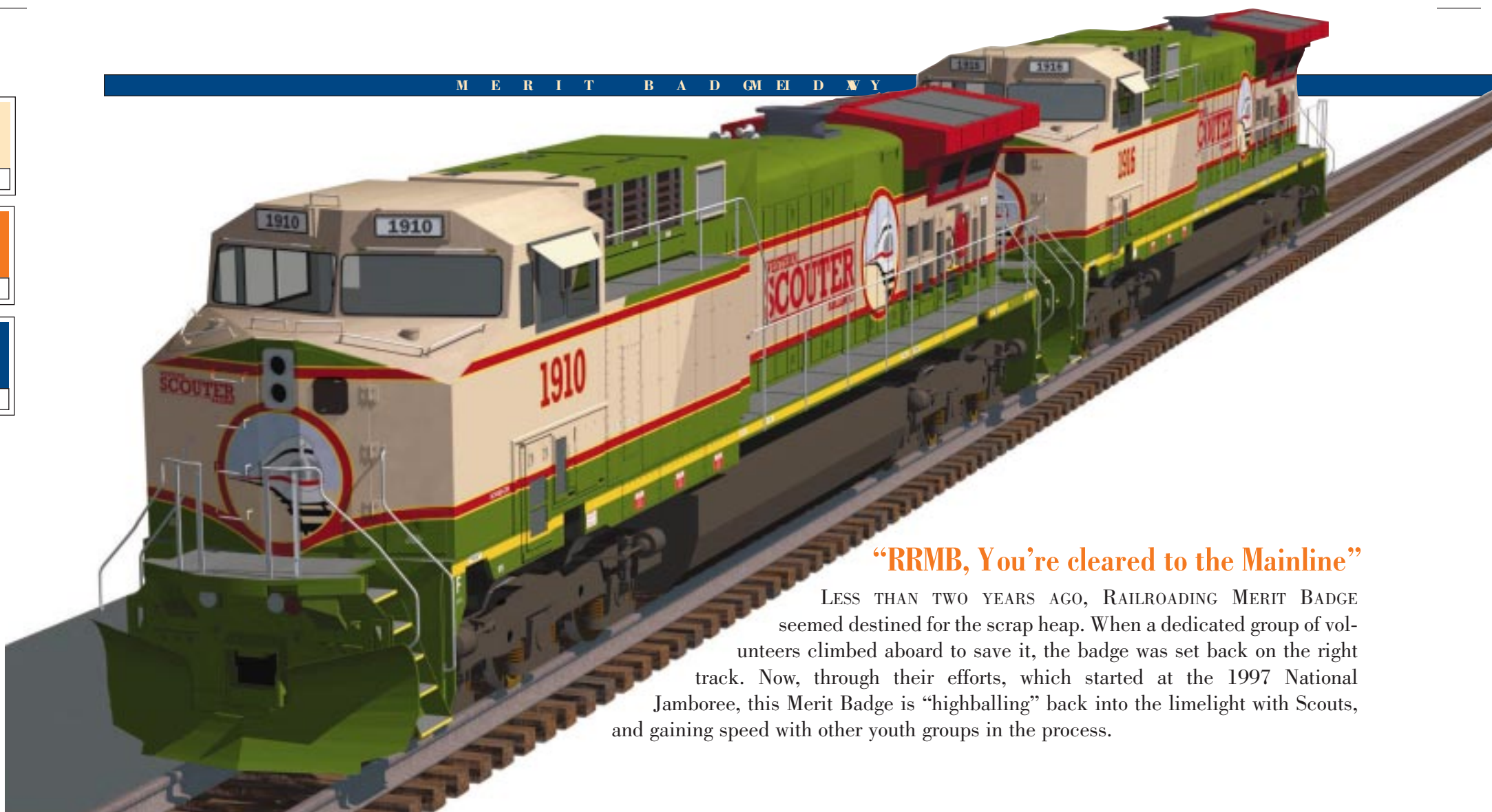


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## “RRMB, You’re cleared to the Mainline”

LESS THAN TWO YEARS AGO, RAILROADING MERIT BADGE seemed destined for the scrap heap. When a dedicated group of volunteers climbed aboard to save it, the badge was set back on the right track. Now, through their efforts, which started at the 1997 National Jamboree, this Merit Badge is “highballing” back into the limelight with Scouts, and gaining speed with other youth groups in the process.

# RAILROADING MERIT BADGE

by JmPppas

MARK TWAIN ONCE SAID THAT RUMORS OF HIS DEATH WERE GREATLY EXAGGERATED.

WELL, PERHAPS THE SAME THING IS TRUE OF THE RAILROADING MERIT BADGE. It seems that some were considering phasing it out. Perhaps they thought that railroading was no longer popular or necessary as we approach the year 2000. However, on the Merit Badge Midway at the 1997 Boy Scout National Jamboree, the Railroading merit badge was one of the most popular of all. Over 2400 youth visited and participated in the excellent program and displays put on by Charles Anderson, a Railroading merit badge counselor from San Angelo, Texas. More than 1500 walked away with the badge.

The exhibit features a series of hands-on stations that helped teach different parts of the badge, as well as promote safety awareness. It included “time saver” switching layouts, which had boys actually running trains through switching exercises like those on the real railroads, a full size mock up of a locomotive engine, and model railroad layouts that captured the attention and imagination of Scouts for hours at a time. The exhibit was run by railroaders and model railroaders.

The entire exhibit is staged around a semi-trailer, which houses a couple of the stations, and serves to transport the contents of the exhibit from site to site. The trailer was donated by UPS, and is typically shipped via — what else? — railroad. Most of the transportation expense is donated by the railroads, too.

Several other corporate sponsors hooked up for the exhibit, including:

Operation Lifesaver, who’s program of rail safety awareness is a major part of the exhibit; Burlington Northern Santa Fe railroad donated \$22,000 to create a Railroading Merit Badge video (by Pentrex); Trane, Inc. supplied the air conditioning equipment for the trailer; several other railroads have also donated money or services. The hobby industry also got involved, with Microscale donating a set of decals for all the kids that went through the program, and a major manufacturer donating model kits to the first 125 participants.

With all of the success of the exhibit, it seems Railroading merit badge has been saved. That was Anderson’s first goal. From here, he hopes to help rewrite the requirements to better reflect modern railroading. As always, the merit badge will continue to teach boys about real, full size railroading and how it works, and at the same time teach them about the hobby of model railroading.

Charles Anderson and his crew have exciting plans for the next year, too. Last October, they brought the booth to the NorthEast Region Jamboree in New Jersey. Next March, the booth will travel to Roanoke, Virginia. Then, don’t forget about the National Model Railroad Association’s annual convention and show, being held in Minneapolis in July, 1999.

Now that Charles Anderson and his crew have performed such a success story with the Boy Scouts, several other youth organizations are also showing an interest in his Railroading exhibit and the program. There’s currently a Cub Scout program

under development, and 4H, FHA, FFA, and the Girl Scouts are waiting in the wings.

The team is also working with Operation Lifesaver to develop *Rail Awareness for Youth*: a program to increase the visibility of railroading to children and teenagers. This serves two efforts: first, and most importantly, increasing safety awareness around railroads and rail equipment; and second, helping promote the job opportunities that exist in railroading.

The revitalization of the merit badge has happened coincidentally with the tremendous popularity that prototype railroading and model railroading have found with the public. Railroading, model railroading, and the Railroading merit badge are all stronger than ever, and will be with us for a long time to come. In spite of the fact that Congress has considered cutting funding to Amtrak (our national rail passenger service), the fact is that travel numbers are up, and in many areas expanded passenger service is being put in. In recent years, California has experienced a major increase in passenger rail service, with the addition of several bay-area and Los Angeles area medium-distance commuter trains. Most recently, the Alta Monte Commuter Express has opened the Alta Monte corridor between Stockton and the San Francisco/Oakland bay area for the first time in many years.

Also, railroad freight service is a bustling industry. Shipping freight by rail is still the most cost effective and environmentally friendly way to go. Recently, some of the railroads have experienced traffic problems because of the tremendous amounts of freight that industries are ship-



Stathi and John Pappas, two attendees of the exhibit, standing in front of the mock-up locomotive cab that was created as part of the Railroading Merit Badge exhibit.

ping by train.

Most interesting is the fact that model railroading is more popular than ever. There are more model railroading hobby magazines on the shelves than there were in the legendary “hay days” of the 1930’s through the 1950’s! Model trains and toy trains are available today in a variety that one would only have dreamed of just a few years ago. Lionel Trains, perhaps the most famous brand name of all, has popular performer and song writer Neil Young helping to develop new electronic control units and other such new devices for their line of trains. Mr. Young’s tour in 1996 featured a traveling display of model trains, and it was a hit with youths and adults around the country.

So, if it is true that some thought that, like Mark Twain, the Railroading merit badge was dead, they were wrong. Real railroading, model railroading, and the Railroading merit badge are alive and well!

*Pete Keppel created the giant engine at the top of this page. The engine was modeled and rendered entirely from scratch using 3D software. Oh, yes—the first merit badge he earned was Railroading Merit Badge!*