

Eric Bird describes a compact scene intended to showcase a collection of digitally controlled engineering and construction equipment.

Gleisbau Bitterfeld

A German track maintenance depot

I cannot remember exactly when my interest in railway engineering models began, but I have gradually collected quite a few over the years. It was suggested that I should make some sort of display layout for exhibition purposes, as it would make an unusual theme that no one seemed to have attempted.

I had to hand an American micro layout (the usual "It will come in handy one day") so this was adapted into an imaginary rail engineering depot 'somewhere in Germany'. The name was decided upon by the fact that I found two small cast plates from Germany that fitted the theme perfectly and so *Gleisbau Bitterfeld* was born.

It also serves to demonstrate the value, advantages, and functions of DCC control and why I believe it is the way forward, particularly if you are just starting in the hobby, young or old.

Bitterfeld is a real place in Germany but has no connection to the layout, although I have been asked where in Bitterfeld the yard is located on a number of occasions by Bitterfeld residents!



Above
What was intended as a fiddle yard has become an extra display area, and when not too full of stock is used to demonstrate the working Trix rail-mounted crane, which has its own separate dedicated control panel as it runs off an older decoder which is not compatible with my current system.

Below
The area immediately outside the workshops on the main board.



Right
The fiddle yard/display area.



Below
From left to right:
Märklin *Hilfzug* coach
and Roco support coach,
Viessmann Robel type 54.13
draisine with crane (Klv53)
and cement wagon,
Trix crane, Viessmann Robel
with working crane.



It was clear from the start that the micro layout on its own would not be enough to either display enough rolling stock and provide some sort of operational interest ('play value') so a suitable board is connected to act as a display area as well as a fiddle yard.

Peco Setrack and points were used on the main board and Fleischmann Profi-track in the add-on yard.

The points are operated by the rod/tube method. Some rolling stock has issues with the frogs due to finer wheel

tolerances, but because of the small size of the layout size it is not possible to change to larger radius points without some major remodelling.

The main controller is an NCE Powercab tethered throttle, and I also use a WiFitrax WFD-30 wireless module along with a 'phone app. I also use a Roco Multimaus for additional sound functions.

I use Kadee couplings, with associated magnets, and these along with the DCC control system have prompted many questions from modellers who are not sure if it is worth going over to the 'dark side'! I explain that I am very much a 'plug & play' person, and that if you can use a mobile 'phone or a television remote, then you are off to a good start with regard to DCC.

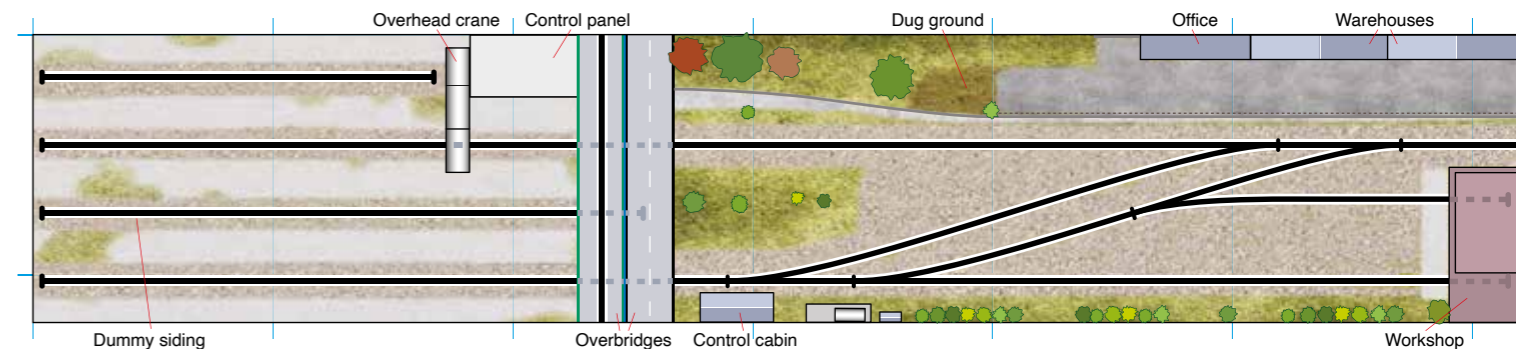
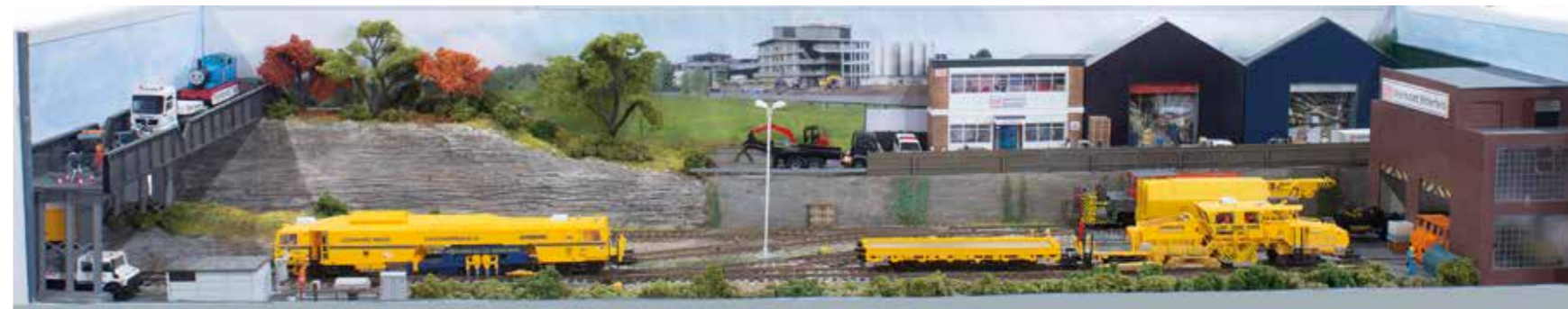
One question that always gets asked is: "How much?" I tell the truth about the cost – which probably explains why there are not many exhibition layouts with these models!

All the buildings are low relief. The main depot is made up from bits of a Walthers kit, and the warehouses on the road above are from Ten Commandments, with interiors simulated by reducing photos found on the internet, which does raise comments on how long and deep the warehouses are!

The admin block is Hornby, also with reduced photos as office interior scenes.

The backscene is a commercial product chopped about a bit to suit the location.

There is also a small girder bridge over the fiddle yard entrance/exit with overhead catenary, along with a Vollmer overhead crane which both serve as a visual block as well as displaying a Kibri maintenance vehicle.



Gleisbau Bitterfeld Overall layout size 1870mm x 360mm. Each grid square 300mm x 300mm.

Above
The main workshop yard.

I have put mirrors at the end of the warehouse road as well as just under the yard girder bridge, and these cause some amusement as children try to work out where the rest of the road or line goes!

The main rolling stock roster consists of the early version of the Trix 'Goliath' crane, Roco snow blower and EDK 750 crane, and Viessmann tampers and Robel track machines, but other unusual items of stock not normally seen by the travelling public can make appearances.

These are complemented with various Kibri kit-built unpowered rail infrastructure maintenance models, which can be propelled by a Viessmann powered wagon, which saves the fitting of motors and testing my modelling abilities!

As the Trix crane is the 1999 version, it has no sound function, so a Märklin sound-equipped *Hilfzugwagen* has been drafted in to add some realism and compete with the Roco EDK 750 crane with all its function features. The Trix crane is operated by its own controller.

Below
The fiddle yard exit/entrance overbridge. The portal crane is by Vollmer.
You have to look twice to spot the mirror next to the van on the second track.

Left
On the girder bridge is a Kibri catenary maintenance vehicle.
Tucked in behind the bridge support pillar
is the control panel for the Trix crane.





Forthcoming exhibition
 The layout is due to be at the Astolat MRC exhibition on Sunday 15th January at The Surrey Sports Park, University of Surrey, Richard Meyjes Road, Guildford, Surrey, GU2 7AD.

Depending on the exhibition and its intended audience, the rolling stock can also feature motive power and wagons from DB Netz and private infrastructure companies.

Most of the rolling stock uses Kadee couplings in NEM pockets and this has proved to be useful in showing how they work for first timers.

I have tried to create some realism with figures dotted around, as well as vehicles which fit the period modelled, roughly late 1990s to the present.

I try to cater for the younger generation with small cameos, such as *Thomas* on a low loader, along with some comedy scenes.

Keeping something moving and entertaining the public is what exhibiting is all about.

I also show short films on a DVD player alongside the layout to illustrate the real machines in action as they are working on the layout to help people understand what their purpose is and how they function, and this goes a long way in explanation. It shows that these machines are usually working at night or out of sight of the travelling public – and helps explain why they are sometimes on a rail replacement bus service!

This layout may not interest everyone, but our hobby has many varied aspects and I would like to think that it provides another part of that.

Above
The tamper passing the point control cabin.

Below
The workshop area, with a Viessmann powered wagon and Kibri USP 2000 UWS, Rivarossi ASF battery shunter, Roco EDK 750 crane, and Roco BR716 snow blower. Beyond on the upper level are the administration block and storage warehouses.



Below
Bovine intrusion issues holding up Thomas on his European tour!



Above
A general view of the main section, with Viessmann tamper, Kibri USP 200 SWS and powered wagon, Roco EDK 750 crane, and Roco DB BR716 snow blower.

Photographs by the editor.

The layout is coming up for its fortieth exhibition appearance and seems to have been well received by show organisers and the public, most of whom never realised that these machines ever existed, either in real life or in model form.

I enjoy exhibiting and entertaining the public and already have already some bookings for 2023. As long as I have the good health to carry on, long may it continue!