

THE RAIL SIMULATOR NEWSLETTER

WELCOME

Hello and welcome to the fourth edition of our monthly community newsletter for Rail Simulator.

Over the past month Rail Simulator have announced their all new Track System and featured the Severn Valley Railways as part of the Black 5 Cab research trip on the official Rail Simulator website. Our community forum on UKtrainsim.com has reached the 3000 post mark and we rewarded the forum for their enthusiasm! We are still receiving updates from our contacts at the European sites and have a growing wish list from them for Rail Simulator!

As you can see from the title of this newsletter – we have a winner! In this months issue we give you the results of the Rail Simulator newsletter name competition and profile the winning contender.

See you next month!



COMING SOON

Next months edition is the Christmas newsletter! Not only will you receive the regular updates on Rail Simulator – but a few Christmas goodies will come bundled with the newsletter too!

During the next month we'll be talking about the German route that's already under development in Rail Simulator and shall be releasing information to the community on our marketing plans overseas!

NEWSLETTER COMPETITION

Congratulations to www.christrains.nl who have won the Rail Simulator newsletter naming competition! Henceforth the Rail Simulator newsletter will be named 'Rail Times'!

The results are as follows;

- Uktrainsim.com winner with 31 votes was 'On the Rails'
 - Rail Times: 4% [4]
 - The Junction: 13% [12]
 - The Community Whistle: 19% [17]
 - On the Rails: 35% [31]
 - The Waiting Room: 26% [23]
- The-train.de winner with 12 votes was 'Rail Times'
 - Rail Times: 70 % (12 votes)
 - The Junction: 0 % (0 votes)
 - The Community Whistle: 11 % (2 votes)
 - On The Rails: 17 % (3 votes)
 - The Waiting Room: 0 % (0 votes)
- Activitysimulatorworld.com winner with 36 votes was also 'Rail Times'
 - Rail Times: 72% (36 votes)
 - The Junction: 10% (5 votes)
 - The Community Whistle: 8% (4 votes)
 - On the Rails: 8% (4 votes)
 - The Waiting Room 2% (1 vote)

As promised in issue 2 we stated that the winning contender will be profiled on the Rail Simulator newsletter, and so Chris Longhurst of www.chistrains.nl reports on the involvement his website and work has within the train sim community and future plans in our feature section!

FEATURE

In The Beginning

The origins of ChrisTrains go back as far as 1982 when I was 12 years old. I lived in the Netherlands at the time, and took the train to school and back most days of the week. I owned a BBC Micro computer and in 1982 I started messing around with BASIC to see what I could do. In 1983 I wrote my first 3D program which spun a cube on the screen. In 1984 I typed in a game called "The Train Game" from a magazine. All the time I played it, in the back of my mind I was thinking "I wonder if this could be made in 3D?"



I went to University and spent a couple of years doing a course in computer science and in 1990 ended up finding a job at Rediffusion Simulation doing 3D graphics for commercial flight simulators. In 1994 I moved on to a company in Bristol who were big on VR and in 1995 did a train simulation demo for the Silicon Graphics Reality Centre in Theale.



In 1996 I got a job at Evans & Sutherland, going back to making models for flight simulators. In 2001 I was selected to move to America to work with the hardware engineers and software engineers to develop a new product so my wife and I moved to Salt Lake City. If you would like to know more about the history of ChrisTrains, check out www.christrains.com/history/history.html.

Microsoft Train Simulator

2001 was when I first saw a copy of this game. Thinking back to the Train Game and my experience with the SGI Reality Centre, I ordered it as soon as it appeared on Amazon.com. I played it for weeks - finally I was seeing what I'd wanted in 1985 - a fully 3-dimensional world that I could drive those trains through. Around the same time I was itching to learn how to model in 3D Studio Max. I bought a 'teach-yourself' book and worked through the tutorials with a view to getting a simple box on wheels to show up in MSTs. It took some hacking around with the tools documentation but a few days later I had my box on wheels running inside the sim.

Next up I converted one of the old models I did for the 1995 train demos. Using what I'd learned from the box on wheels, it took me about a week to get the Eurostar ready to roll. I sent the file off to train-sim.com and waited to see what would happen. There was a flurry of interest as I believe the Eurostar was one of the first new trains available that wasn't a re-skin.

Figuring that the Netherlands would likely not be overflowing with developers for MSTs I decided to make the Nederlandse Spoorwegen (NS) the subject of my add-ons. It actually only took a week to get the Sprinter ready to go but I had to figure out how to animate pantographs and windscreen wipers for this model. There was very little information to help out so I pioneered some of the early developer work and started to write a document which ultimately became the FAQ on christrains.com.

The ChrisTrains Website.

28th August 2001 was when I decided I need to brand my add-ons. My name is Chris and I was making trains, so I decided ChrisTrains would be the domain name. I bought the name and started up a website for news, information and distribution of my trains. I was getting a lot of feedback from the Eurostar and Sprinter, and my next project was already in the works - the NS1200 locomotive.

By this point I'd been noticed in the Netherlands. I was starting to get emails from Dutch kids who were using my add-ons. I made sure to try to reply to every email I got. Some of them were fanatical to the point of setting up the original ChrisTrains forums. This was A Good Thing as far as I was concerned. It gave me a Dutch distribution point and a place for people to discuss what they wanted, what they liked and disliked. Through the forums I got to know some people who worked for the NS and the various engineering companies that worked on the rolling stock. This meant that instead of scraping the internet for grainy pictures, I had a group of guys who'd go out at the weekend in yellow safety jackets, armed with a request list from me and their camera, and take photos of things I specifically asked for. This was a definite bonus - I live in America but build trains for a country in Europe. Along the way I started work on the NS1200 locomotive and I believe I was the first developer to figure out how to get triple-axle bogies working - something else which ended up in the FAQ.

The ChrisTrains website is a labour of love. I run it entirely on my own and I don't use any fancy editors to edit it. The whole thing is really basic and written entirely in a text editor in my spare time. Generally speaking all the tweaking gets done at the weekends. Because I pay for my site hosting and have no affiliations, it means I'm free to keep the site running with the minimum of advertising.

The ChrisTrains Forum.

The ChrisTrains forums have been through several iterations. The current forum is now run for me by Roland but he has a lot of help from the moderators: Daniel, Dennis, Roy, Rene, Edje, Thom, Dutchtrain, ns1100 and mp.spotsma. Roland started the forum on his own as a fansite, with occasional contact with me. The moderators came along later as the forum became more and more popular. They all now work together and have democratic discussions behind the scenes about bans, flamewars, heated debates and so on. If it wasn't for these guys I don't think the Dutch community would have as much interest in my add-ons - I simply don't have the time to keep my website, make the trains, run a forum, work in my day job and keep my family happy all at the same time. The site is hosted for us free by www.Zenid.nl. They sponsor it and host the downloads too. One of our moderators, Dennis, is a bit handy with programming so he helps us to update the forum with php-updates, scripts and patches.

Roland pays for the upkeep of the chrstrains.nl domain and I cover the cost of chrstrains.com. At this moment we have 648 members on the forum plus the non-member readers. Our low was 60 members, and our peak was over 2,000 regulars. Most of them became members in the early days when MSTs was just released and have stuck with us ever since.

Free models.

My addons are free. I do ask for donations, and occasionally people send some money my way, and I also sell all the models on CD as a service to those who don't have broadband. The fact that they were all on the internet free turned out to be A Good Thing.

Abacus.

In August 2001 I was contacted by Abacus Publishing because I was one of the most prolific designers at the time and they asked if they could re-sell some of my models in their "Roundhouse" collection. I naively agreed to allow them to use my models for a flat fee despite my trains making up 80% of their product but since then I've done some other work for them with better financial results.

JustTrains & SuperScale.

Whilst I was dealing with Abacus, JustTrains contacted me, again based on the strength of the free trains I had available on the internet. They wanted to know if I'd be interested in doing a 100% ChrisTrains product with a proper retail / developer contract, which resulted in the Euro Loco Pack.



For the internet community I learned a lot from the Euro Loco Pack contract and rolled my experience gained from that back into the free trains. In 2002 I launched SuperScale - a project where I revisited older models and revamped them with more polygons, level of detail and higher resolution textures. On the left, the original NS1200. On the right the new one as a result of my experience making the Euro Loco Pack.

ChrisTrains in Neutral.

Since the flurry of activity in 2001 and 2002 things have slowed down a bit. The biggest hit recently has been the Mat'54 - the original Hondokop or Dog-nose train which was released with no less than 33 skins. In 2005 I did my first light-rail project for MSTs with the Alstom Lint-41.



Euro Loco Pack Remix.



In October 2005 I got an email from JustTrains. The Euro Loco Pack was finished so I was able to take all the trains from the original contract and start work on them again to redistribute them free. The Dutch community is rallying around again and providing the photos, data and support I need.

2006 and Beyond?

Is there a future for ChrisTrains? Let's just say that Kuju are working on their new Rail Simulator product, and ChrisTrains is definitely still active. To wit, the ChrisTrains forum won the competition to name this newsletter for Kuju : The Rail Times.