



ALAIN KAP EARNS MMR #526

I grew up in the 1960s, when train sets were the gift of choice for most boys. At least for a couple years, everybody in the family knew what kind of presents to buy for birthdays and Christmas. I received my first Märklin train set in 1967 with a NOHAB diesel engine in the Luxembourg railway paint scheme. These engines looked like two F7s melted together back to back. The NOHAB locomotives were of a General Motors design and featured a 567 engine, which sounded a lot like the diesels I've heard years later in the United States.

My uncle worked for the Luxembourg Railways, so he took care of the train set and expanded it to a 10x5-foot layout, featuring a tunnel and several bridges with the tracks winding over and under each other. The buildings and signals were all lighted, and the layout even had a trolley bus snaking around the houses of the little town. It was a joy to operate it with the lights in the room turned off.

A couple years later, my interests turned to plastic kits and military modeling, and still later...girls. Graduation came, and I started to build up my life. Modeling and trains took the back seat for a decade or so.

In 1989, I visited a local train show and the virus caught me again, because during my time away from the hobby, all kinds of Luxembourg locomotives — steam and diesel — plus rolling stock became available.

I then joined the club. In the following month, I accumulated nearly every available piece of rolling stock on the market that I could afford.

Another three years, a couple vacation trips to the United States, and some issues of *Model Railroader* later, my love for trains took a whole new direction. I wanted to model an American prototype.

My first layout was a 4x8 based an article in *Model Railroader*. At about the same time, I got involved with modular layout building and started to build my first modules following the standards of the FREMO in Germany.

In 1993, I joined the NMRA. A year later, I attended my first American-themed train show and convention in Switzerland with my own switching layout. A couple friends and I expanded the switching layout with enough segments and modules to form an oval-shaped layout, which we took to numerous shows all around Europe.

In 1997, I finally attended my first NMRA convention in Madison, Wisconsin. There, I became involved in the Achievement Program. My first success was when I received my Golden Spike Award in 1998.

A divorce and three moves kept me from seriously starting in the AP. However, in 2003, I entered a scratchbuilt depot into the contest at the Toronto convention. Unfortunately, I missed the Merit Award by 10 points, but the comments and encouragements left by the judges helped me correct the shortcomings, and when I re-entered the model at the British Region convention that same year, it received 96 points and earned me my first Merit Award. Another structure also received a Merit Award — I was fully launched into the Master Builder Structures Certificate, which I earned in 2006.

In all these years, I had started three home layouts but they never got to the stage of running trains because I had to move again before they were finished.

In 2007, I bought a new house with a permanent layout in mind. I concentrated on the AP requirements from the beginning, so I was able to achieve one certificate after the other as I went on with the layout building. I achieved Model Railroad Engineer — Civil and Electrical, Master Builder Scenery, Chief Dispatcher, Association Volunteer and Author, which I earned over ten years.

I was one category from my MMR — either Motive Power or Cars. From my previous rolling stock entries, I knew that just detailing a kit was not enough, so it was clear that I had to build them from scratch. I had an Ambroid wood Helium tank car kit that had been sitting on the shelf for a couple years begging to be built. I was uncomfortable building a steel car from wood, so I assembled all the needed parts from Evergreen styrene and started to build the car using the kit's instructions. Just in time for the 2011 Sacramento Convention, I entered it into the contest and I won my first Merit Award in a National Contest. Now I was persuaded that I also would succeed with the remaining cars, which would be of more standard construction.

In a major effort, I built six models of rolling stock in only four months. The deadline was the British Region convention in late October 2013. Of the six models, five earned a Merit Award and my last Certificate to meet the requirements for MMR.

In looking back, it took me almost 15 years from my first encounter with the AP until the ultimate goal of MMR — a goal that I considered almost unreachable for a foreign member of the NMRA. However, I succeeded through the help of many great modelers and new friends along the way. A big thanks goes to my fellow modelers and mentors Fons Bossaers, MMR 290 and the late Wolfgang Dudler MMR 452, who unfortunately passed away in August 2012.

I'm looking forward to the formation of the new European Region and to help members willing to jump into the Achievement Program to further improve their skills in becoming better modelers.

I live in Saarburg, Germany, with my wife Alice and son Alan Justin. I also have two grown daughters Audrey and Shirley. I work as an accountant for a paint manufacturing company in Luxembourg.