

# a travelling man's circuit

by G. R. Fraser

A few years ago, fascinated by the then just beginning slot racing craze, I invested in a Wrenn outfit, as having the greatest potential, and then discovered the incompatibility of a well organised racing circuit, and a thoroughly disorganised career as Transport Command aircrew. While my track rusted quietly away in U.K., I sat scratching myself and partaking of the local brew in every unlikely spot east of Gibraltar and West of Karachi. This, I decided, was definitely not 'on,' and some way of taking my track round with me became an absolute necessity to prevent screaming boredom or cirrhosis of the liver on long Squadron detachments.

The question was—how? Burdened down with kit for hot climates, cold climates, flying gear, and demijohns (for filling with Commanderia in Cyprus or vin ordinaire in Nice!) the further addition of great gobbets or racing track posed a pretty portability problem. Having started with the usual basic set, I had soon added enough track and cars to make an interesting layout, but in assembling and taking it down continually, the somewhat flimsy Wrenn electrical connections led to numerous breakdowns.

Eventually I decided that some type of portable baseboard was the only solution, and as it had to be as compact as possible (having to be lugged about along with aforementioned kit in a possible Bahrain summer temperature of 120°), I sat down and played jigsaw puzzles with the pieces of track I had, to get the most roadway in the smallest possible space. After about six hours, gibbering gently, I managed at last to get a layout where the ends of the track actually met. Flushed with success, this was drawn out on a piece of paper, which I promptly lost as soon as I tore the track up. Hours later, frothing at the mouth and sobbing softly with frustration, another promising and tightly-knit circuit was born, and this was hurriedly marked out on a sheet of hardboard before the damn thing escaped again!

Because R.A.F. Movements staff handle baggage in a manner which guarantees them jobs with demolition squads in civilian life, the track mounting had to be sturdy, so each section was drilled with countersunk holes which enabled it to be fastened to the hardboard with 2BA. bolts, locknuttred on the underside. The actual layout now consisted of two pieces of hardboard 28in. x



Aerial view of the complete circuit viewed from one side showing the 'towers' (left, centre) which provide corner support for the portable box.

28in., and a centrepiece 28in. x 12in. one inch square framing and bracing, 3/4in. sides and back, the whole screwed to a 1/2in. ply base as shown on the accompanying sketch, completed the basic work. Now one half of the circuit could be lifted up, inverted, turned, and placed over the other half. Over-centre clips at the

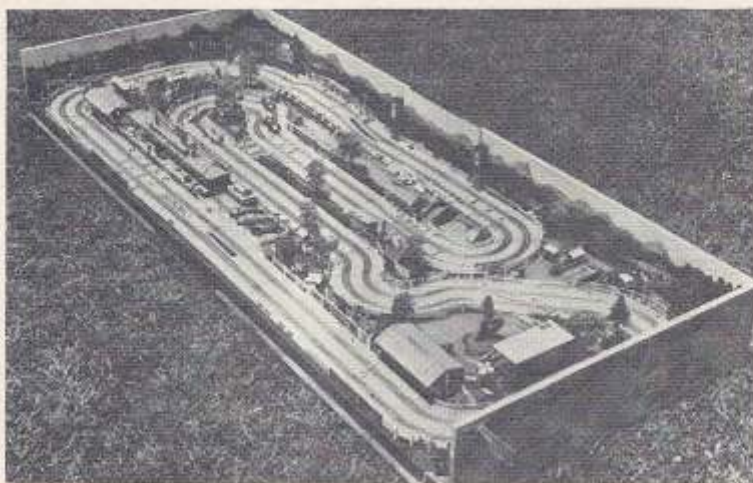
Tightly bunched, the cars slide through the 'Sleekit Esses,' up the short straight, over the stream, and into 'Bogle Bend,' by the old ruined, haunted castle in the pine trees at the main road entrance to the circuit.



As the leading cars round the final turn, a Cooper which has 'lost it' at the Esses is pulled out of the fence, its shaken driver beside it and the team manager ruefully inspecting the 'remains'! Meanwhile a party goes on at the chalet beside the pool.







Left: From right front, the over-centre clips which lock the box can be seen, so can the 'lip' of the baseboard which mates with the back on placing the two halves together. Right: The layout in its closed form. The centre section and track, some of the scenery, cars and transformers are packed separately.

corners closed, and lo and behold, an easily carried, sittable on, and strong box, 28in. square and 7in. deep.

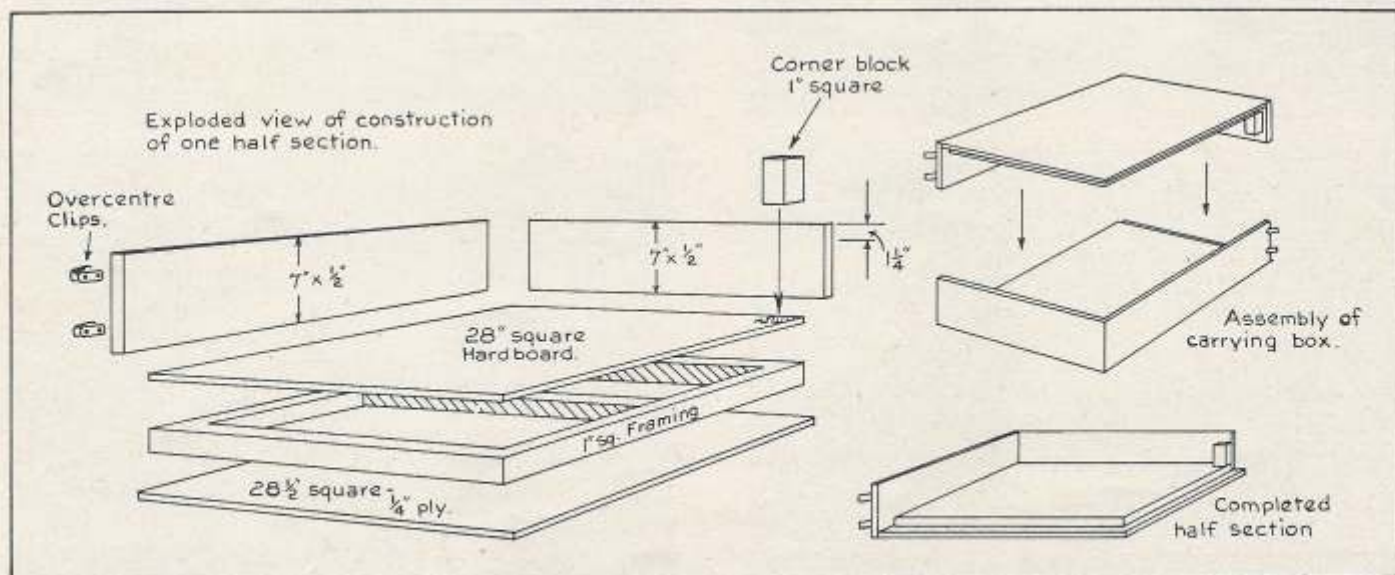
At this stage in the proceedings I acquired a wife—an indispensable adjunct in the more tedious bits of scenic work, i.e., sticking down Wrenn landscape sheeting on the grass areas, etc. Unfortunately, wives come a bit expensive in the better quality brands, so that any ideas of equipping the still-bare circuit with Wrenn accessories went by the board. Rooting through my boxes of plastic scraps from model aircraft kits, I produced lots of spectators from modified pilots, mechanics, etc., even producing some sex changes which would astound the medical profession by judicious paring with X-acto knives, and the addition of a couple of blobs of plastic cement on strategic spots! On the Cooper pits, for example, sits a bosomy blonde with a low neckline (placed there by the team manager to distract the opposition from their pit signals) who started her career as a hairy German mechanic in a Fokker Triplane kit!

Having decided to use any accessories available, I then introduced artificial perspective to the layout by using larger figures, buildings and so on in the foreground, tapering them in scale to the rear. And a right motley collection, both in makers and places bought, they were too! 'Busch' trees and hedges, Faller kiosk, from

Germany, Corgi pits, chalet, timekeeper's hut, etc., bought in England, road signs (Malta), jeeps (Japan), boxes and drums (Dinky-France) and any other suitable items garnered from far and wide. Figures by Spot On, Wrenn (at the back of the layout) Airfix railway accessories, and Dinky and Spot On static cars were added. About 50 per cent of the decor, bend name boards, lichen bushes, etc., were hand made from plastic scraps, and with a final mad flourishing of paintbrushes the circuit began to assume quite a crowded air! The items were all bolted on or stuck to the baseboard with Evo-Stück, and the first test of this was on a trip to Malta in very turbulent weather, where I turned pale (B.R.P.) green and hung on while our Beverley wallowed like a whale with St. Vitus Dance, and yet on arrival at Luqa, the circuit was soon operational (which is more than could be said for my stomach) with everything still stuck fast (ditto!).

For some months the layout put in appearances at Squadron crewrooms during quiet spells, causing much hilarity, vulgarity, and a distinct lack of charity! We had to stop 100 lappers with a change of drivers every 25 laps—too much bloodshed, as young Pilot Officers ruined all chances of promising careers by being frightfully rude to senior Squadron Leaders who'd bumped them at the chicane, hairy old Engineers nudged young Signallers' arms at critical moments, and a general absence of gentlemanliness prevailed. It wasn't that which I minded so much, as the running round the outside of a circle of intent backs trying to shout above the din "Hey, fellas, let me have a go—it's my racetrack—"

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please let me play with it—well, you rotten lot. . . .!"

Next came the move to Singapore, and the circuit travelled with me the 7,000 mile journey by Beverley, and where at last I have completed the painting of the background scenery and, in the usual burst of maudlin nationalism which only getting away from one's country engenders, produced a rather nostalgic Scottish flavour, complete with coal mines, Bluebird buses, pine trees, and snow capped hills—in a 94° monsoon season it almost made me feel cool to paint these! The odd final touches—a Corgi Cooper suitable modified with a large hammer to give a nice 'pile-up' scene, the wooden blocks which support the corners of the closed box disguised as lap and clock towers, balsa haybales, and cabalistic signs painted on the track surface in riotous abandon at deflector sections, bends, etc.—I dunno what they all mean, but it looks good, and after all, this is just a fun circuit, not a miniaturised Silverstone! Having just been operating in the heart of Darkest Borneo, the degree of realism takes second place to the ability to fold it up small and remove it smartly from the attentions of President Soekarnos merry mayhem-makers—their Puerile intrusions and disturbances when we're trying to motor race are really going to get us so WILD one of these days. . . .!

Perhaps the only drawback in a portable layout of this nature is to ensure that when the two halves are placed together, to obtain minimum thickness of the carrying box, buildings, trees, etc., must interlock, which involves scenic designing to suit. This is the voice

of sad experience, and obviates the expensive crunching noises which followed my first attempt to fold it all up! The odd tree is detachable for this reason, and with the centrepiece and middle track sections (made this way to enable easy servicing of the deflector sections and the addition of longer straights if required) transformers and cars, constitutes an additional package which fills up the odd corners of a suitcase comfortably.

Now the change-over to the new D.C. rotary motored cars is under way, and this is proving a distinct improvement. The older vibrator cars, always finicky, became even more so in the heat of Singapore. The other almost incurable fault is that in the humidity here, the track rusts in a few days, which leads to a lot of work sanding it shiny again. This disadvantage is, however, outweighed by the small and compact nature of the layout, impossible in the larger scales. For the private owner who has no access to a club circuit, and who wishes his own 'personalised' track which is easily transportable or can be readily packed away, this method of construction is, I think, ideal.

Having now completed the layout, I am often found thoughtfully eyeing the 40ft. x 10ft. freight bay of the Beverley. Now if we could tap the 28V aircraft circuit, we could switch on the autopilot, and the crew could give their undivided attention to racing on a really respectable sized circuit to while away the monotony of 10 hour 'legs'—ah me, perhaps the Air Council might not approve! Pity—we might have set an altitude record of sorts—it is not often one sees a Ferrari at full bore at a height of 16,000 feet!