

The MR story

A brief look at my own experiences of the Mamod and MSS railway system

Introduction

A little history of my own love affair with the Mamod Steam Railway. To me the Mamods always had a charm of their own and my first loco certainly impressed me. It behaved perfectly straight from the box. My problem was that I could never leave things as they were and this loco took on many guises before it eventually was well and truly worn out. I bought several more which were used in other projects with the most ambitious being an 0-4-0 + 0-4-0 Garratt style loco. The one end of the Garratt was powered by a Mamod loco engine fitted inside the tank and the other was not powered but carried the meths and water tanks. The 'pot' boiler was taken from the largest of the Mamod stationary engines. Amazingly this worked well for several years and has only recently been converted to battery electric.



My live steam Mamod Garratt as originally built using an old biscuit tin plus Mamod stationary engine and loco parts.

On looking back I missed the simplicity of those early days with the Mamod Steam Railway. I have read so many negative comments about them but this certainly did not reflect my own experiences. Reviews mostly compared the Mamods with a full specifications garden railway loco. They are not the same and were never meant to be. They operate at a very low pressure and have very small diameter pistons which does make slow running very difficult. Their outdoor performance can certainly be vastly improved with the modifications that are available, although the total cost of these can be higher than the price of the basic loco! Available modifications include silver soldered copper boiler, lubricator, improved safety valve etc. Without altering the fire they will not run well on a garden railway during a breezy day. For this purpose I would recommend changing the fuel tray for a gas burner. Meths burners are not so easy to set up and the quality of meths seems to be very variable. On a windy day the meths burner's flames can get blown through the air vents on the chassis damaging the paintwork on the sides.

Sadly the Mamod railway was no longer produced and the hopes I had of starting again looked very unlikely. Then the system appeared again with the MSS logo. I jumped at the chance of getting a few locos to go with some of the old stock I had. The cylinders and pistons are made very differently to the first Mamods. One of those on my saddle tank actually fell apart which could have been a disaster to someone starting out in the hobby. At least it gave me the opportunity to see exactly how they were put together. Apart from this all of my locos perform very well within the usual limitations of the pot boiler and fire and this is without any modifications. I have no intention of changing the MSS locos except for minor cosmetic items that can be removed, making it easy to put them back to their original specifications.

Lubrication

On my early Mamods I fitted my own design of displacement lubricator which worked very well. These required the locos to be taken apart to gain access to the steam pipe. I have decided not to fit lubricators to the new locos, cylinders are now lubricated by removing the steam dome and injecting a small amount of steam oil directly into the steam pipe with the control valve on the loco set to full forward. As the oil is introduced into the steam pipe the loco is slowly pushed forwards drawing oil towards the cylinders. All other parts, axle bearing, connecting rod bearings etc. are lubricated with cheap car engine oil. I always oil everything every time the boiler is refilled ready for another run.



Another of my modified Mamods fitted with a displacement lubricator, meths fire with fuel tank in the tender, cylinder covers, boiler vacuum filler drawing water from the tender, cab control lever etc.

Firing

I have used meths and gas firing in the past to varying degrees of success but was never happy with either. In hot weather the meths reservoir would overheat and ignite. I overcame this problem by putting the meths tank in the tender but this meant I could no longer operate the loco as an 0-4-0T. Gas was better but I was never really happy with a large gas tank in the cab. Also they could be a little temperamental in those early days. Since I owned a few Wilesco engines I decided to try firing the locos with the Esbit fuel supplied for Wilesco. With a very slight modification to the fuel tray this has proved a great success and now I always use the Esbit. It burns very hot and without spitting pieces of burning fuel all over the track.



Fire tray with two Esbit fuel tablets

Conclusion

I now have a small collection of the Mamod/MSS rolling stock to which I have started to add some of my own items. These include battery electric powered diesel locos and also small coaches that have been built onto the 4 wheel MSS chassis. These are all operated under the railway logo “MR”



One of my own MR diesels, number MD202 with a passenger train made up with one Mamod coach and two of my own creations.

I now look forward to adding more and more rolling stock to my own Mamod/MSS collection.

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