



All photos: Stuart Moon

# Ragleth from Accucraft

The new generic locomotive – Stuart Moon dons bib and brace.

**T**hose who visited the Accucraft UK stand at the Llanfair Garden Railway Gala in September 2009 will have seen the latest production sample in the exhibition cabinet. A chat with Ian Pearce, MD of Accucraft UK, revealed that the need to keep the 0-4-0 models fresh, and a new design, offers a simple replacement for 'Caradoc,' 'Mortimer' and 'Edrig,' which seems rather a broad brief for one model to take on. Home builders weep not, the 'boiler and frames' version of Edrig remains available; sighs of relief all round? Anyway the result is a simple four-coupled locomotive, right up the headshunt for those who like generic models.

Generic locomotives, primarily because they are a blank canvas and of no particular prototype, are popular with those who like to modify their models. The keen-eyed, therefore, can only remark on the additions rather than the lack of a particular rivet. Anticipation is that demand will be high following introduction of this offering. The body takes its design cues from those seen in 'Lawley' and 'Wrekin.' The compact dimensions however, present a more balanced and purposeful look than that of Ragleth's longer wheelbase sisters.

## GREATER HAULAGE ABILITY

The cab layout and free space available make easing a driver figure on board a straightforward undertaking. The chosen driver figure need not be of slimline and modest build, and the line-up of popular Rob Bennett characters tend toward those of a more robust of figure. Indeed the racing snake figure of our highly steamed editor fits easily in the left hand cab entrance of Ragleth without recourse to radical surgical procedures. It is good to know that space is 'designed in' for footplate crew of whatever provenance.

With the common powertrain introduced with 'Superior',

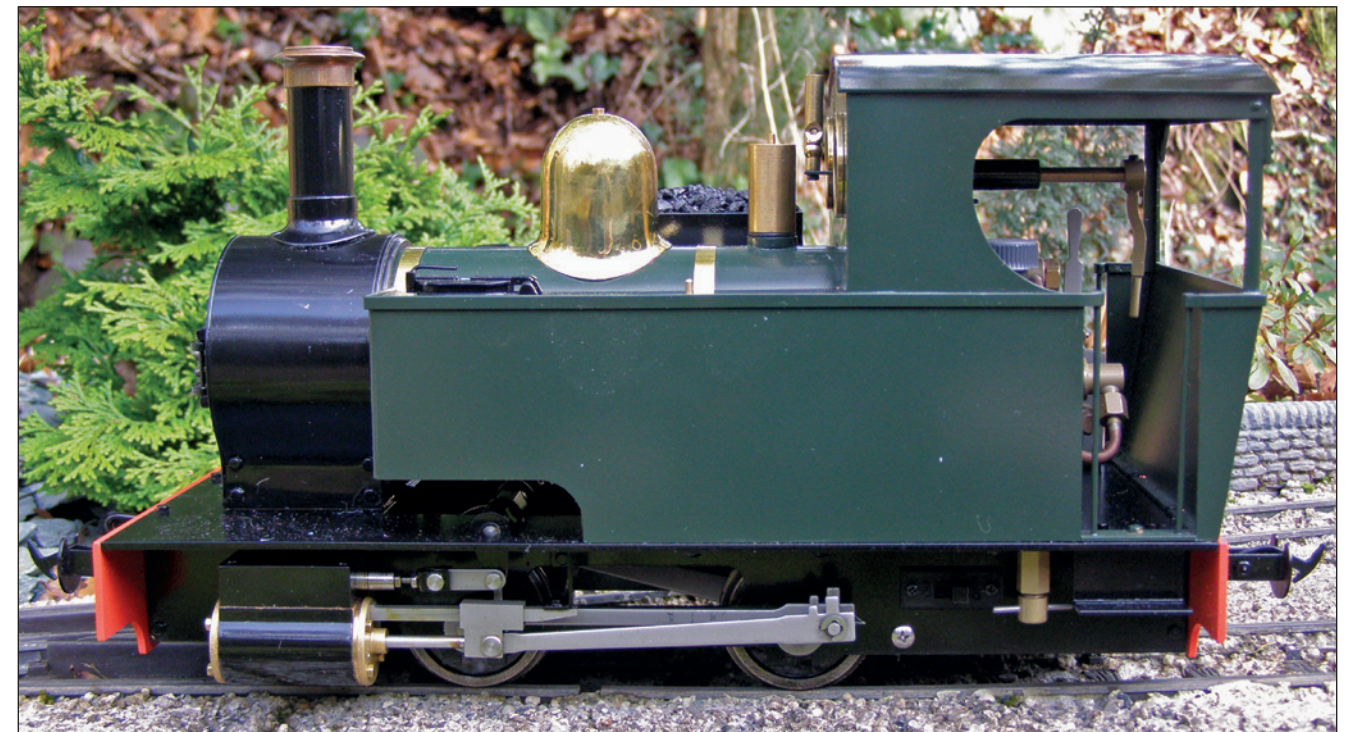
there are no surprises for those used to live steam operations. Ragleth has the same smooth power delivery as the rest of the Accucraft generic range, so will suit many garden railway owners. The one aspect that sets apart this four-coupled model from her 0-6-0 sisters is perhaps greater haulage ability; the adhesion weight placed through four wheels not six. Ultimately, this means that there is just that little more grip available, so when the going gets tough Ragleth should surpass her better-facilitated sibling.

On the mostly flat Little Bovey & Heathfield Tramway, ultimate adhesion is rarely tested, although the tight LGB R3 curves do offer a check on forward progress – especially with 9lbs of test train on the coupler. It is never enough to stop Ragleth completely because she just digs a little deeper and chuffs out of the sticky spots.

In recent months, the LB&HT has taken delivery of some modest four-wheel coaches and a luggage van from Perfect World and their simple varnished lines act as a counterpoint to the Accucraft unlined silk finish. Ragleth livery options are GWR Green, LMS Red, Dark Blue and Sober Black – an improvement on earlier models. The paint finish is up to the usual standard and those that wish can pass their chosen model to one of the various aftersales livery specialists for addition of lining, from the simple to the expansive and complex. Alternatively, there is the DIY route as used by people who dislike spending money and enjoy an hour or two with rolls of lining tape. The cab floor is clear of clutter, so mounting footplate crew onto some wooden floorboards is a simple task to achieve.

## BOILER BLOW DOWN

The review model came fitted with a single channel 2.4 Ghz control. This rather under-utilises the transmitter's facilities as the



**Left:** The standard three-quarter view. This is a locomotive that presents all sorts of possibilities for those who like to fiddle....

**Above:** The design cues from Lawley and Wrekin are apparent in this left profile view. It is possible to make out the gas pin nipple in front of the second boiler band. The plain safety valve is easily enhanced by the addition of the aftermarket bonnet. The under-floor boiler blowdown valve is the item in front of the step.

**Right:** Tank to boiler fit is nice and close. The only minor down, is the gas fill this pokes up above the tank surface. The cure would be a small wooden/metal tool-box with hinged lid as a disguise one of the items that detailers will no doubt apply.

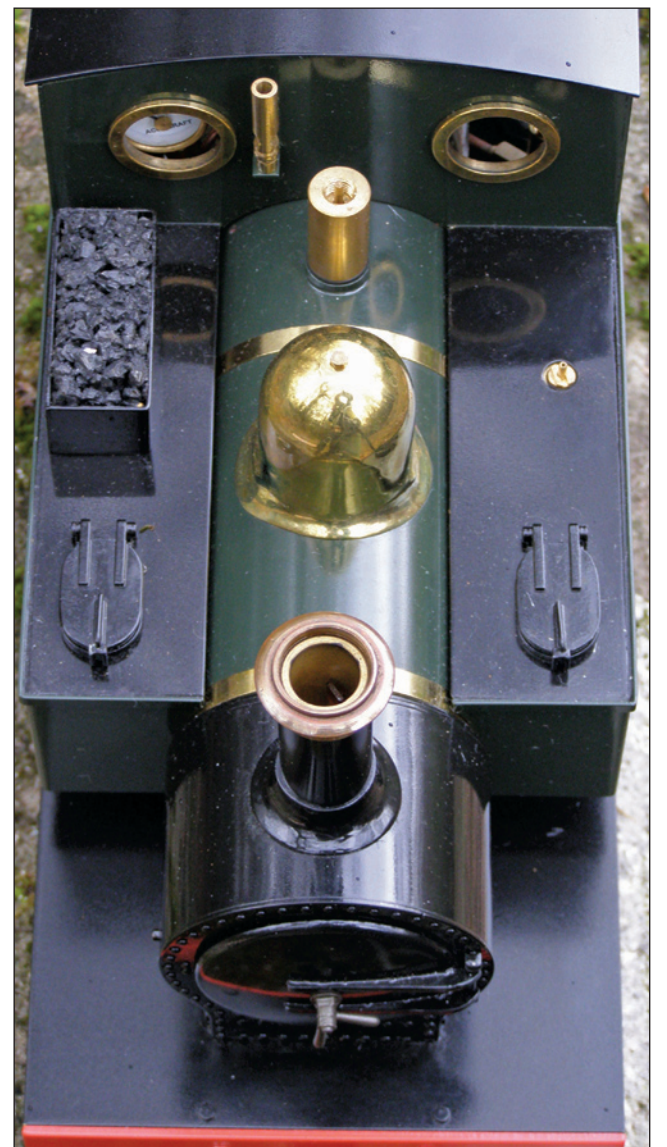
supplied units offer five-channel control. In the dim mists of time single channel Macgregor units were thought to be living on the 'cutting edge' of control. Move on 30 years and finding a stick system with two channels is becoming increasingly difficult.

The Planet T5 system employed does all one could wish for. It controls the piston valve regulator/reverser and this is also dependent on the setting you choose for the rather nicely formed regulator lever in the cab. It would not be impossible to add another servo to drive the regulator, but take a degree of care here as the majority of the electronics live under the cab floor and the incautious could find themselves with an inoperative installation due to piercing what lies beneath.

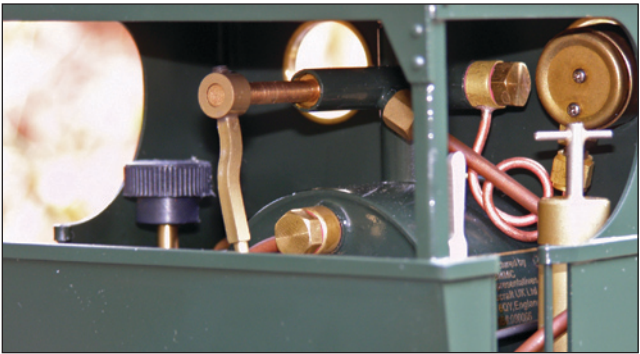
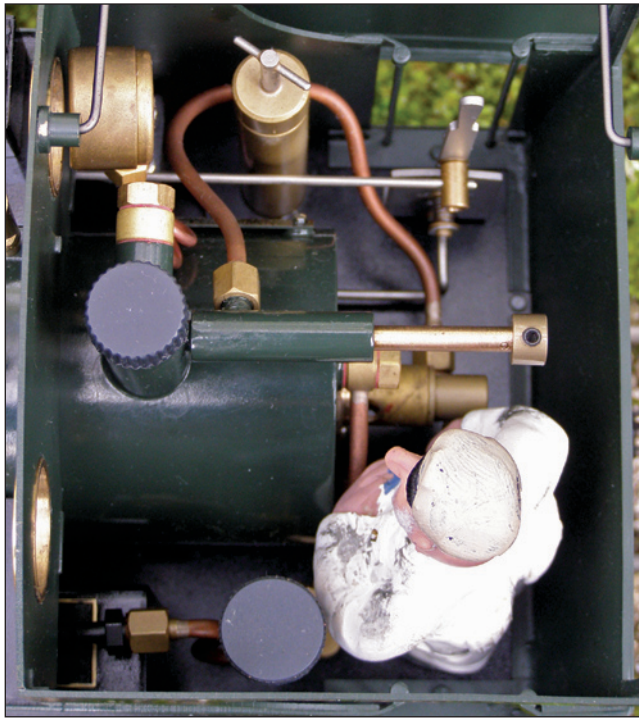
As with Ragleth's predecessors, the mounting holes for servos, receiver and power supply are pre-fitted by the factory and those wishing to do so may add their choice of radio kit. Note however, that while Accucraft will happily supply a factory R/C installation, the company does not deal with queries on fitting one's own system.

The manual controls are easy to access, and owners of previous Accucraft models will find no surprises in the modus operandi of their Ragleth. Being a piston valve model there is the customary boiler blowdown valve, sited below footplate level to clear the boiler of excess water. The lubricator lives a reclusive life in the corner of the cab and its extended tommy bar makes recharges of oil a simple matter. Those who have previous experience will know of the well established lubricator blowdown procedure employed at the end of each run which speeds the servicing operation.

Having bolted on your choice of bits and pieces and then transported the finished item to the steam-up bay what follows should outline the performance that owners should be able to







**Above:** The cab interior is ripe for detailing with red sleeving for the reverser and regulator handles, a splash round with cream paint after daubing most of the copper piping and associated fitting with satin black etch-primer.

**Left:** There is plenty of room for at least one crew member – even a large figure such as this. The side lift roof opens the cab for easy adjustment from 12in/foot scale fingers.

**Right:** A pause in clearance run and performance checking, your scribe and Driver Stokes exchange views on cab-first running. The late winter sun was pleasantly warm hence the shirtsleeve order.

achieve ‘out of the box.’ Raising steam is commendably quick and, after the usual stuttering and spitting start, Ragleth settles into her stride with a modest roar from the burner. A nice chuff from the exhaust accompanies a huge cloud of water vapour issuing from the chimney. Testing models in late winter with air temperature around six degrees C makes live steam a scenic and atmospheric event, even if the driver is verging on modest hypothermia at the end of the run.

**REVERSER/REGULATOR**

Coupling up to the standard test train reins in the ‘slightly sprightly’ light engine performance and, with a slow slide of the transmitter stick towards full forward gear, Ragleth is soon chuffing along at a measured pace through the controlling pointwork of Bovey Mills Yard and thence onto the mainline. Here we can experiment with the regulator opening to establish a maximum and use the radio controlled reverser/regulator to control speed and direction. The only slight downside of the combined regulator and reverser arrangement occurs when a little more regulator is called for to keep momentum up a long grade when the combination ‘stick’ is already up against its top stop!

With the upper limit noted, Ragleth is soon on the toes of the 1:100 upward climb to Stover Station. This is quite a stiff test for locos running with a fixed regulator setting, and at less than safety valve blow-off pressure. It is commendable that on a predetermined setting Ragleth slows and digs her wheels in as the steam motor pulls against the weight of the train. There is a moment when she looks as though she might stall but the boiler raises a little more steam and before the safety valve can lift the modest rise in pressure forces the pistons down their bores to restore forward motion.

Having mastered the climb, we are on the slight down grade into Stover Station and again Ragleth deals with the easy going without running away, even with 9lbs of train pushing her onward. We pass through, Stover our train rattling over the yard and passing loop pointwork and all too soon we are traversing Stover Loop. Here a reverse loop of four to 40-feet radius curves are employed to turn the train through 360 degrees and commence the return journey to the line’s HQ at Bovey Mills.

**LOCOMOTIVES RUNNING LIGHT**

We have no need to worry. Ragleth acquitted herself well on the outbound journey, so the return should be a breeze and it is with both Little Bovey and Bovey Mills Stations clattering by, before entering the much stiffer test that is Indio Loop which involves a tight 360 degree turn of 4ft radius — somewhat tighter than the infamous Tyler’s Curve on the Ffestiniog Railway. To add insult to injury, this tight curve also has an unintended gradient of 1:50

and the result is severe test for most locomotives running light never mind hauling 9lbs of fully laden wagons and brake-van.

Ragleth hauls her train around this trackwork without too many problems, although it takes a nudge of extra regulator to keep everything moving. We take the diversion route back onto the main line, avoiding shunting operations underway in the yard, and then run up to Little Bovey to wait the passing down passenger train. This gives us a chance to check water and oil round and it is a pleasure to find that we have at least half a glass of water in hand – another full circuit can be achieved before Ragleth will need servicing.

This gives a scale distance of about six miles between consumable services; close to the distances worked by 12in/ft scale narrow gauge locomotives before the replenishment of water and fuel reserves. Our fireman is particularly lazy having not touched the firing shovel or fuel control valve since lighting up, so the performance is not truly prototypical. Editor Gorton tells me his coal-fired Edrig runs for about 20 minutes between firing turns so the LPG fired version is quite close to that version of the ‘real thing.’

**THE PROS**

Ragleth is a nicely proportioned model of no particular prototype that is easily enhanced with a wide range of aftermarket extras. One of the features shared across the range is the ability to give remarkable results when run at well under the recommended boiler working pressure. During the test runs Ragleth made steady progress with the lower gas setting producing steam at 25psi rather than 45psi. Ragleth is available to suit 32 and 45 gauge tracks, so you and Ragleth can a visiting go. Accucraft’s own chopper coupling is fitted and is gaining popularity with many. This might bring about the change from the centre buffer with ubiquitous three-links out of the kharzi pull chain.

**THE CONS**

The introduction of Ragleth means that the predecessors have been retired which is a shame. The tommy bars remain an issue, being unpleasant to use hot or cold but at least Accucraft provides a tool for those with delicate pianists fingers. There is not a lot of steam ‘voice’ and this is easily stifled by burner roar. Improvements come from fitting aftermarket solutions. Daydream moment: IF the dummy whistle were mounted to the right-hand side of the cab, it would allow the fitting of a small resonator whistle in the same position.

Many love generic locomotives for the opportunities they offer to aftermarket fiddlers and others who enjoy the challenge of getting the model they want at a price they can afford. Ragleth provides a mounting base for the latest collection of locomotive



sundries. There are no real issues with the running or reliability of these models out of the box. After the initial stiffness works off, Ragleth should run for years with proper care during the procedures of preparation, running and storing. The standard chopper couplings allow connection with normal centre buffer couplers and the range of Accucraft UK rolling stock. For the money you pay and the loco you receive this has to be another of those ‘investments’. **GR**

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