with the Lionel model trains of that time and these two companies were the market leaders.

Today the S-scale model trains, including the long-lived American Flyer are rising rapidly in popularity again.

This is the result of the Lionel Corporation, the predecessor of the present manufacturer of Lionel trains, Lionel LLC, having purchased the rights to the American Flyer from the company which had bought the rights from A C Gilbert when his company became bankrupt in 1967.

Lionel Corporation was itself in financial difficulties at that time, and went through the hands of several owners before reaching its present incarnation as Lionel LLC in 1996. But for some time that new company initially concentrated on producing and marketing its own HO and HO27 models and did little to inspire the devotees of S-scale. Since 2002 however, Lionel LLC has been introducing new models of S-scale model trains - and heartening those enthusiasts.

There is a range of organizations and associations to cater for the interests of S-scale model railroaders. A peak body, the National Association of S-Gaugers, which is also associated with the National Model Railroad Association, has a very active membership. Their website which provides information on activities, events, suppliers, and archived reference material, also has links to S-Gauge clubs in 29 US states as well as Canada and the UK. There are even two Yahoo Groups - S-Trains and S-Scale.

S-Scale model trains, and all the appropriately scaled accessories, are now produced by a number of manufacturers and cater for several different segments within that scale - mainly the American Flyer, the standard S-gauge and Proto:64 being the major ones.

After a long and checkered history S-scale model trains are certainly back in vogue again.

To quote Craig O'Connell from his "S" Scale Model Railroading Homepage website:

"S scale is one of the fastest growing scales within model railroading today and is growing in leaps and bounds. Why? Because you need only 10% more space than HO to operate, our products are proliferating in the market place and S scale products run reliably, track better and are easily modeled to prototypical accuracy."

Author: John Vanse is model train enthusiast who has a number of websites with information about model trains. These sites can be access through the hub site: The Model Train Guide

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