

One from the Classic range

Stuart Moon reviews Accucraft's 0-4-2 plantation locomotive.





Photos by Author.

Above: An attractive little steamer – do you not agree?

Above left: Note the tiny red handwheel on the steam chest, and the multitude of rivets. The larger Accucraft UK cylinders certainly contribute to performance.

Far left: The bell dresses up an essentially plain design.

Left: The smokebox door opens. The small neat headlamp looks the part, although it doesn't actually work.

A sharp-eyed investigation of the Accucraft stand at the Llanfair Garden Railway Show in September 2010 revealed this rather pretty loco, and I was told it was another generic model along the lines of the original 'Ruby'. Whilst it is based on that much maligned design, it has been through something of a mid-life makeover in recent years, and there is little left from the original design, other than the wheels, valve gear, and livery.

The most recent modification appeared with the 'Forney' version, where the adoption of larger cylinders transformed the basic model's listless performance into a serious steam locomotive. The only remaining Achilles heel is the modest boiler capacity, which makes any version a short duration model. Whilst it can be serviced in double-quick time, any loco that needs thorough attention every 20 minutes will not get the same duties as one that runs for 40 minutes or more.

This handsome 0-4-2 is typical of many plantation engines, and it carries many of the design cues that were common to the late 19th century plantation locomotive. These little locos were exported around the world, many finding work on sugar plantations in South America, and across the Pacific in Hawaii. Many of the American locomotive manufacturers built plantation locos to 3ft gauge, and this Accucraft model represents the design from the Baldwin Engineering Works, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

THE JOHNSON BAR

This model is a nice, well-balanced design; and it has all the feel of a real existing prototype, rather than a designer's daydream. Lift and tip the cab roof to one side, where the space for prodding, tweaking, and poking at the controls is at a premium. Yes, this model is supplied in a hands-on, keep-fit format. None of your namby-pamby 'stand in the middle of the garden with radio control as standard' here! I like to get up close and personal with my test locomotives and, if that means walking the length of the line, so be it. Accucraft has settled on a common control layout for its locos, irrespective of the prototype being modelled: to the right, just inside the door, lives the Johnson Bar (reversing lever); on the left is the gas tank and its control valve; in the centre, the burner and regulator. All these are easily found and adjusted – simples!

Having removed all the loose bits (coupling pins and the like), invert the loco and oil around the various bearings, pivots between

the frames and axle ends with a drop of motor oil. Place the locomotive onto the track, and complete the oiling by adding a drop or two to the coupling rod ends. Gas can now be added to the tank. Finally, the water can be shot into the boiler via the cab-mounted filler – a Goodall version is available for those that prefer to run continuously, but this review is conducted on the (as supplied) one-fill basis. Remember only to finger-tighten the O-ring seals. Open the smokebox door, apply your lighter, and open the gas valve – the flame should light and pop back into its tube.

Let the flame settle for a few minutes before opening the valve a little further to establish a gentle roar, and then close the smokebox door. None of this is particularly difficult but, in this cab, clearance is quite restricted for the human finger, and so some of the control positions are not the best. The gas control is close to both the cab side and the back-sheets, which makes small adjustments tricky. Also because the gas tank is close to the boiler, it gets warm, and so small but frequent adjustments are necessary. A regulator arm (as Accucraft uses in the Welshpool & Llanfair 'Countess') would improve things greatly. As the loco heats up there will be the customary pops, crackles, and snaps as the condensate from the previous runs boils off. This can be a bit unnerving for the tyro steam raiser. A few shunts up and down the shed road clears this, which is replaced by a cloud of vapour from the loco's chimney.

HANGS IN THE AIR

These minor niggles aside, the model can be set in motion quite easily and, once a steady speed is reached, the roof can be closed, and the locomotive left to its own devices. Only a modest regulator opening keeps the light engine rolling around LGB R3 track geometry, and up modest grades at a steady scale 30mph, which is a fairly high line speed.

Accucraft models have always been good with visual effects, and this little loco is no different. It puffs out a fair cloud of vapour that hangs in the air, marking its recent passage even on a warm sunny day. But the real test of any locomotive is running with a train and, for this test, a mix of the standard test load formed of Accucraft brass and resin-bodied rolling stock was employed.

In the Forney review in *GardenRail* 194, Accucraft (US) was taken to task on the coupling height, and these couplers are still not quite on target. At the front, only a nice neat socket sits above the



Above: In the cab things are tight, some of the usual facilities awkward to access. An owner could perhaps change the Hornby type knobs for something neater and allow more room.

Right: The consist returning from Stover. It may not be heading an endless line of cane wagons, but looks in charge with these coal hoppers.



pilot. Ideally, there should be swivelling reach-arm, as fitted to the Forney, or a stepped link supplied as a loose accessory. As a result, this lovely little loco cannot propel or haul the excellent range of company freight stock and passenger cars in and out of storage roads other than as a trailed consist. The rear coupler is the standard Ruby open-jaw offering, so no problem with height or coupling but, why it is not a nice easily interchangeable unit? This is, after all, a generic model, so it has no prototypical restrictions.

The loco was connected onto a rake of stock and a full driving session was undertaken. This soon demonstrated the model's nice wide power band. In fact, a very heavy consist is more likely to challenge the loco's adhesion rather than its haulage power. Running with a train of four freight cars or open wagons plus caboose/brakevan, it appears visually balanced. With this length and weight of train, there were no problems with maintaining progress on grades or curves. Whilst the minimum operating radius is declared to be 4ft, the test line's LGB R3 geometry was no real issue. However the underfloor detailing constricts the rear pony truck operating arc for curves tighter than LGB R3 (radius 3ft 11in or 1195mm).

A DELIGHTFUL VARIATION

Modest gradients are not a problem, and the test line's 1:100 gradient was no challenge. It did slow the model, but there was no stalling on the manually-set regulator opening. This is always a pleasant situation to achieve because the model slows and deepens its voice before moving steadily up the grade. Once over the brow there is no rush down the bank, merely a lightening of the engine note, and a return to the set speed – very satisfying to watch.

At the end of a run, the dropping of the oily mess from the lubricator is hampered by the close proximity of some under-footplate pipework detailing, which limits access to the drain cap tommy bar. On a cold engine, this is not too much of a problem but, with a hot lubricator holding a mix of near-boiling water and oil, this is not ideal. Lubricator draining is best done on residual boiler pressure, after which the loco can be left to cool. Those keen to polish can then give the paintwork a traditional wipe down with an oily rag before return to storage.

There are fine cast brass details around the model (such as the brake gear and associated air feeds and the dummy ashpan) so,

application of the oily rag should be gentle. Also, it is advisable to leave O-ring seals slightly loose rather than tightened home, so that they will survive longer.

This is a delightful variation of a long established design. It has a few areas that require more attention but, the performance, provision of small details, and the all round completeness of the design will speak far louder than any reviewer's comment.

THE PROS

Affordable price. Instant 'must have' appeal. Ideal for beginners (or if converting to 1:20.3 from other scales). Balance of detail and practical appearance.

THE CONS

Gauge fixed at 45mm. Smaller than average boiler capacity. Coupling height and open-jaw design compromises connection with other Accucraft US rolling stock. Cab controls not easily accessible. No floor space for crew.

SPECIFICATION

Scale: 1:20.3 Gauge: 45mm
 Length 10.75in. Width: 4in. Height: 5in.
 Minimum radius: 48in (1200mm).
 Valve Gear: Eccentric cams and rocking arms.
 Reversing: Piston valve.
 Fuel: Butane. Burner: Slotted, fitted to single tube.
 Boiler water capacity: 80ml. Working Pressure: 40psi.
 Standard fittings: Safety valve, water filler valve, throttle.

RRP – £795.00 – check street prices.

GardenRail Resource

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