

Question Time: Murphy Models

Murphy Models has almost single-handedly created a new market for ready-to-run Irish railways.

BEN JONES talks to Paddy Murphy about his company and ideas for the future.

Of all the interviews I've done so far, this has to be the most unusual setting. Rather than meeting in Paddy Murphy's Dublin office, a change of venue sees us travelling south-west towards Cork on an Iarnród Éireann InterCity service. However, it's a comfortable and appropriate environment in which to talk about Irish model railways with the man who's inspiring a whole new area of interest for - Irish and British - modellers.

After leaving Limerick Junction, the coach empties out and we find space to spread out and discuss how Paddy got into the model railway industry and how he sees his business today. Traditionally, Ireland is not the most fertile soil for hobbyists, so how did he start in the trade?

"I've been in retail since the early-1970s, first with foods and later with toys. I started sourcing spare parts for people from the European model trade and did my first toy show in October 1979. I was surprised how much interest there was, so I investigated it further and paid my first visit to the Nuremberg Toyfair. The result was that I became the Irish agent for Arnold and Herpa.

"I approached several other companies at subsequent fairs and it went on from there until I had agencies for a number of toy and model firms."

Perhaps the first Irish models that many of us will remember seeing were the Lima Class 33s and Mk 2 coaches in CIÉ colours, were these a Murphy commission?

"Probably the main reason for lack of

interest in model railways was the complete lack of Irish prototypes in model form. Although Britain is close by, its trains are as unfamiliar to many Irish children and modellers as subjects from further afield. About 10-12 years ago, after discussions with people in the model trade in Ireland, I developed a plan to commission existing Lima models of British Mk 2 and Mk 3 coaches in Irish colours. We needed something to haul them of course, and the result was that Class 33, numbered as 'A' Class 015 [released in 1998].

"Obviously there were lots of differences between the model and a real 'A' Class, but it was a 'toe in the water' exercise and the response showed that there was a market for Irish models. It showed that there were around 250 potential customers in the Republic and Northern Ireland who would buy recognisable Irish models."

"I had a very good relationship with Lima and took the decision to commission my first locomotive - the General Motors 201 Class in 2001. After gathering all the information from the USA, we rattled that off in a day - unlike the months of research we needed for the 141/181 Class recently.

"Nobody had done anything like that with Lima before, but for the time I think they did a very good job. We produced 3,000-3,500 locomotives in three liveries with different names, some in train packs and some in sets. The response was tremendous, both at home and in the UK. You only have to see the prices the '201s' are fetching on eBay to see that people still want them."

Did the collapse of Lima [in 2003] force Paddy to look elsewhere for manufacturing?

"I'd already done some work with Bachmann by then. After the success of the Lima coaches, I contacted Bachmann and commissioned the first set of 'Murphy Brothers' coal wagons, followed by the 'Woolwich' 2-6-0s and CIÉ coaches in the late-1990s (see page 54)."

"I get on very well with Bachmann. They're a good outfit to deal with, and



Paddy Murphy with an Irish Rail 201 Class diesel - the subject of his first specially commissioned 'OO' model from Lima.

Although most Murphy Models commissions have been diesels, Bachmann has also produced several steam locomotives, including this Northern Counties Committee (NCC) 'Jinty'.



25 years in retail teaches you who you can trust. I have good relationships with most manufacturers though..."

"Bachmann are railway people, and they often ring me with ideas of what I could do. The classic example was the Northern Counties Committee (NCC) 'Jinty' 0-6-0T, which was their idea. It helps them to spread the cost of their tooling and gives me something extra to sell.

"The RPSI green Mk 2s (see MR119) are another good example. I was delighted to commission these for the RPSI (Railway Preservation Society of Ireland) and I hope they'll be a major contributor of funds to the society. Bachmann have done a terrific job with them on our behalf."

The recent 141/181 Class diesels are the result of several years hard work and represented a huge financial risk for Murphy Models. What made Paddy take the plunge?

"This is where Bachmann got its payback for helping me out with ideas for models. I wanted to produce an Irish diesel to current standards, but to do this with Bachmann I had to order at least 5,000. In the end, the quantity was 6,500.

"I'd originally discussed this project with Lima three or four years before I went to Bachmann. By the time we'd got an agreement to develop it, people were demanding more detail and features. I was stunned by the amount of work that went into researching something like the '141s'. But with 11 versions from 12 locomotives, the work definitely paid off.

With the obvious success of the 'Small GMs', has Paddy got more Irish locomotives up his sleeve for 2009?

"I have looked at other classes, and there are two obvious candidates, but there won't be anything before 2010. I've already got enough work in progress."



Lima produced the Irish 201 Class diesel exclusively for Murphy Models in 2001. The limited run models now fetch high second hand prices - particularly IE orange 201 River Shannon. PAUL DUNN

➔ with the Cravens coaches, more 'Murphy Brothers' wagons and as some of the '141/181s' are already sold out, I'm planning to add two more locomotives of each class in 1970s 'Supertrain' brown and black, plus another limited edition in current IE livery."

Raising my eyebrows at the mention of Cravens coaches, Paddy spots his chance to elaborate on these new models.

"As I realised the Irish RTR market was opening up, a classic diesel type was the priority and I realised this would be a better seller if matching coaches and wagons were available. Information on Irish wagons is scarce, but I have a network of sources which has been working on the Cravens stock for more than a year. Unlike the repainted Mk 2s and Mk 3s, they're unique to Ireland and a perfect companion for the 'Small GM.'"

Paddy won't disclose who is designing and manufacturing the model on his behalf, but he does reveal the first assembled pre-production samples to arrive in Ireland - and very fine they are too. When does he expect production models to arrive?

"The early tooling is here for checking and approval and if all goes to plan we should get them in the late-summer or early-autumn.

"There's been huge interest in the Cravens, so much that we've had to revise our production figures upwards to cater for demand. However, I don't want to produce too many as I never sell off remaindered stock. All my models maintain or increase their value. Collectors appreciate the fact that they can buy my models without worrying about their investment."

Are collectors the majority of Murphy's customers, and what is the breakdown of sales across Ireland and Britain?

"A lot of people admire what is a very good model [the 141/181 Class] and are buying them as static models even though they have no great interest in Irish railways. A rough estimate is 65% of locomotives sold in Ireland (Republic and Northern Ireland) and around 35% in



Britain, although some have also gone to Spain, Switzerland and Canada where they've been very well received.

"But I'm also pleased that my models help to sell kits of Irish rolling stock to more active modellers. Model Irish Railways and Silver Fox are selling more kits of coaches, wagons and locomotives as interest grows in the subject."

It's widely assumed that Hornby inherited the tools for the Lima 201 Class; does Paddy expect this to reappear in a red box?

"I don't honestly know. I've approached them, but without success. Personally I wouldn't produce that model again as it would be a backward step, but it's a matter for Hornby. The model was good for its time, but has been left way behind now."

As we pass the sidings that mark the start of the steep descent into Cork, we round off by discussing what Paddy has planned for the next few years.


"I'm 69 now and juggling three or four projects. I'm a one-man operation, so if I don't do it, it doesn't get done. However, I would like to publicly acknowledge the help of all those who've given advice and helped with research over the years - it's very much appreciated.

"Once the Cravens coaches are signed off, I'll decide what to do next. Ideally I'd like to do one or two projects a year, but I'm dependent on good quality drawings, which are hard to find.

"I have a wish list like everybody else,

and there are items on there that are up for grabs. But, I have to make tough commercial decisions on the 'probables'. I have to take into account tooling costs, potential sales, livery and detail options. If we want top quality models in this 'niche' market we have to be willing to pay the price. Manufacturing and labour costs in China are going to increase by 20-30% in the next couple of years."

Does Paddy see Irish modelling getting stronger over the next few years?

"Now that we have models of Irish prototypes, why not? It's not just railways, we also have buses from Corgi, EFE and others, Aer Lingus and Ryanair aircraft from Herpa. People will buy these simply because they're Irish models, so the support is there now and I see no reason for that to change." 

How it used to be: Lima produced this BR Class 33 in CIE colours in the 1980s. Only in the last decade have bespoke RTR Irish models appeared. PAUL DUNN/MODEL COURTESY OF PETER BAKER



The recent 141/181 Class by Bachmann has taken Irish 'OO' modelling to new heights, and opened up a completely new area of interest for many modellers. PAUL DUNN

Using Bachmann's Southern 'N' Class 2-6-0 (a batch of which was built for Ireland) and LMS coaches, Murphy's was able to offer an attractive 1950s style CIE train.
PAUL DUNN

➔ WHAT NEXT?

Find out more about Murphy Models at: www.murphymodels.com. If you're interested in Irish railways, it's worth considering membership of the following organisations; Irish Traction Group (diesel preservation) - www.irishtractiongroup.com, Railway Preservation Society of Ireland (steam preservation) - www.rpsi-online.org and the Irish Railway Record Society, which promotes interest in all areas of Irish railways.

