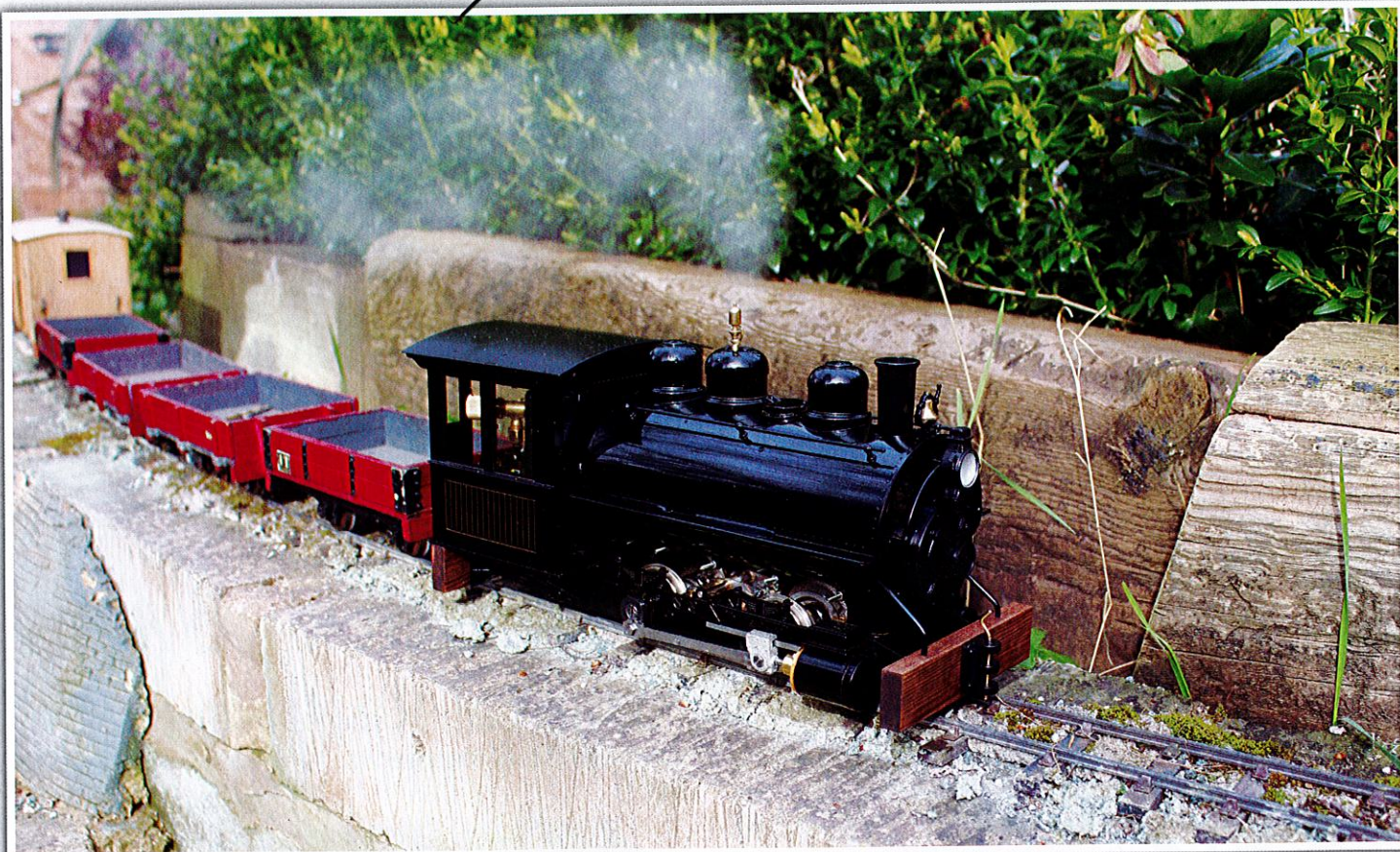


An American Cousin Visits The Bole Hill Railway

Steve Blackmore dons his stetson and takes a look at Davenport - the new American 0-4-0 locomotive from Roundhouse Engineering.



Some may have been surprised on the first of January by Roundhouse's choice of a transatlantic prototype, but of course, it makes good commercial sense. There were (are) more railways outside the Welsh principality than in, and odd-bods like myself who model overseas railway deserve a turn in my opinion!

I think it fair to say that Davenport is one of the lesser-known American locomotive builders but, importantly for making the model gauge adjustable, they produced some outside frame examples. As Roundhouse points out, Davenport export all around the world, with many ending up on sugar cane plantations, so I don't think it's too big a stretch of your imagination for

one to find its way onto your little railway.

This model is broadly based on Kiama, which now runs on the Illawarra Light Railway in Australia. Roundhouse was able to obtain some drawings from the museum and, together with other photographs from various other Davenports, this has resulted in an interesting-looking locomotive.

It was late March before I was able to pick up the Davenport, as it had spent the previous few weeks 'over the pond' at a couple of American shows. First job was a detailed examination on the dining room table. Key mechanical features of the model are:

- Outside framed 0-4-0 chassis with Roundhouse internal Walschaerts valve gear.

- Gauge adjustable between 32mm and 45mm.
- Water top-up system and water gauge (this is important, see later).
- Dimensions - Length 310mm over buffers, Width 115mm, Height 165mm, Weight 3.4 Kg.
- Exhaust enhancer.

All the usual good quality Roundhouse controls are fitted. The cab roof is held in place by a couple of magnets, allowing easy access to the water top-up valve, just visible behind the pressure gauge. Batteries are easily accessible just under the roof and the gas knob can be reached through the right rear window. The glazed cab windows are a nice touch. It's a nice compact layout, but

fitting a miniature crew that doesn't impede the water gauge might be a challenge.

Turning to the frames. Yes, they are plate frames rather than prototypical bar frames, but I think Roundhouse has done a good job reducing their height so to leave plenty of daylight showing under the boiler. The inside valve gear is clearly visible, which I found quite mesmerising to watch as the loco trundled around the garden. Standard Roundhouse cylinders are fitted, but with the slide valves moved inside the frames. Dummy steam chest castings are also fixed to the top of the cylinders complete with a dummy valve rod.

The front and rear buffer beams are real wood, so provide cool hand holds. Industrial-style multi-height couplers are fitted. The front tie rods are a nice touch. If the Davenport was to be permanently added to the Bole Hill roster, I think I would add a few bolt heads or reinforcement straps as the beams look a little bare to my eyes compared with the rest of the loco.

Turning to the saddle tank, this is pleasingly riveted and topped with very neat cast dome and sand pots. A brass bell and safety valve contrast well with all the 'black bits'. Oh, and I forgot to mention that the smoke box door is also a very crisp and distinctive casting.

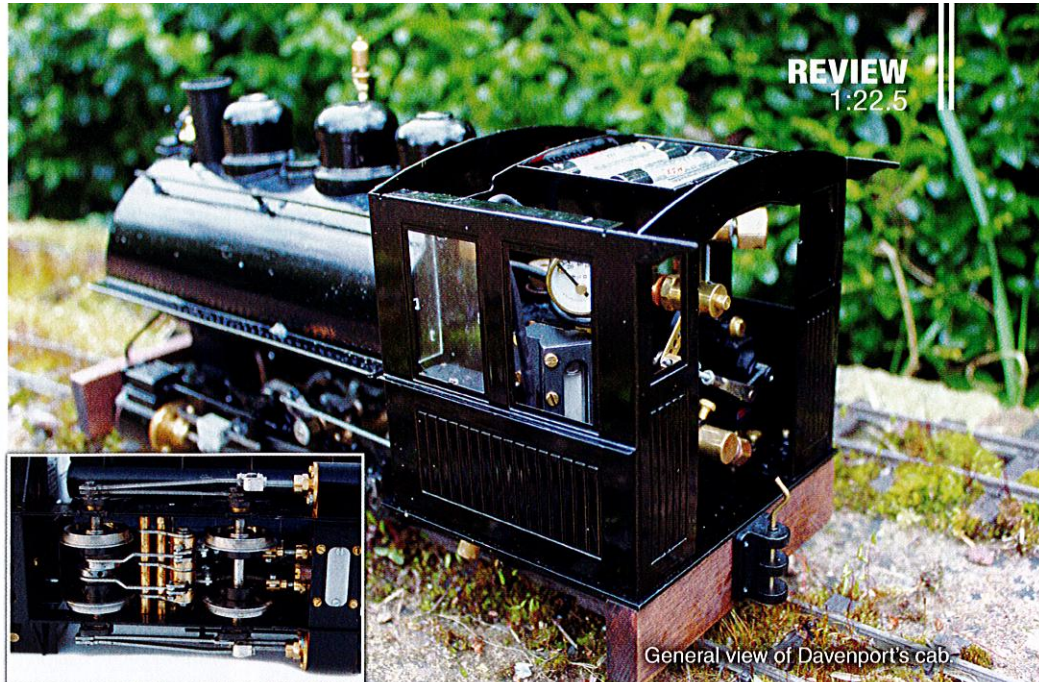
Roundhouse offers this loco in any of their standard colours. The review model is a mixture of gloss and satin black. Frankly, the photos don't do it justice. When viewed in natural daylight, the contrast between the two blacks is very pleasing.

Anyway, enough of the preliminaries let's talk about running it.

For years, Roundhouse has always designed in the safety feature that the gas should run out before the water does. Not so with the Davenport. The boiler is comparatively small as it doesn't extend up into the saddle tank as the Bertie does, but their standard vertical gas tank is fitted. This means that you will need to add water at least once during a run. However, the water sight glass is totally reliable and Roundhouse supply a good water top-up bottle so I found no problem with this.

The first run took six minutes to raise 20 psi, at which point I ran it light engine for a minute to clear all the tubes before I backed it onto a short goods train. I would like to have borrowed more appropriate stock for the photographs but already that virus was making its presence felt and I had to use the BHR's native stock.

The train set off smoothly, trundling around my level upper circuit without fuss. After 10 minutes, I noticed that the water was halfway down the glass, so I topped it back up to the top of the glass and proceeded to get another 15 minutes



General view of Davenport's cab

INSET: Close up of the amazingly-compact inside valve gear.

running before the gas ran out with gauge glass quarter full.

For the second run, I decided to tackle my hilly main line. Again, seven minutes to raise 25psi and then 26 minutes running up and down my hill, refilling with water a couple of times. I continued to run for the rest of the afternoon with my video truck attached and achieved 30 minutes on most runs with faultless running at all times. One train consisted of four bogie coaches and the video wagon (i.e. 20 axles) and the loco had no trouble starting this train even at the steepest part of the line.

What the photos can't show is the lovely sound you get from the exhaust enhancer as the Davenport tackles the 1 in 50 climb.

I did, however, spot an issue with the couplings. The loco itself is quite long at 285mm over the buffer beams, with a short 72mm wheelbase offset to the front. This means there is quite a lot of lateral throw on that back coupling on tight corners. The Bole Hill Railways minimum radius is four foot and with the hook and chain couplings I use, this was not a problem. However, if potential purchasers are thinking of fitting chopper or knuckle couplings and they have tight curves on their line, they may have issues.

The other issue I had was with the shape of the cab roof. Later in the day I decided to run a passenger train and started to get frequent derailments of the leading coach going downhill. Investigations showed that the cab roof actually overhangs the rear coupling by a fair amount (as per prototype) and as the coach tries to overrun the loco's coupling on a curved descending grade, the two roofs clash, pushing the bogie off the rails. If a potential purchaser wants to pull box cars or coaches, I would suggest fitting a larger rear coupling just to give a little more clearance between roofs. In normal times,

I would have discussed these minor niggles when returning the loco after the weekend's visit, however, Uncle Boris intervened and I found the Doncaster factory was shut for the duration! No doubt these issues will be sorted when production resumes this summer (fingers crossed).

To conclude, Roundhouse has produced an interesting-looking model packed with details that I'm sure will appeal to American outline modellers in particular. The loco's running qualities are to the firm's usual exemplary standards. Also worth a second mention is the inside valve gear, which is a marvel of robust miniaturisation and fascinating to watch. ■



The rear cab overhang might cause problems on lines with tight curves.

Garden Rail Resource

ROUNDHOUSE ENGINEERING
Units 6-10, Churchill Business Park,
Doncaster, DN1 2TF
www.roundhouse-eng.com

Davenport price:
£1625 - manual control version
£1850 - radio control

**Please mention Garden Rail
when contacting suppliers.**