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# Model Railroad News

The All-Scale News Monthly

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# Holiday Train Set

## Capture the Joy of the Holiday Season

### Piko's Colorful Large Scale Starter Set

Review by David Otte  
Photos by Mike Lindsay

Christmas Freight Starter Set (#38105), MSRP: \$379.99

North Pole Station Built-up (#62265), MSRP: \$79.99

North Pole Water Tank Built-up (#62702), MSRP: \$69.99

Santa's House Built-up, (#62703), MSRP: \$89.99

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Large Scale trains are usually associated with outside garden railways but, due to their size, make for excellent indoor floor trains as well — especially during the holiday season. It's become a long-standing tradition in our home for my son to set up his G-gauge track around the perimeter of the living room and allow a short steam powered consist to meander through the various canyons created by colorfully wrapped packages, past



The Piko logo may be new to you, but the Germany-based company has been manufacturing HO-scale model trains for over half a century now and entered the Large Scale equipment arena about four years ago with their introduction of the European Taurus locomotive. Currently, they are cataloging two other steam powered starter sets, lettered for the Pennsylvania and Santa Fe Railroads, along with the Christmas Starter Set pictured here.

villages of porcelain houses, over blankets of fluffy white snow, and eventually around the decorated tree offering a tasteful bit of animation to our holiday festivities. Sound inviting? Well, your family can experience some of this Christmas cheer as well with Piko's new Christmas Starter Set. It offers a complete ready-to-run pike for beneath the tree, but also accomplishes it in true holiday spirit dressed for the season.

Piko is a relative newcomer to the large scale locomotive and rolling stock market, but they have a six-decade history of producing HO-scale trains for European enthusiasts, as well as a full line of easy-to-assemble Large Scale plastic structure kits that have been enjoyed by U.S. modelers for a number of years. In fact, their entire

G-gauge line up is still made in Piko's main factory in Sonneberg, Thüringen, Germany, and the company's heritage and worldwide reputation for quality is quite evident in their Christmas Starter Set.

First, let me just state that, while I've painted a picture for you utilizing this set indoors, Piko's Large Scale trains are designed for the outdoors as well with both the rolling stock and track ties manufactured from a weather resistant plastic, which will stand up to the sun's ultraviolet radiation, dust, and moisture. Also qualifying this train for operation in rain, snow, or sunshine, is Piko's use of a sealed motor/gear box assembly on the locomotive and heavy solid rails extruded from pure brass making up their sectional track.

### The Set

Heading up this holiday freight special is a burly-looking tank engine patterned after the coal burning 0-6-0s that once carried out switching duties for railroads and industries all across North America. Enhancing the many crisp, molded-in details on its plastic boiler and cab are a plethora of separately applied parts that include steam dynamo, working front and rear headlights, footboard pilots on the rear and a traditional open slatted "cow catcher" pilot up front, air pump and reservoir tanks, coupler lift bars, cab steps, cab window glazing, simulated coal in the fuel bunker, cab roof vent, and brass plated bell, whistle, and flag poles on the pilot beams. The cab interior also features backhead details as well as a painted crew figure. Not to be outdone, the chassis is outfitted with add-on cylinders, spoked metal drive wheels, plastic side rods with functioning cross-heads, simulated valve gear, and a frame-



Besides the 0-6-0 saddle tank steam locomotive and two freight cars, the Christmas Starter Set also includes a full circle of track, track clips, controller, transformer, and all necessary wiring.



Measuring 33.25 inches in length when coupled together, the Piko Starter Set's consist is quite colorful and full of Christmas cheer. Despite its short stature, the switcher engine is a robust locomotive easily capable of pulling additional freight cars.



mounted hook-and-loop coupler on the rear.

Augmenting the model's appearance is the constant directional lighting system, which provides a nice bright white headlight and backup light. The steamer is powered by a 5-pole, can-type motor and electrical pickup is mostly accomplished through the drive wheels with additional railhead contact made by means of a pair of sprung pickup slide shoes fixed beneath the motor block located between the first and second set driver axles.

Trailing behind the saddle tank switcher are two freight cars also based

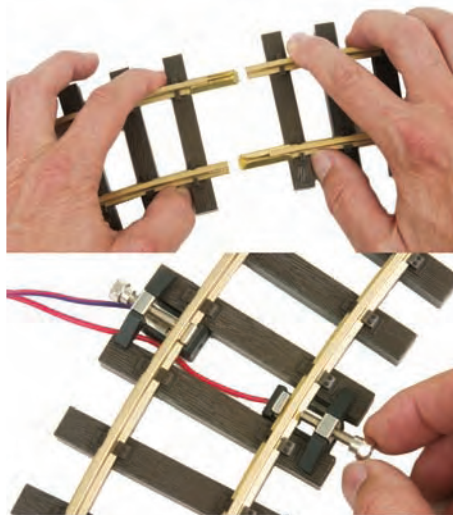
on US prototypes. The two-bay steel hopper is perfect for loading up with tiny packages, ornaments, and other small bits, offering the kids some extra play value while the center cupola caboose mimics the short, wood-sheathed crummies that once populated narrow gauge rails in the Rocky Mountains. Both of the cars' plastic construction features a bounty of molded-in details such as the rivet heads and hand grabs on the hopper and the wood grain finish on the caboose. The caboose adds brake gear, hand brake wheels, handrail, ladders, window glazing, platform steps, roofwalks, smoke jack, and truss rods with turnbuckles beneath the frame. Both cars ride on free-rolling, four-wheel-style trucks on which hook and loop type couplers are attached allowing these cars to negotiate tight-radius curves.

Of course, what makes the components of this starter set consist the most appealing is their Christmas-themed decoration. The locomotive wears a four-color scheme with a vibrant Santa-

red-and-pine tree green enhanced by pad printed graphics of bows, ribbons, holly, and twinkling stars — a pattern carried on over to the rest of the train. The broad flat side of the hopper car gave the manufacturer the opportunity to really show their skill with a panoramic snowy scene of Santa leaving gifts beneath some lucky recipient's tree. The application of this décor as well as the quality of assembly of our samples was top notch.

### Operation

While I found the set a real sight to behold just setting it up on the workbench, this toy train is meant to be operated; it was eventually time to construct the layout on the family room floor. I begin with the assembly of the included 12 sections of 600-millimeter radius curves forming a circle about four feet in diameter. The track sections come with sturdy, factory-



The Piko solid-brass-rail-equipped track sections are easy to connect through use of traditional, factory-installed brass rail joiners. The track power connection is made by use of clamp-on terminals and color-coded wires. The wire leads are then inserted into the appropriate sprung terminals on the controller and, in turn, a two-wire cable from the controller is connected to the separate transformer. "Child's play," in a manner of speaking, with adult supervision of course!



Piko has done a great job of creating their version of a typical six-coupled tank engine switcher supplying it amply with both molded-in and separately applied details. Visible here are the add-on headlight, open slatted style pilot, air pump and reservoir tanks, coupler lift bar, cab glazing, fuel bunker, brass plated bell and whistle, intricate running gear, spoked drivers, and painted crew figure in the cab.





The 2-bay steel-type hopper, while the most eye-catching member of the consist with its mural depicting Santa on its sides, is quite functional allowing the train to earn some revenue hauling small gifts or ornaments beneath your tree. On the other hand, the caboose is a real standout too with its add-on end rails and hand grabs, ladders, end platform steps, roofwalks, smokejack, and window glazing. Both cars are equipped with plastic wheel sets and truck mounted, European-style hook-and-loop couplers.

installed brass rail joiners with one end actually hooked into the end tie so it won't get lost when the sections are dismantled and stored. Piko also provides 14 plastic track clips, which lock the track sections together by fitting in the small notches found in the center of each end tie. This really makes a temporary layout possible during the holiday season and capable of being setup on a hardwood, tile, or even carpeted floor.

Once completed, I attached the track power cable to a section of track. Piko

utilizes a very dependable power terminal that physically clamps to the rails using thumbscrews. The color-coded wires are pre-stripped on the other end of the harness and are inserted in the appropriate spring-loaded terminal on the controller.



Piko makes it easy to complete your holiday layout with Christmas-themed structures. The North Pole Station, North Pole Water Tank, and Santa's House provide the Jolly Old Elf his home base and come factory-assembled ready to place on your Christmas display. The plastic components are molded in

UV-resistant colored plastic and the buildings all include signage, garland draped over the windows and doors, colorful Christmas trees to position out front, simulated icicles hang down from each structures' roof, and the water tank is even equipped with a pull down spout for re-supplying your steam locomotive.

This device, which provides both throttle and direction control, is then attached to its separate power supply by way of another color-coded 2-wire cable. The throttle and transformer are rated for an output of 20 volts direct current and 28 volt amps, more than adequate for this small set.

With the transformer plugged into the wall outlet, it was time to put the train on the rails, which is relatively easy, even for a child, and start hauling Santa's toys from the North Pole for delivery to all those good little girls and boys. With headlight aglow, our 0-6-0 crept forward smoothly with minimal gear noise, a sign of a quality-built drive mechanism, and advanced through a nice range of speeds. I experienced no problems during operation of any of the equipment and the hook-and-loop couplers make it particularly easy for the youngest of engineers to couple the train. As the train made its way around the circle of track, the only things missing were the puffs of white smoke coming from the little tank engine's exhaust stack and the sound of Santa Claus exclaiming "Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good-night."

## Recommendations

This is truly a festive train set that both old and young will enjoy setting up for this holiday and, thanks to its quality build, many holidays yet to come. And Piko makes it easy to think outside of the four-foot circular layout too, offering a full range of track for expanding the pike indoors or outdoors and creating a true holiday layout with specialty structures in both built-up and easy-to-assemble kit forms.

Yes, Santa Claus is surely coming to town, but this year he's riding in style onboard Piko's Christmas Starter Set. 