

Visit to Tichy Trains Manufacturing Facility

by Bill Roman

photos by Marshall Abrams



Terry explaining how the various plastics are used

Many of the attendees of the Tracks to the Triangle MER convention had the opportunity to visit Tichy Train Group, in Alamance, NC. Tichy Train Group is a manufacturer of model railroad kits and scratch building supplies and parts. Don and Terry Tichy, the proprietors, very graciously hosted a visit to tour the state-of-the-art manufacturing facility. It was an impressive and entertaining experience.

Don and Terry divided the visitors into two groups and led us through the entire production process over

approximately a two - hour period. Terry escorted us through the inventory management part of the building which stores completed items pending shipment out to hobby shops and individuals placing orders. We next saw how decals are printed, and were given samples of the very clear, crisp products. This was followed by a look at the machine which cuts the various sizes and lengths of phosphor bronze wire available. Meantime, the

other half of the group was led by Don through the remaining portion of the facility and we swapped at this point.

Don showed us the actual molding of parts from making the molds to the production. He uses aluminum blanks for the molds, and does all the



Don explaining the grinding machine

machining himself, even making the cutters. One of Don's favorite tools is a computer numerical control (CNC) milling machine, of which Don is a master programmer. He demonstrated the very fine touch needed to finish the molds after the machining process to ensure perfect alignment, no rough spots or edges, etc. Part of this behind the scenes tour included an "under the scene" look at the basement of the facility in which the utilities for the molding process are located. Power supply and cooling water are provided via piping under the floor rather than by conduit or pipes from above the machinery or along the walls and floor, making movement around the equipment much safer and simpler. One of the nice things about the styrene Don uses is that it can be recycled into new products. There is a grinding machine



Don describing the milling machine

in the basement for recycling waste, such as sprues and runners. The grinder produces pellets that are used in new parts manufacturing. Don says the styrene he uses can be recycled like this pretty much indefinitely.

The building was originally built for and occupied by a company that manufactured medical supply materials so is very well lighted and ventilated – a far cry from what one might expect a "factory" to be like. I think that all of us who had this opportunity to visit were very impressed with quality of all the kits and parts, as well as the amount of work that goes into their production.



Bill Roman has been a member of NMRA, MER, and Potomac Division for over 40 years, and served twice as the MER Secretary. While he now models in HO, this followed about 20 years in N scale. Over these years, Bill has attended around a dozen NMRA National Conventions and upwards of 50 MER conventions.



The tour ended with a discount shopping opportunity



Published in The Potomac Flyer, newsletter of the Potomac Division, MER