



John Sipple

Sipple on Trains

The 25-ton Class-B Climax

This eye-catching model will have your customers asking questions.

Charles Darwin Scott was a lumberman and clever inventor. He combined both skills into a home-brewed locomotive he used on his own logging tram railroad in Spartanburg, Pennsylvania. Due to its success, Scott decided to produce it and took his plans to nearby Corry, Pennsylvania, and the Climax Manufacturing Company. In early 1888 the first Climax Patent Geared Locomotive was produced.

The Class-A version of the Climax was a very humble-looking machine, rather like a flatcar with some machinery and a shed. In 1891, the first Class-B was produced. The gear shift in the transmission was eliminated, and the pistons were tilted upward at a 25-degree angle. This improved version first appeared in 1893, remaining much the same until production ended in 1929. A Class-C was created with a third truck under a water bunker, giving it a little more pull, but it never reached the popularity of the Class-B.

During its lengthy production run, the Class-B had several notable variations, including a T-boiler for many of the older and smaller machines. The larger locomotives, up to 62 tons, were produced with a straight boiler, but that was changed in 1910 to a wagon-top with a tapered shape. This is the version chosen by Bachmann for this model.

As an added note, Climax really did paint its locos with the company name for several reasons. Any locomotive built for inventory would get this treatment until it was sold. Any unsold machine that went out on trial



The model is virtually a museum-quality representation of a 25-ton Class-B Climax. Rich in detail and weighing in at close to eight pounds, this is one good looking and hefty little locomotive.

would have the name clearly visible for a potential customer to see. And if a loco was repossessed due to its owner failing to keep up on the payments, it would be refurbished by giving the loco a fresh coat of paint, including the company name.

Bachmann has been building engines and rolling stock in Fn3, which is 1/20.3 F scale in three-foot narrow gauge. When it came time to produce a small, geared steam locomotive, they provided large-scale fans the Class-B, two-truck Climax. The first run was released in the late 1990's, and it was a crackerjack loco, though it had one notable deficiency.

On the original version, each of the two trucks had its own motor, but the wheel pickups were connected directly to the motors. With no centralized power supply, converting such a loco to R/C or DCC was a prohibitive process, so many of these remained a straight DC product.

The model, then and now, has always been virtually a museum-quality representation of a later, 25-

ton Class-B Climax. It is rich in fascinating detail, and this part of the model didn't need any improvement. However, in the latest release, all the lighting has been updated to LED's, a welcome change, since these lamps will last the life of the engine.

In a masterpiece of illusion, the pistons appear to drive the transverse shaft of the transmission which, in



What a haul. In addition to the model, there is a treasure trove of included options, like the different stacks, oil bunker set, horde of small tools and engine crew. There is even a length of siphon hose to fill the water bunker from a trackside pond or stream.

turn, drives the jackshafts under the loco cranking the wheels. In actuality, the motors in the trucks supply both the traction and the animation, a clever bit of engineering that Bachmann has pulled off perfectly. Best of all, the new trucks have the power pickups separated from the motors, now feeding into a main power board.

This means a variety of power management systems can easily be connected to the locomotive. The power board is in the enlarged bunker box behind the cab, and it is a study in electrical engineering. The board offers a 10 x 12 Plug-N-Play socket for dual row plugs from a variety of manufacturers. In the DCC-Ready version, the PNP socket is filled with a “dummy” board that can be quickly removed and replaced with the buyer’s choice of power control.

Our sample came with the factory-installed SoundTraxx Tsunami DC/DCC/Sound decoder. It connects to a standard speaker that comes installed in both the DCC-Ready and the Sound-Equipped versions.

Upon removing the loco from its packaging, I followed the instructions and did the suggested lubrication (see the manual and CD) then placed it on the rails. A DCC system was used to run the locomotive, and everything worked fine. Interestingly, the sound-equipped version of the Climax demonstrator carries road number



The front and rear views reveal a number of interesting details. Hidden behind the sand tanks are the setting switches for the motor, lights and polarity.

0003, which is also the default address of the decoder, meaning I didn’t have to change anything.

The sound is simply delicious. With the high chuff rate of geared locos and an approximate top speed of 18 scale mph, everything works in unison, quite appropriately and very prototypical. It starts moving on DCC speed step one, producing just a crawl. As with a full-scale Climax, the model handles rough track without any complaints.

Logging companies that owned both Shays and Climaxes stated that, pound-for-pound, the Climaxes pulled harder and were less likely to derail on rough track. While the Shay outsold the Climax, it was never truly balanced due to the driveline running down the right side. In model form this new Climax weighs less but out-pulls a late-model Class-B Shay, echoing the claims of countless loggers.

With its museum-quality detail, this is a real eye catching model—one that will get customers interested and asking questions. Feel free to place the loco on a stretch of track and let it run, especially the sound version. Point out the flickering firebox light, amber cab light and directional headlights. Blow the whistle and ring the bell. Watch kids from young to old light up while watching the loco. One of your train customers will certainly want to take it home. **HM**

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