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**OUR
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Sunset/3rd Rail North Shore Line Silverliners

Review and Photos by George Brown

As with other interurban railroads during the first half of the 20th century, the North Shore Line was an electrified rail link connecting the cities of Chicago and Milwaukee with passenger and some freight service. The line ran along the shore of Lake Michigan and was completely electrified using trolley wires. But by the late 1940s, the interurban era was waning

across the country including on the North Shore Line. Unlike the major railroads that had the capital to invest in new stainless steel streamline trains, the North Shore Line was already experiencing irreversible annual losses.

By 1950, in an attempt to retain what was left of its declining ridership and to hopefully attract new riders, the North Shore Line repainted several of its existing cars in a clever scheme of red and specially decorated silver that simulated fluted stainless steel. This bold paint scheme and the catchy name of Silverliner were supposed to make the line's interurban passenger cars built in the 1920s and 1930s by several different manufacturers, such as Standard and St. Louis Car, look new and modern. But even with a fresh coat of bright red and fluted silver paint, the cars were no more than refurbished equipment from before the Great Depression.

On North Shore Line tracks and in the streets of Milwaukee, the cars ran under trolley wires using traditional trolley poles for electrical pickup. However, in Chicago the cars ran on the city's elevated commuter rail system using power from a third rail shoe on each truck. Rounded ends and full-swing couplers let the North Shore Line cars negotiate the tight curves encountered on urban streets and elevated lines. These cars were slightly over 55' long and normally seated 52 passengers in the coaches.

The prototype dining car, built by Pullman in the late 1920s, was the same length as the coaches without traction motors or trolley poles. Electricity for the car's heat and lights came from the powered cars via cables. However, the dining car did have control equipment at each end for running the train if necessitated by the car's chance location at the head of its train.

I understand that many of the North Shore Line's cars from the late 1920s and early 1930s were capable of speeds in the 80–90 mph range. Some are still operable today at railway museums, while others are on static display.





Construction and Features

Our 1:48 scale three-car set of North Shore Line Silverliners consists of a powered and a nonpowered coach plus a non-powered dining car. This set was 1 of 50

Silverliners built for 3-rail operation, and an additional 25 sets were built in the North Shore Line's Greenliner livery. Sunset/3rd Rail built the same number of sets for 2-rail operation. The powered coach is lettered as car number 739, while

the nonpowered or dummy coach is number 738. The dining car is lettered as number 415, which was the only prototype diner repainted in the Silverliner scheme.

As with all 3rd Rail products, the Silverliners were handcrafted in China from flat and etched sheet brass plus lost wax brass castings. I understand from Scott Mann, president of Sunset/3rd Rail, that the red paint on the models is an exact match for the color of the real Silverliners. In a phone conversation with Scott, he explained how he and his builder went through numerous attempts before they achieved success with the paint color. I can't attest to the accuracy of the red paint, but I can say without reservation that the shadow gray striping over the base silver does an amazing job of simulating fluted stainless steel.

As with prior products from 3rd Rail, the exterior of each car is highly detailed, as shown in the photos. The trolley poles are cosmetic only and can be put either in the raised position or latched down. As on the real North Shore Line cars, trolley poles are only on the coaches and not on the

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dining car. However, all three cars have simulated wooden walkways on their roofs.

On both 3-rail and 2-rail versions, operating scale Kadee couplers mounted in sprung draft gear boxes couple the three cars together. Because each car as well as the complete train is bidirectional with either end running forward, both the powered and dummy coaches have a headlight mounted realistically on the vestibule door on one end. Naturally, the headlight faces the track ahead, or behind. At the other end of each coach, the end door has prototypical brackets for holding a headlight. Only the headlight on the powered coach is directional—the headlight on the dummy coach lights continuously regardless of the train's direction. No headlight or mounting brackets are on the dining car.

Details underneath the floor of each car are profuse with a number of them visible at normal viewing angles. I especially liked the detailing on the truck side frames, which are lost wax castings. Even the third rail pickup shoes of the real cars are cast into these side frames. Of course, only

holding the car upside down reveals the full effect of the underside detailing. What really surprised me was the handsome dark brown satin finish rather than the flat black usually painted on railcar undersides and trucks, especially since the passenger steps and tube pilots on each car are gloss black.

Each truck on the powered and dummy cars carries a center-rail pickup roller. On the powered coach, a small DC motor with a gearbox on each axle powers each truck, and a pair of rubber tires provides excellent traction. According to Scott, the powered coach pulled not only



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its two dummy cars but also a six-car set of his Golden Gate Depot streamline passenger cars. Inside the powered coach, electronics for the TMCC, Cruise Commander, and RailSounds 4.0 systems occupy nearly two thirds of the coach area and are hidden behind bulkheads and blackened windows.

As attractive and detailed as the individual cars are on the outside, their interiors are the set's star attraction. The forward third of the powered coach as well as the entire dummy coach has coach seating with several painted figures in place as passengers. The dining car interior has not only the dining section complete with tables, chairs, and passengers but also the kitchen area. Both the dummy cars also have the requisite lavatories, but with clear windows instead of the prototypically correct frosted glass. After all, with frosted windows, the interior details would be hidden from view. The control stations at both ends of each car are modeled and are also closed off making full vestibules for passenger entry and exit from the car. I

expected at least the station at the front of the powered coach to be set up for running the train with a motorman at the controls, but not so. A voltage-regulated LED light strip mounted in the roof of each car provides constant brightness lighting of each car's interior.

At Trackside

From their inaugural run and through my entire review, the Silverliner's motors and drive gears were delightfully quiet. With a low gear ratio, startups were slow and smooth with no lunging or jerking. I expected the same performance characteristic throughout the train's entire speed range and was pleased with the show the Silverliners put on.

On the editorial Carpet Central Railroad's Atlas O72 and O54 main lines, O72 crossovers, and a temporary loop with O45 curves, the Silverliners tracked without fault. Their minimum curve is advertised as O42, and given the limited swing

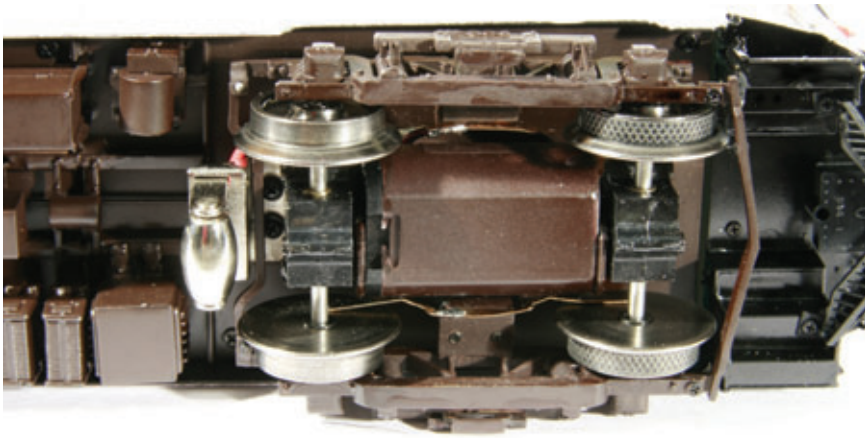
of the scale couplers, that's pretty good. The only operating anomaly I noticed was the dining car lifted slightly as it tracked through the crossover between my two main lines. The problem turned out to be that one of the pickup roller assemblies wouldn't telescope as it should. After a minor adjustment plus some light oil on the metal frame for the roller, the car tracked solidly.

As delivered, the Cruise Commander board is set up for 100 speed steps with speed control enabled. Except for a couple of turns around the CCRR in conventional operation, I ran the Silverliners exclusively using command control. I found the combination of the Cruise Commander with the truck-mounted DC motors to be pleasingly responsive to changes in the throttle settings for increasing or decreasing the train's speed.

To select 32 or 100 speed steps and to turn the speed control on or off, the Cruise Commander uses command sequences entered through the hand-held controllers. Running the Silverliners with 100 speed steps requires either the original TMCC system or a Legacy control system operating in CAB-1 mode. Entering the Silverliner into my Legacy system as a TMCC locomotive with RailSounds worked fine in 32-step operation without having to reconfigure the Cruise Commander board. But in a nutshell, I preferred 100-step operation.

As the performance testing results show, the three cars of the Silverliner set with their small motors and LED lighting strip are literally cool runners. Their current draw proved to be incredibly low—so low that I ran two sets of tests just to verify the readings.





At the End of the Run

For the traction fan and modeler, the North Shore Line Silverliner set could prove interesting. Yes, its retail price is expensive, but considering the set is hand-built brass and available only in small double-digit numbers, it could definitely have an appeal. 🗣️

North Shore Line Silverliner set

Retail price: \$1,199.95 at 3rd Rail or 3rd Rail dealers

800-373-7245; www.3rdrail.com

Silverliner Performance

(sound: on; speed control: on)

Weight of Powered Coach: 2 lbs, 12 oz

Weight of Nonpowered Diner: 2 lbs, 4 oz

Weight of Nonpowered Coach: 2 lbs, 9 oz

Distance Between Pickup Rollers: 4-1/4"

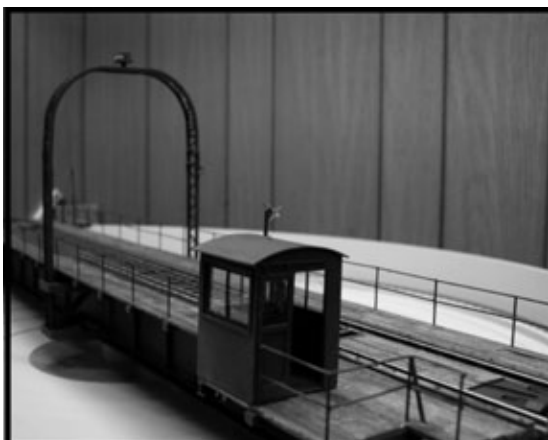
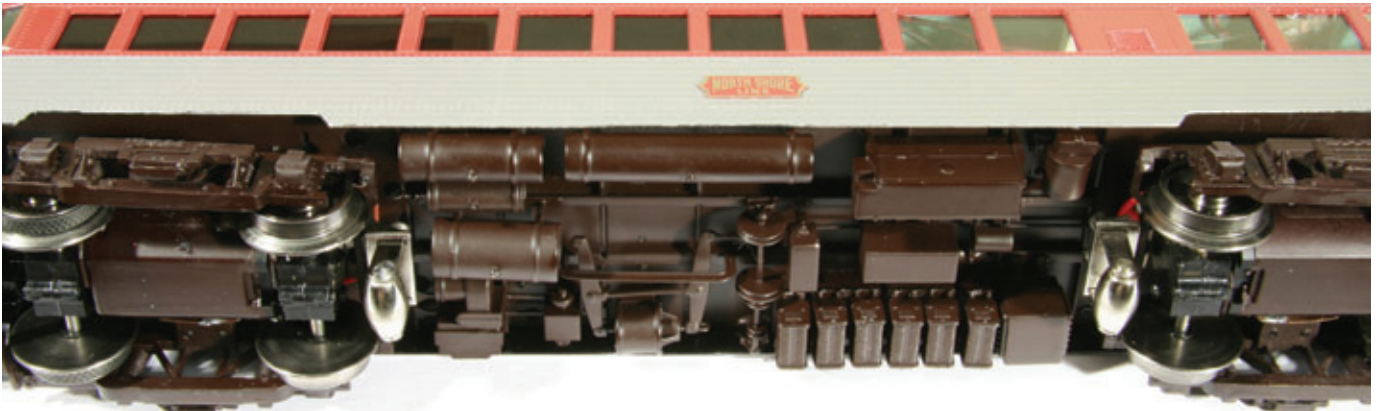
Tractive Effort: 1 lb, 8 oz @ 7.9V, 4.1 A, 32.4 W

Minimum Sustained Speed @ 18 VAC:

2 scale mph @ 0.3 A, 5 W

Maximum Tested Speed @ 18 VAC:

60 scale mph @ 0.9 A, 16 W



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