

# **WITLESS & CLUELESS**

## **The Continuing Saga of Larry Loungecar and Rivets O'Reilly**

This series of monthly columns is intended to be a humorous look at the hobby of model railroading. *Witless & Clueless* was created by Pete Birdsong, Division 10, Mid-Central Region, NMRA. The column appears in the Division 10's newsletter titled The Lantern. Although created by Pete Birdsong, Michael Armstrong assumed authorship several years ago. Michael has since relocated to Davenport, Iowa and has become a member of the Eastern Iowa Division, Mid – Continent Region. He continues to write *Witless and Clueless* for The Lantern and his friends in Kentucky. In an effort to earn his Author certificate, Michael has earned the maximum credit for Division-level publications, thus this series begins with the January 2008 column published on the Mid-Continent Region's web page under "Member Articles" for web-based publication credit.

- Allen Merta, Achievement Program Chair, Eastern Iowa Division

## **Witless & Clueless**

### **The Continuing Saga of Larry Loungecar and Rivets O'Reilly**

Created by "Railroad" Pete Birdsong  
Written by Mike Armstrong

Rivets: Hey, Larry! How ya doin'?!

Larry: Rivets, I'm sittin' on top of the world, 'cause I had a great Christmas!

Rivets: You musta got a lot of railroad stuff this year. That is somethin' different! How'd that happen? Bonnie hates to buy you model railroad stuff.

Larry: Boy, you are tellin' me. Her latest lines are: but you have so much or where ya gonna put it? Well, I finally got her to see the light.

Rivets: How'd ya do that?

Larry: Well, I went to our closet while she was at work and I pulled out all her shoes and put 'em on the bed and beside the bed, and by the time I was finished, ya couldn't SEE the bed! When she came home and walked into the bedroom, she asked me what the heck was goin' on and I said, "Look at all the shoes you got! All them shoes and many of 'em ya only wore one time. It is time for ya to buy me something for Christmas for my railroad."

Rivets: That was a dangerous move, Larry. Ya coulda been killed!

Larry: Well, she said, "Okay, do you want anything special?" And I said, "Well, I just happen to have a list here, alphabetical, categorized and with part numbers."

Rivets: What she say ta that?

Larry: She just gave me that look of hers where her face goes blank with a bit of a wrinkle in her nose, and asked, "How long have you been planning this?"

Rivets: How long had ya been plannin' it?

Larry: Well, in October was my birthday and all I got was a bunch of new clothes. She was buyin' me the stuff she wanted me to have. So I had to do somethin'. I was a desperate man.

Rivets: So what did ya get?

Larry: Well, this was the kicker. I got a two hundred dollar steam engine, and Bonnie only paid sixty three dollars for it, because I also ordered seventy five dollars worth of tools from the company that sells all them pigmy tools, Slightro Mart. Yeah, I am feeling pretty good about Christmas this year.

Rivets: Larry, why do I have the feelin' there is somethin' yer not tellin' me?

Larry: Now, Rivets, why would ya say somethin' like that?

Rivets: Larry, it couldn't have been that easy for ya. It never is. So, out with it. What did ya leave out?

Larry: (Mumbles something)

Rivets: Larry, speak up.

Larry: I left out the Hawaii trip.

Rivets: What Hawaii trip?!

Larry: Well, Christmas day we were openin' our gifts. And Bonnie came across one for her...and I was not the person who bought it.

Rivets: What was it?

Larry: It was a plane ticket to Hawaii.

Rivets: You guys are goin' to Hawaii?!

Larry: No, Rivets I said "ticket". Only one. Bonnie went to Hawaii. She said, "Okay, so ya got your trains and tools. So while you are playing with them, I am going to Hawaii.

Some girl friends and I are going to lounge on the beach while you run your new train in the cold." I said, "Our basement is heated." She said, "Who cares?! This will teach you to try and make me believe I spend as much on shoes as you do on trains." I said, "When ya comin' back?" She said, "You'll see me when you see me?"

Rivets: Wow, Larry! I didn't know she was so tough. That woman is hard.

Larry: Aw, she told me when she'd be back before she left. She is having a good time and she'll be home tomorrow night.

Rivets: I thought you said you had a good Christmas.

Larry: I did and I am. It's the best Christmas ever 'cause I've been buyin' all kinds of stuff at after Christmas sales and with Bonnie gone to Hawaii, I haven't had to sneak one thing into the house! Yeah, Rivets, I sure decked the halls with rails and trolleys.

Rivets: Come on, Larry. Let's get some hot cider and toast Bonnie's Hawaiian trip and discuss where we can send my wife!

*January 2008*

**Witless & Clueless**  
**The Continuing Saga of**  
**Larry Loungecar and Rivets O'Reilly**  
Created by "Railroad" Pete Birdsong  
Written by Mike Armstrong

Rivets: Hey, Larry, what are ya up to these days?

Larry: Well, Rivets, I am workin' on a list of rules about buyin' on ePay for model railroaders.

Rivets: What makes you an expert on ePay buyin'?

Larry: Well, I have broken each of these rules dozens of times, so I oughtta know.

Rivets: Okay. Let's hear 'em.

Larry: Well, first of all, never buy an "Elvis" boxcar.

Rivets: What kinda rule is that?

Larry: Use your head, Rivets. Elvis is dead. That means the car is already obsolete.

Rivets: I ain't even gonna argue that point. What is next?

Larry: Never buy anything when the person selling says in the add, "I don't know anything about trains. That is just a cover for poor packing and a bad description. When things go wrong in the mail, the person says, "I said in the add I didn't know anything about trains. So don't blame me." It was probably shipped broken in the first place.

Rivets: I suppose that could be true. What's next"?

Larry: This is an important one. Never bid on something that somebody else is bidding on. You might not win the auction.

Rivets: Larry, uh.... never mind.

Larry: This is a good one too. Never buy an old catalogue. You can't buy anything out of 'em.

Rivets: I hate to ask how you know that?

Larry: There is an old saying, "Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me ten or 'leven times and you won't fool me any more."

Rivets: I get it...

Larry: Never buy from anybody who calls herself "foxy lady".

Rivets: And I bet you have a reasonable explanation for that rule.

Larry: Yeah! I bought this hopper when I saw the picture and didn't read the description. It was held by a lady in a bathing suit. She held it at her stomach so ya got a good look at the train and her chest.

Rivets: Sounds like fun.

Larry: Yeah, but I was distracted and didn't look closely at the hopper and when it got here, there weren't any wheels or trucks. Maybe there was a reason she didn't show her face in that picture. "Crook" was probably tattooed on her forehead. I put new trucks on the hopper, but every time I see the hopper, I have carnal thoughts.

Rivets: Larry, how many of these rules do you have?

Larry: Well, I'm still workin' on it, but I go a few more. Never buy a cord without something attached to it.

Rivets: Why that rule?

Larry: I got twenty or thirty cords in the box over there and I don't use 'em for nothin'. But if there is a cat attached to one, when you plug it in, the night sound effects are terrific whey the train goes by my forest around "Wildcat Bend".

Rivets: Larry, you didn't really...

Larry: Just once. Oh, never buy anything when the owner says, "It needs a little TLC. What TLC really means is "The Lost Cause". I have fifty freight cars and twenty engines that have been described as needing a little TLC.

Rivets: They will give you something to do in your old age, when all ya wanna do is sit. Anything else?

Larry: Yeah, never buy anything that is described as "rare" or "vintage". If it is rare, then someone has put their kids beat up toy on a flat car and described it as "rare flatcar with load." You can bet nobody else is gonna have one like it!

Rivets: How many of those have you bought?

Larry: About sixty, but then I wised up. Vintage means, "Here is one piece of junk I wish you'd take off my hands." And never buy anything in its own box. It is just something else you have to store.

Rivets: Larry, you can throw a box away.

Larry: But what if it need it later? If I don't have the box, I won't have to worry about needing it.

Rivets: I guess there is some kind of twisted logic in that, Larry.

Larry: Never buy smoke pellets.

Rivets: For cryin' out loud, Larry. What kind of rule is that?! You can't be serious!

Larry: Well, somebody may have a wife like mine who thought they were aspirin. It took us three weeks to figure out why every time she passed gas, she smoked. And...

Rivets: Larry, stop right there. I don't even want to know any more about this. Is that all, I hope?

Larry: Yeah, that is my list for now. But if ya just go down the ePay lists, you can see all kinds of mistakes innocent bidders

can make. I mean, I have experienced my fair share of breakin' these rules. This will help somebody, I know.

Rivets: Well, keep at it Larry. I wouldn't tell too many people about your rules 'til ya wait awhile, rethink some of 'em.

Larry: And there is one I am developin' now: Always read the description. A picture ain't always worth a thousand words.

Rivets: Here is a rule you might consider. Never bid on anything that costs money.

Larry: Everything costs money.

Rivets: In the end, you'll be happier and so will you local hobby shop.

Larry: Oh, I have some rules about them.

Rivets: I don't want to hear 'em!

*March 2008*

# Witless & Clueless

## The Continuing Saga of Larry Loungecar and Rivets O'Reilly

Created by "Railroad" Pete Birdsong  
Written by Mike Armstrong

Rivets: Hey, Larry! Whatcha been up to lately?!

Larry: Oh, hi Rivets. Well, I'm just polishing the buttons in my collection. I just added a brand new solid gold Northern Pacific button, a solid silver Burlington Northern button, and a gold Great Northern button with a diamond in Rocky's eye.

Rivets: Wow! Solid silver and gold? Where did ya get 'em?

Larry: Rivets, you won't believe it when I tell you! I was at the bus station the other day, havin' a sandwich at the lunch counter. A guy musta seen me wearin' my railroad hat, 'cause he says to me, "Pssst, hey buddy!" It was kind of a loud whisper. I says, "You talkin' to me?" He says, "Yeah. You like trains?" I says "Sure!" He says, "I thought so by all them pins on your hat." Then he asks me, "Do you know a bargain when you see one?"

Rivets: Larry, tell me you didn't buy the buttons from that guy!

Larry: Rivets, he takes me off to the side and opens his coat and the inside is full of gold buttons and pins and stuff. No wonder he whispered. He musta been carryin' a fortune in his coat!

Rivets: Larry, those ain't real gold! They're probably brass. What did you pay for them?

Larry: That is why I know their real gold. I only gave a hundred and fifty bucks for all three. He even showed me how the diamond was real. He took me over to the door and he made a scratch mark on the glass in the door from the diamond in the goat's eye.

Rivets: Larry, that's an old trick... He switched buttons.

Larry: Naw! I was watchin' him all the time. I tried to show my wife that trick and the diamond broke into little pieces. I think I musta used tempered glass or somethin', so now the goat looks like he's winkin' atcha.

Rivets: Did you take them to anyone to have 'em appraised?

Larry: I did, but those guys don't know nothin' about buttons. They said they were so cheap ya could probably buy 'em at a bus station. That's when I walked out.

Rivets: Ya got any more room on your vest for 'em?

Larry: Yeah. I'm gonna put 'em on a place where everybody can see 'em: right around the collar.

Rivets: Larry, ya have to know they're not gold!

Larry: Aw, Rivets, how do you know?! The most expensive thing you ever bought in your life was a traction tire for your Lionel!

Rivets: Larry, I can't believe you. Nobody sells anything legitimate when the first thing they say to you is "Pssst". So just enjoy your buttons and from now on do your shopping at the Division 10 Train Show.

Larry: I guess I shouldn't show you what else he sold me.

Rivets: What?

Larry: Well, I bought a brand new 2008 button for the Lionel Railraoder Club for seventy-five bucks.

Rivets: Larry, now that is what I'm talkin' about. Membership in the Club is only thirty bucks. All you got is a button when ya coulda had a membership and got the mailings for a lot less. Why

would ya buy anything from somebody at a bus station, anyway?

Larry: Well, she was....I mean...he was...

Rivets: Larry, what do you mean "she was"?

Larry: Well, she was pretty and seemed like a nice person.

Rivets: What do ya think now?!

Larry: I think she was only pretty.

Rivets: I hope ya learned yer lesson. There's no such thing as a free lunch.

Larry: Actually, lunch was free. I gave her all my money and didn't have any to pay for my lunch. The guy at the counter said my lunch was free. He had been watching the whole thing and said it was the best entertainment he had had that day. I wonder what he meant by that?

Rivets: Larry, somehow, I don't think ya want to know.

*April 2008*

# Witless & Clueless

## The Continuing Saga of Larry Loungecar and Rivets O'Reilly

Created by "Railroad" Pete Birdsong  
Written by Mike Armstrong

Rivets: Hey, Larry! How'd it go the other night at the Railroad Club?! I hear ya were the dispatcher!

Larry: Well, ya know I'm workin' on my Achievement Program certificate for chief dispatcher, so at six thirty, I got on the horn and said, "Howdy Boys! You got Highballin' Hogger here. Train thirty one, you are clear to leave Pickle Barrel Yard. You are clear all the way to Pig Sty." This went on for ten minutes and nobody was movin' anywhere. I never figured it out until somebody came and told me that we weren't drivin' trucks and I don't need a "handle"! We were runnin' trains and a hogger is an engineer and hoggers are waitin' to have their trains dispatched... so drop the highballin' hogger nonsense and start dispatching trains!" They don't have much of a sense of humor!

Rivets: I don't remember any town of Pig Sty on our layout.

Larry: Well that was another problem. I thought I'd add a little word association humor to the mix. For each town, I just threw in something that it reminded me of. Pig Sty is at River Bend where the feed lots are. And "Pickle Barrel Yard" for Heinz Yard.

Rivets: This is supposed to be prototypical,

Larry. You can't make up town names and expect people to complete their assignments! Engineers can't guess where the dispatcher wants them to take their trains.

Larry: Rivets, we are playin' with trains, come on! What is a matter with a little humor.

Rivets: Larry, we aren't "playin with trains". We are runnin' a railroad! And we want to run it as good as we can. Did you get the mess straightened out ?

Larry: It just got worse, Rivets. Since we behind schedule, I sent the trains out one after the other, ya know? Just to get things movin'.

Rivets: You mean you didn't follow the time schedule.

Larry: I figured I could get things back on schedule if we got things runnin'.

Rivets: Yeah? Well how did that work?

Larry: Before I even knew what had happened, all the tracks were blocked and no body was goin' nowhere and every track in the yard was full. I couldn't believe it! I was tryin' to keep track of thirteen trains and then I got a phone call from my wife wantin' me to bring home a loaf of bread. And I had thirteen engineers wantin' to talk to me at the same time while I talked to my wife..

Rivets: How'd the yard get full. Didn't the yardmaster help?

Larry: Well, I figured I was his boss so I told him to fill those yard tracks to make way for the trains comin' in.

Rivets: Uh, Larry, where are trains going to come in when the yard is full?!

Larry: That's what everybody started sayin'! And they all started arguin' with each other and then they all started lookin' at me. And then they started comin' toward the dispatcher's office.

Rivets: And...!

Larry: I turned off the main power breaker and the back up lights came on over the door and everybody went outside 'cept me.

Rivets: What did you do in there in the dark.

Larry: Rivets, sometimes I am a genius.

Rivets: Not in this story.

Larry: I grabbed a flashlight and went to the layout and spent a half hour movin' things by hand and got it all straightened out. Then I hit the breaker and yelled, "Okay, everybody, LET'S go back in!" Then I locked myself in the dispatcher's office just in case.

Rivets: Sounds to me like that was the most unprototypical job of dispatchin' our club ever had!

Larry: Well, I did have trouble finding somebody to sign that I dispatched, but one guy finally said he would...if I never dispatched again.

Rivets: Well, Larry, they'll get over it.

Larry: They already have. They gave me the name of a layout where I could dispatch. It's called the LR&F.

Rivets: Larry, that's my neighbor's kid's layout! It's called "The Living Room and Floor" and it's an oval with a side track, an engine, a flat car and a caboose!

Larry: Now, that's my kinda railroad! What are his runnin' nights?

*May 2008*



**Witless & Clueless**  
**The Continuing Saga of**  
**Larry Loungecar and Rivets O'Reilly**  
Created by "Railroad" Pete Birdsong  
Written by Mike Armstrong

Rivets: Hey, Larry, man do look bad!  
What's with the bags under your eyes?!

Larry: Rivets, I've been up for two and a half days without sleep. I am beat!

Rivets: Wow! Whatcha been doin'?

Larry: Well, ya know how ya get an idea in your head and you can't let it go and then ya get excited and ya have to keep at a new project until it's done? Well, I got tired of the duck under on my layout. See the bald spot on the back of my head? See the bruises? I decided to build a bridge.

Rivets: And ya spent two and a half days straight building one bridge!?

Larry: One?! Rivets, I built three and none of 'em worked! The first one was the kind of bridge that pivots on a center base. I saw one on the Mississippi at Davenport, Iowa. That looked pretty cool. Well, I gave it a swing to see how it would work and it hit the peninsula on the layout and took out a whole town, all the signals by the tracks, and put a hole in the mountain.

Rivets: Man, that's a bummer!

Larry: Well, then I built a swing down bridge and it hit the floor and I had to step over the end of it. I tripped and fell against on the layout and took out the grain elevators and farmers co-op.

Rivets: So, what kind of bridge are ya gonna build now?

Larry: For cryin' out loud, Rivets, I'm tryin' to tell ya. I built two more bridges after that. The next was a bridge that swings up, but

that hit a light fixture and busted plastic and florescent bulbs and glass flew all over the layout.

Rivets: Larry, do the words "careful" "slow" and "patience" mean anything to ya?

Larry: I was bein' slow and careful! I just must have been lookin' at the wrong end of the bridge when I swung it up. So, I decided to build a lift bridge. This was a good plan.

Rivets: So, ya finally got one to work?

Larry: No. My calculations were a little off.

Rivets: Larry, was this another disaster?

Larry: The worst! I had different motors, and after a lot of thinkin', I decided to use my dad's old grinder motor. Man, Rivets that bridge was pretty. I even set some buildings and scenic accessories on the bridge. It was only gonna go straight up and down. I used a doublepole double-throw toggle switch. But the grinder motor was so fast that the bridge flew up and before I could turn it off, it crashed into the ceiling smashing all the stuff I put on the bridge and knocking out three pieces of ceiling tile that flew down on the layout and took out the farm house and out buildings, as well as the water tower and windmill. The motor snapped the cable and the bridge crashed to the floor knocking out another gash in the mountain on the way down.

Rivets: Boy, Larry, I don't see how all that could happen from those bridges you built. How long was that bridge?

Larry: Ten feet.

Rivets: Ten feet?!?!? Why did ya make it so long?

Larry: Well, ya know how some of the guys down at the club are a pretty good size? As they go in and out of my layout, I didn't want them to break anything.

Rivets: So, what bridge did you finally use?

Larry: I didn't. I just put the duck under back in.

Rivets: Well, then I can help. I'm actually on my way home from the hobby shop, and I bought this. Here, wrap it around your head when you go into your layout.

Larry: What is it?

Rivets: It's a self healing mat.

*June 2008*

**Witless & Clueless**  
**The Continuing Saga of**  
**Larry Loungecar and Rivets O'Reilly**  
Created by "Railroad" Pete Birdsong  
Written by Mike Armstrong

Rivets: Hey, Larry! What's with your layout?! You've got rolling stock all over the place...every place but on the track!

Larry: Well, Rivets, I was thinkin' 'bout my dad and for some reason I started runnin' my railroad like I ran Dad's when he wasn't around. I used to really frustrate him by placin' cars all over the place.

Rivets: Why would you do that?

Larry: 'Cause I could never get 'em back on the track if they derailed. I just took 'em off and put 'em beside the track where ever they happened to be. Dad would come down and see cars everywhere and get really upset.

Rivets: I don't blame 'im! I want my railroad to look the same as it did when I left it.

Larry: I do, too, Rivets. Back then, I didn't know any better. Ya know, I really got interested in trains and model railroadin' because o' my ol' man. I even wrote a song ' it.

Rivets: You wrote a song?!

Larry: Well, actually I didn't write it. I just wrote another verse to a song Tommy and Dick Smothers used to sing. Let me git out my railroad guitar and I'll sing it for ya.

Rivets: Larry, what is a "railroad guitar"?

Larry: It is a guitar with two "R"s on it. I put 'em there. Song goes like this, with apologies to Tommy and Dickie:

*My ol' man's a model railroader.*

*What do ya think about that?*

*He wears a model railroader's rain coat.*

*He wears a model railroader's hat.*

*He wears a model railroader's 'spenders.*

*He wears a model railroader's shoes.*

*And every Saturday evening,*

*He reads the Model Railroad News.*

*And some day, if I can,*

*I'm gonna be a model railroader,  
Just like my ol' man.*

Rivets: That's not bad, Larry. You surprise me. But ya got cars all over yer layout! Certainly you didn't have that many derailments in one night!

Larry: Well, Rivets, it actually wasn't one night. It was over several months.

Rivets: So you've been thinkin' 'bout your dad all that time.

Larry: Well, not exactly. They kept derailin', so I took 'em off.

Rivets: Well, there's gotta be a reason for 'em comin' off the track. Let me have a look...Well, for cryin' out loud, Larry! Look how dirty the wheels are! Don't ya ever clean 'em?!

Larry: Uhhhh, not really.

Rivets: So, ya just take 'em off the layout when the quit runnin' right. Won't ya run outta rollin' stock after 'while?

Larry: Heck no, Rivets. I just buy a kit or a ready to run car and put it on the layout. No problem!

Rivets: And meanwhile, ya just clutter yer layout with rollin' stock.

Larry: It reminds me of my dad.

Rivets: You mean you like to remember how much your dad was frustrated by all his cars off the track?!

Larry: Well, it's a really vivid memory!

Rivets: Somehow, Larry, I don't think you are a model railroader "just like yer ol' man." Yer in a class all by yerself!

*September 2008*

**Witless & Clueless**  
**The Continuing Saga of**  
**Larry Loungecar and Rivets O'Reilly**  
Created by "Railroad" Pete Birdsong  
Written by Mike Armstrong

Larry: Hey, Rivets, guess what!

Rivets: Larry, I can't guess enough impossible things that you could be up to. Just tell me what you want me to guess.

Larry: I met the nicest group of modelers that other day and they have inspired me!

Rivets: Uh-oh. When you get inspired, that means great changes are coming to your railroad. Where did you meet these modelers.

Larry: I was away on business the other day and I happened to come upon an LCCA meet.

Rivets: LCCA!? That is Lionel, O Scale. You don't model in O Scale.

Larry: They were still a nice group of guys and fun to talk to.

Rivets: Okay, so what was your inspiration?

Larry: I am going to build an O Scale layout!

Rivets: You mean you're getting out of HO and N Scales?

Larry: Heck no. I am just going to build an O Scale layout.

Rivets: Larry, you already have an HO Scale layout in the middle of your train room. You have an N Scale layout running along the walls. And you have a garden railroad in your back yard. Why in the world would you want to build an O Scale layout?!

Larry: Well, I'll tell ya, Rivets, it all goes back to my childhood when I had a Lionel Scale layout and I used to make tunnels out of books, bridges out of fly swatters and log loads out of frozen hotdogs.

Rivets: Frozen hotdogs?

Larry: Yeah, I was even creative back then. Anyway, I have started collecting O Scale trains. Have you seen all the good stuff that is on the market these days? It is amazing. I just bought this O Scale 4-12-2. It was only \$1995.95!

Rivets: Where did ya get the money for that?

Larry: Well, I had to go into my retirement savings, but it was worth it.

Rivets: A two thousand dollar locomotive. Man, Larry, what did your wife say?

Larry: She thought it was really pretty.

Rivets: Somehow, Larry, I think you are leavin' something out.

Larry: Okay, I had to tell her it was an old junker that I fixed up.

Rivets: You lied.

Larry: She was impressed with my work.

Rivets: Larry, did you ever stop to consider the simple fact that if you took all the money you spent and spend on your garden railway and your HO layout and your N Scale layout and now your O Scale layout, you could have one really nice layout in one scale with all the best stuff.

Larry: I got the best stuff now...in all four scales.

Rivets: Yeah, but at what cost. You're spendin' your retirement. What are you gonna do to eat when you retire...suck on that smokestack.

Larry: Rivets, I will as they say, live on love...the love of my trains.

Rivets: Larry, you're outta room. Where are ya gonna put this layout?

Larry: There are possibilities galore: slide it under the bed, build it in the attic, even though I'd have to stand on a step ladder to run it, build it like a Murphy bed in the wall, or have Bonnie park her car in the drive way instead of the garage, or build a hanging layout around the ceiling. It's all been done. Possibilities galore!

Rivets: Well, there is one possibility you haven't considered... Bonnie choking you in your sleep!

*October 2008*

# **Witless & Clueless: The Continuing Saga of Larry Loungecar and Rivets O'Reilly**

Created by "Railroad" Pete Birdsong  
Written by Mike Armstrong

Rivets: Hey, Larry, where were ya last weekend?!

Larry: We were outta town visiting Bonnie's lowlife brother.

Rivets: What he do?

Larry: Well for one thing, he made fun of my model railroad. And for another he told me to grow up and get a real hobby.

Rivets: Like what?

Larry: Well, he collects sidewalk dried worms that come up on the sidewalks after the rain.

Rivets: He does not!

Larry: No, but he might as well. He's that kind of guy. But the weekend wasn't a total loss. The local railroad club was havin' a layout tour of the members' layouts. So, I called and they let me come along.

Rivets: How was it?

Larry: It was the most interestin' tour I have ever been on. There were some weird layouts. The first tour was of a "virtual layout".

Rivets: And what is a virtual layout?

Larry: Well, this guy had an around the wall layout with a duck under. There was no scenery, no turnouts, no backdrop, no towns...nothin' but a single loop o'track. You just sat in a chair in the middle and wore these glasses that looked like night vision glasses with headphones. The electronics inside filled in every thing and you just ran the train around the loop. To switch just back up. Everything was filled in with the techno-gizmo. He had his layout up and runnin' in a day.

Rivets: Larry, that is ridiculous. The idea is to operate trains like the real thing.

Larry: Hey, Rivets! I didn't say I agreed with it. It was just fun...like a PSP. But it sure was fun to have a 200 foot bridge out and have the train jump the gap! The next one was the most interestin'.

Rivets: Yeah?

Larry: Yeah! This guy had a scenic and ultimately detailed helix. It was in his garage. The helix was ten feel high. All the action took place in the helix. At the top, a length of track came out, ya looped around back to the helix and down, then the same thing on the floor of the garage.

Rivets: Geeze, Larry. If it was ten foot high, how could ya see to run it up top.

Larry: That was the ingenious part, Rivets. He installed a hydraulic lift in his floor that held his chair and he would go up and down with the train.

Rivets: Then how did he have a layout tour with it so high!

Larry: Well that was a bit old fashioned, Rivets. He had ten step ladders and everybody climbed up and we got a pair of little binoculars...like uppity people use at the opra.

Rivets: Larry, you experience some of the craziest stuff!

Larry: Well, maybe. But it can't be any crazier than goin' to Howard Coleman's layout tour.

Rivets: Why's that?

Larry: Coleman's is a combination of the ones I jus' told ya 'bout.

Rivets: Really?

Larry: Naw, but it'll be a lot of fun. You goin'?

Rivets: Wouldn't miss it!



**Howard's Lionel layout**



**Howard's garden layout**



**Howard's 1:8 scale hopper**

**Not pictured: Howard's N scale layouts**

*November 2008*



**Witless & Clueless:  
The Continuing Saga of  
Larry Lougecar and Rivets O'Reilly**

Created by "Railroad" Pete Birdsong

Written by Mike Armstrong

Rivets: Hey Larry, why lookin' so glum?

Larry: Because I just got my 2009 NMRA calendar.

Rivets: Yeah! Me, too. I think it's terrific!

Larry: Well, I sent in fifty pictures and none of 'em were chosen for the calendar. I thought sure one of 'em would be chosen.

Rivets: What were the pictures of?

Larry: Here they are. See for yourself.

Rivets: Larry, these pictures are all of the same thing.

Larry: Look a little closer, Rivets and you'll see that they are NOT the same picture. It is fifty different angles of the best scene on my layout.

Rivets: Uh, Larry, maybe its because there are quite a few things missin' or some things are not finished.

Larry: Aw, come on, Rivets. That's good modelin'!

Rivets: What ya did is good, but there are some things not finished. Larry, you are what I call a "ninety per cent modeler". Ya get a project almost finished and then ya quit. I can see a gap underneath yer house. That needs to be filled in. There is no glaze in yer windows. There aren't even any posts holding up the porch roof.

Larry: I got the posts in a box. They are almost finished.

Rivets: Larry, ya need to get into the achievement program. That will help improve yer modelin'.

Larry: I tried that, Rivets, but those guys don't know what they're talkin' about. I took a house to be judged and I only got 40 points.

Rivets: Don't tell me you took the house that was in the picture.

Larry: What if I did?!

Rivets: I can show ya three things wrong with it right off. How did ya expect to get enough points with an unfinished house? Their purpose is ta help ya become a better modeler.

Larry: I thought it was pretty good.

Rivets: You're a ninety percent modeler. A little more effort and you'll be right in there. Ya might even get a Master Model Railroader Certificate.

Larry: What good is that?

Rivets: Well, it puts ya in an elite group. People from all over the country will be standin' at yer door for modeling tips, and it looks good on yer resume when you apply for a job at a hobby shop when ya retire. Besides, don't ya want ta be the best modeler ya can?

Larry: Well, yeah.

Rivets: Okay, then, start workin' a little harder. Didn't the judges give ya any tips?

Larry: Yeah. They said I needed to glaze the windows, put in porch posts, and fill in the scenery gaps around the base of the house.

Rivets: Hmm.

Larry: Hmm, yerself.

Rivets: Check out the calendar again. Lookin' at those pictures, you might be glad your picture isn't in it!

*December 2008*

# **Witless & Clueless: The Continuing Saga of Larry Loungecar and Rivets O'Reilly**

Created by "Railroad" Pete Birdsong

Written by Mike Armstrong

Rivets: Hi Larry, how was the trip to the World's Greatest Hobby Show?

Larry: Terrific, Rivets. You know me...even a bad show is a good show when it comes to trains. Even if I don't buy nothin', I still like to look at the layouts and see what's for sale.

Rivets: What do ya mean, "even if ya don't buy nothin'." You always buy somethin'! What did ya buy this time?

Larry: Well, that is a bit of a story, Rivets.

Rivets: Larry, with you, if it ain't a story, it didn't happen. What did ya buy?!

Larry: I'm getting' to that, Rivets. I was standin' by the booth for Model Railroader and the guy asked me if I wanted a free copy of this month's issue. I told him, no thanks.

Rivets: Larry, I have never known you to turn down anything free, even if ya have twenty of 'em.

Larry: Well, I had my latest copy at home, but I just bought another copy of it at another booth.

Rivets: Why did ya do that?

Larry: Rivets, it's kinda embarrassin', but I needed something to read when I went to the restroom. But anyway, we got ta talkin' and I told him all the magazines I subscribe to. A lot of them were Kalmbach, but ya know I try to get every magazine there is.

Rivets: I know. I keep tellin' ya, ya don't need all those magazines. Ya got closets full now.

Larry: Yes I do need 'em. And I have ta subscribe, because they wouldn't let me read 'em at the hobby shops any more. The guy said, "Hey, this ain't no library. Buy it or put it back on the shelf!"

Rivets: Boy, he didn't seem very nice about it.

Larry: Actually he was nicer than the other guy who told me that I sweat so much in my hands that the print gets runny and blurring on the page.

Rivets: Your hands sweat?

Larry: Yeah. When I see all the stuff there is to buy and all the good articles on modelin', I just get the "sweats" I want it all so bad.

Rivets: Ya probably shake, too.

Larry: A little. But the guy at the show couldn't believe that I subscribed to all those magazines in all those scales. And all those prototype magazines are great, too. There are so many out there. And then I found one I had never subscribed to...it is a magazine about British Garden Railroadin'.

Rivets: Ya didn't subscribe did ya?

Larry: Rivets, I'm not that nuts. It was a hundred twenty bucks a year. I asked Bonnie to get it for me for Christmas.

Rivets: And just when I thought there was hope for ya!

Larry: Aw, don't be worrin'. She wouldn't do it. Instead, I came home from work and she had emptied three closets of all my railroad magazines in the middle of the livin' room floor. All over the tables and furniture. There was no place to sit! Then she said, "A lot of those magazines you didn't even get past the cover. When you read all of those, then I *might* consider this new magazine for next Christmas.

Rivets: Well, I guess she is safe. You'll never get all those read.

Larry: Hey, don't be such a pessimist. I took a month's vacation and I'm already through every issue of Model Railraoder back to 1976. It is a bit depressin' though.

Rivets: Why's that!

Larry: Lookin' at those old ads...makes me wish I had bought it all back then when prices were lower.

*January 2009*

**Witless & Clueless**  
**The Continuing Saga of**  
**Rivets O'Reilly and Larry Loungecar**  
Created by  
**Railroad Pete Birdsong**  
Written by  
**Mike Armstrong**

Larry: Hey, Rivets! Guess what!?! I'm plannin' for the future.

Rivets: What do ya mean?

Larry: Well, I am tired of worryin' 'bout how I'm gonna move my layout. So, I am tearing it all down and rebuilding it as a modular layout.

Rivets: How did you come up with that idea?!

Larry: I was readin' the latest issue of Model Railroader and they had this great article 'bout a modular project layout that had several configurations.

Rivets: Several? I read that article and it had three configurations.

Larry: One is one, two is a couple, and three is several.

Rivets: So, are ya gonna make a whole new layout or are ya keepin' the same track plan?

Larry: Well, I'm still studyin' on it. My layout is twelve by twenty. But because of the way it is constructed, one module would have to be ten by eight.

Rivets: Larry, that's no module. Some layouts are smaller than that and they're permanent!

Larry: Yeah, that is a bit of a problem, but I would have two modules that would be two by ten.

Rivets: That doesn't seem to be to be a good plan.

Larry: Well, I can always build small bench work modules to set the ten by eight on.

Rivets: For cryin' out loud, Larry. Ya still got a huge thing to carry. The idea of the modular layout was to make it easier to transport.

Larry: Well, I guess your right, but I sure hate to lose all that work, not to mention money and time.

Rivets: Then just leave things as they are.

Larry: Rivets, I gotta get ready for the move. I don't want to have to tear out a wall or tear up the floor to get it out of the house like I did the last time.

Rivets: Yeah, I remember. It kind of ruined the sale, didn't it?

Larry: All the buyers wouldda had ta do was replace a few boards and add six support poles.

Rivets: Yeah, that's all they would have had to do.

Larry: Anyway, this is what I am gonna do. I can see now I have ta start all over to get my modular layout the way I want.

Rivets: Where are ya movin' to anyway?

Larry: I'm not movin' anywhere. As I said, "I'm just preparin' for the future in case we do.

Rivets: Larry, what the heck is a matter with you?! Why don't ya just build the modular layout when and if ya do move? Keep the one ya got 'til then. It's not a bad layout.

Larry: Rivets, that article in Model Railroader was just so inspirin' that I thought I'd get started now! I have to get started now. I'm enthused.

Rivets: Is that what you think you are? I think the word I would use is "dope". I thought that was a terrific article, but they didn't print it so you would do somethin' dumb. They write those articles to be helpful, to teach, and yeah, be inspirin'. So be inspired but don't make any hasty decisions.

Larry: This ain't hasty. I been thinkin' 'bout this for twenty minutes.

Rivets: As I said, don't make any hasty decisions.

*February 2009*