

1: "Just here" Glyn Winsall and Richard Hancock deal with the wagons whilst Fred Winsall attends to the Northampton team's locomotive and onlookers consider the manoeuvre. 2: The first was a demonstration run by home team, Tony Holme Barnett, Mark Bradley, Derrick Payne.

This was the first in what we hope will be a series of competitions; our hosts for the event were Sutton Coldfield and North Birmingham M.E.S. at their tracks at Balleny Green

# THE SHUNTING COMPETITION

When we first mooted this idea it was felt that it could be a fun day, both from the point of view of the train crews, and spectators. Most of the action takes place in the station area, over a span of about 400 ft. and from the spectators point of view it was extremely pleasant to sit on the platform outside the station, perhaps enjoying a cup of tea and nibbling at some of the excellent food on offer, whilst watching quite critically the movements of the train crew who were on test at that time. There was plenty of bustle in the station area, and after a little while one got used to the idea of seeing a loco in an impossible position in the midst of a train of mixed stock, with the crew of driver, shunter and pointsman rushing about sorting out where the next movement would be.

As one faintly perspiring crew member commented after his run, "This is a bit like three dimensional chess, you have to be at least two moves ahead of the game all the time to stand any chance of finishing the run within the time limit".

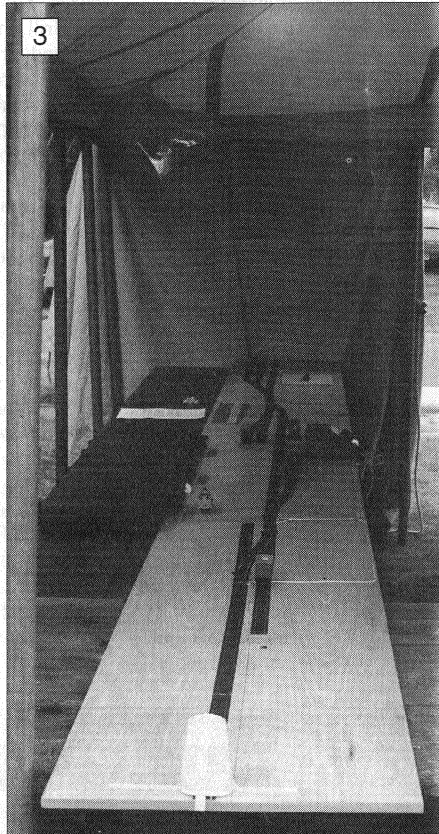
For those who were unable to attend, the scenario set to the competitors was that of a pick up goods train on a branch line. They started light engine from the shed to a train of seven vehicles waiting on a siding. Each of these bore a conspicuous number from the series 1 - 12, although it was by no means certain that they were in order. The other five wagons for the train were standing in sidings. The brief was to pick up all the wagons in order 1 - 12, then the crew departed on a trip round the main line, returning to the station and setting back into the original siding. The final part of the job was to take five wagons from the train and set them in order in the designated sidings, ready for the next crew.

Thanks to the hard work put in behind the scenes by Dennis Monk, our chief judge, each of the teams was set a different task - and Dennis had carefully worked out the least possible moves on paper, so that each team could complete their task in the same minimum number of moves.

(A move is the movement of the locomotive - coupled or not, apart from edging up to a train of wagons to couple if the first stop was short. Competitors were able, without incurring penalty, to hand move a wagon no more than 4in., in the event most relied on the driver to set the train as required).

The day started with a demonstration run by a team from the home club - volunteers all - none had tried the game before and they had the same briefing as the other competitors. That done we moved on to the competitive runs.

It would be a pointless exercise to try to describe each teams' efforts individually, as we do in I.M.L.E.C. and similar events. Rather we offer the master plan for the day in tabular form, together with



3: Led by Mike Bartlett, a team from Sutton Coldfield M.R.C. presented a layout upon which teams and anyone else interested could practice their shunting skills.

a track diagram, and leave you, if you have the interest, to see what you can come up with. We felt that each half of the competition would require 18 locomotive movements. Some teams got very close to this optimum, others got a little confused and finished up with rakes of wagons in sidings, just right, until that is, they realised that the loco was in the middle and had no way of escaping.

From previous trials I had expected that at least one crew would have to retire with a dead fire - it is easy to forget the engine in the hurly-burly of the

short runs of shunting. In the event I was proven wrong.

I was tickled pink to see the variety of shunting poles on parade, our teams entered into the spirit of the event very well, several even making headlamps to have the correct code on the engine for shunting in L.M.S. territory. (We were working to that rule book).

Just to give the doubting Thomases amongst the spectators a chance, Sutton Coldfield M.R.C. led by Mike Bartlett, cooperated with Sutton Coldfield M.E.S. members in making an "OO" gauge layout with the same configuration as the shunting area. This was set up in a marquee and visitors were invited to try their hand at the job being attempted on the main track.

It is rumoured that two ladies wandered in during a slack time, got the steward to explain the rules and then calmly set out and ran the test in less than the theoretical best number of moves. We couldn't prevail on them to repeat the performance however. A lot of interest was shown - and if there is sufficient room it may be that we shall have the same layout at the forthcoming M.E. Exhibition and invite visitors to come along and try their skills on this layout.

We had a few trade stands on site, Dan Jeavons showing his latest offering, together with his established range of locomotive castings and g.r.p. bodies, and Paragon Machine Tools of Nottingham who offered a selection of tooling etc. both new and used.

It is invidious to pick out any particular name for thanks in an event run by a club, but I feel that on this occasion I must. First Mick McKie from Sutton Coldfield, who approached the organising of the event with a completely open mind and bags of enthusiasm. As well as a sub-committee of himself, David Molesley and Tim Carver, he co-opted many fellow club members for the nuts and bolts of the operation and covered many miles, both collecting and delivering the stock used in the trials. Without his active support this idea would I am sure have been stillborn. Next I would like to thank Dennis Monk, who put in a tremendous amount of work behind the scenes on the admin. side of the competition, he reckoned it was good therapy, whilst recovering from a spell in hospital. Having seen the amount of paperwork which he generated in working out the runs and other details, I appreciate the sheer hard work which he undertook to set out the details for competitors. Dennis was also good enough to loan a 5in. gauge wagon, his Aristocrat 5in. gauge coach for use in the competition, plus his Class 08 shunter to act as yard pilot and passenger train during each run. Don Crisp of Reeves and the Birmingham S.M.E. was one of our other two judges. Don kindly loaned his four scale 7 1/4in. gauge wagons to form part of the train. Ken Wood from Stafford was our other judge. Dennis