

# NVisible

by Patrick G. Lana, MMR photos by Travis Searls

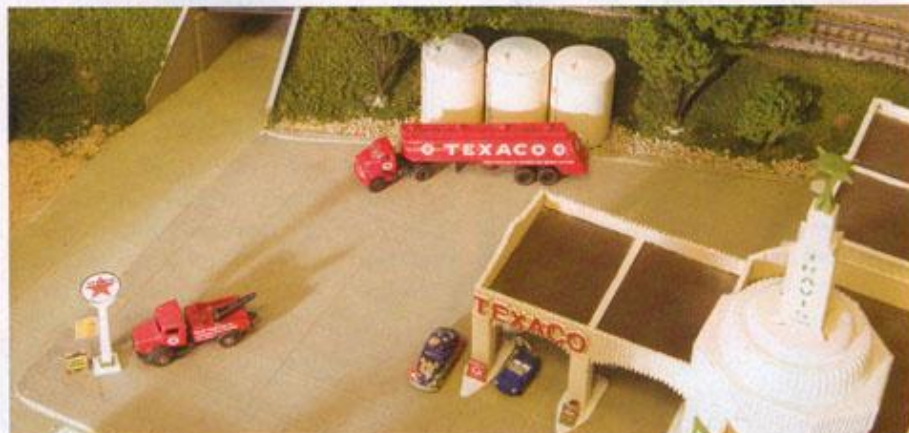
## A Day at Travis Tower

Usually, a “Day at ABC Tower” in the model railroader or railfan lingo means a day of train watching. Not so at Travis Tower. Travis Tower is a highway truck stop. A truck stop?! Although trains are my first hobby interest and modeling subjects, I have to admit that vehicles (cars and trucks) take a close second.

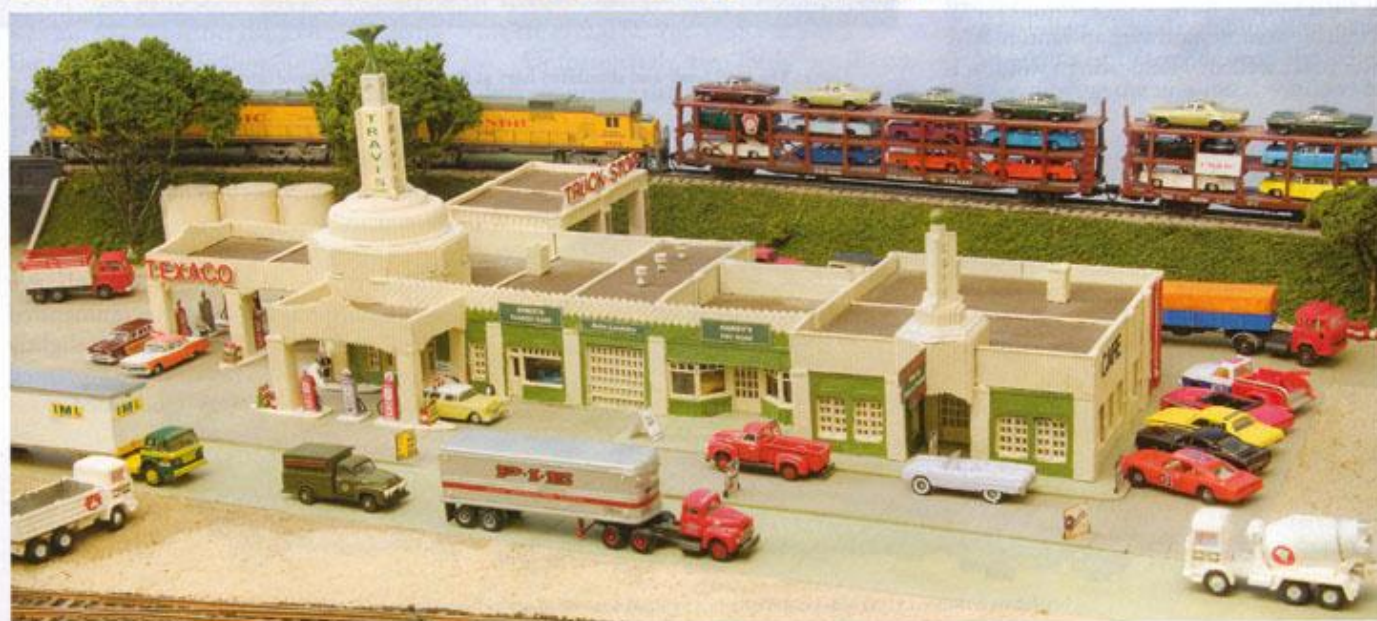
*Below:* At 8:45AM, a Texaco tanker arrives to fill the station fuel tanks. The tractor and tanker are Sylvan resin kits. The tanks and wrecker are from DPM's Jerry Riggs Quick Service kit. Modeling 1968, I had to have a VW with flowers! The bug's inspiration was a Franklin Mint (FM) diecast 1/24 scale model of a 1967 VW Flower Power Beetle. This is a Wiking N scale VW brush painted blue with artwork for custom decals from various wallpaper samples and photos of the FM car on the Internet. The blue sports car is a Micro machine “Mini.”



*Above:* At 6:30AM, first responders arrive for a donut daze. From left to right, the patrol cars represent a 1968 Iowa Highway Patrol car (repainted CMW 1967 Ford police car), Adam-12 Squad Car from the 1960-70s' TV series (repainted Kato Toyota with scratchbuilt lights and custom decals), California Highway Patrol Buick Century from the 1955-59 Highway Patrol TV series (Kit bashed Lineside Models '55 Chevy), Mayberry Sheriff Car from 1960-68 Andy Griffith TV show (kit bashed Lineside Model '65 Ford), 1930s Police car from the Dick Tracy Movie (1990s Ertl from the box), '67 Ford police cruiser (CMW from the box), and a 1948 Ford police panel (CMW from the box). The two fire trucks are Micro Machine toys and the fire chief car is a CMW car from the box. Northbound Train 22, the *Morning Mail*, passes in the background.



*Below:* It's high noon at Travis Tower. At the café are Boss Hogg's white Cadillac DeVille, the General Lee Charger, the 1969 black Dodge Charger, Daisy's yellow Plymouth Roadrunner, and Cooter's red, white, and blue tow truck from the Dukes of Hazzard 1/144 series produced by Racing Champions in the 1990s. The other vehicles in the photo are from CMW, WS, or Wiking. Southbound Train 121, the *Fast Ford*, transports new cars and parts from the Ford Twin Cities Assembly Plant to the Ford Kansas City “Claycomo” Assembly Plant. The MicroTrains autoracks carry die cast CMW 1967 Fords on the easily seen top deck and repainted cheap plastic Bachmann cars on the two harder-to-see lower decks. This arrangement makes the autoracks top heavy but less expensive and not as heavy overall as a full load of die cast CMW cars. Why did I use 1967 Fords in August 1968? Because they were the only good-looking Ford model available in N scale close to my time period.





Above: Ernie's Classic Car shipment arrives at 2:15PM. The trailer is a generic version of auto transports used in the 1950s and early 1960s. It is scratchbuilt from styrene using photos of a Danbury Mint diecast 1/24 scale 1954 four-car carrier as a guide. The semi-tractor is an Athearn Ford "C." The blue car represents the 1951 Hudson Hornet that played Doc in the movie "Cars" and is from a Disney/Pixar board game called "Tractor Tipping." The black and red cars are Ertl models made in the 1990s from the movie "Dick Tracy," representing Tracy's 1936 Ford Coupe and Tess' 1937 Plymouth, respectively. The last car is a CMW 1948 Ford Woody from the box. This may be Ernie's Dream Car!

When I was a pre-teen, one of our favorite Sunday family activities was to go to the Pine Inn Truck Stop on what was then U.S. 30 (The Lincoln Highway) through Cedar Rapids, Iowa. This was before I-80 was built so there were a lot of trucks on U.S. 30. We would have a truckers' humongous-calorie meat-n-potatoes dinner (the

big rigs in the parking area and the service station.

You probably think this is a pretty weird place for Sunday lunch after church, but Mom was glad to not have to cook (albeit she was probably bored) while my brother, Dad, and I oohed and aahed at the rigs while eating our fill. When we traveled



Above: The supper crowd arrives at 6PM. The Tower Truck Service building on the right is part of the Travis Tower Truck Stop. It advertises "Rapid Rig Repair" to "Keep Big Wheels Rolling." Vehicles from left to right: Woodland Scenics Travel Trailer, CMW IH tractor with P-I-E flatbed, GHQ White tractor kit with custom-decaled ICX Atlas trailer, Athearn Ford "C" Tractor with Atlas Custom-decaled Chippewa trailer, CMW IH tractor with Navajo Aero Van trailer, GHQ Kenworth Bullnose tractor kit, and two Micro Machines heavy duty wreckers under the Pioneer Village sign. Northbound Train 268, the Golden Prairie manifest, is in the background.

noon meal) and watch the big over-the-road trucks come and go. As is the case for truck modeling, the more axles a truck had the better! We always tried to get a table with a window view so we could watch the

on summer vacations, we did the same thing at lunch, finding the biggest truck stop available and the best window view possible. Today, Annette and I still stop at travel plazas (modern name of truck stops) for

lunch, and she knows to find the seat for me with the best view of the trucks. If you can't have trains, trucks will do. That is why I needed a truck stop on my N-scale layout.

My Travis Tower Truck Stop is strategically located at the northwest corner of the intersection of Iowa Highway 2 and 25 in Valley Junction, Iowa. Valley Junction is named after West Des Moines, Iowa, where we lived in the late 1970s. Rock Island Railroad called it Valley Junction. Travis Tower is named after Travis Searls, who has provided many photos for my columns and is a key member of the Crandic crew. Travis also took all the photos for this August 10, 1968, "Day at Travis Tower." He shot 67 photos over the course of the day but we present the ones we thought best here.

The truck stop building is modeled after the Tower Conoco Station and U-Drop-Inn located at the corner of Route 66 (the Mother Road) and Highway 83 in Shamrock, Texas. The U-Drop Inn inspired Ramone's auto painting shop in the 2006 Disney/Pixar movie "Cars." The movie is where I first saw the building. Today, it has been fully restored and serves as the Chamber of Commerce office and as a tourism office/museum. Source: <http://www.legendsofamerica.com/TX-Shamrock.html>.

I freelanced the building because of my space requirements and the building parts I had available. My Travis Tower Truck Stop includes a Texaco Service Station and the Old Home Fill-er Up And Keep On Truckin' Café. The cafe is named after the Pisgah, Iowa, cafe of the same name featured in the popular 1970s song of the same name sung by C.W. McCall. Source: <http://www.roadsideamerica.com/tip/6016>.

Between the station and the café are two shops; Ernie's Classic Cars and Harry's Hot Rods. Ernie's is named for retired co-worker Ernie Oakes who rebuilds classic cars and is my go-to "car guy" for questions I may have. Growing up in Southern California, Ernie's way of life was surfing and cars. He has been in hot rods or classic car reconstruction since the late 1960s. When I met him, he had a 1947 Chevy convertible and now owns a 1962 Chevy Impala SS. He is considering selling his '62 to purchase the car of his dreams, a 1951 Ford Woody Station Wagon.



Harry's Hot Rods is for Harry Lindsay, who is a fellow model railroader and builder of hot rods for 55 years. A life member of the NMRA, he has a 20x43-foot HO layout and is Assistant Superintendent of the NMRA South Suburban Division, Rocky Mountain Region. He currently owns six rebuilt/refurbished cars but has sold another three. I don't know where Harry finds time, but he is currently a member of the National Street Rod Association, the Goodguys Street Rod Association, and the Early Ford

*Above: It's 7:30PM, and the Tower of Power Hot Rod Show N Classic Cruise-In is that last event of the day. We've captured some of the full crowd of hot rods and classic cars. I believe I see my first car, a red 1965 Mustang notchback, in the display line! All the car models here are 1/144 Racing Champions Motor Trend and Hot Rod lines, except for the white 1953 Corvette roadster which is from the Hallmark Corvette's 50th Anniversary Christmas ornament.*

rene parts from the 1:200 scale Revell Off-Shore Oil Rig North Cormorant (a great kit for building parts), a milk bottle lid (under the main tower), sidewalks from structure kits used for facades, and various pieces of sheet styrene. The gas pumps were made from sheet styrene and the graphics were copied on a printer and glued on the gas pump faces. A small wire represents the pump hoses. Service station details like tire stacks are from DPM's Jerry Riggs Quick Service kit. All signs on the building were computer generated.

One visitor to my layout said he didn't know there were so many autos and trucks made for N scale. Well, there are and there aren't. There are more commercially available highway vehicles today than a few years ago but they don't always fit the era or time period one is modeling. I have used a number of vehicles that are 1/144, 1/148, 1/150, and other various scales close to 1:160 or N scale. The size difference is usually not apparent if the various scale vehicles are not placed side by side. I have also repainted, kitbashed or scratchbuilt a number of the vehicles.

Following is a list of manufacturers of scale vehicles that I use along with acronyms in the corresponding photo captions: Athearn, Atlas, Classic Metal Works (CMW), Design Preservation Models (DPM), Ertl, GHQ, Kato, Lineside Models, Racing Champions, Sylvan Resin Kits,

Wiking, and Woodland Scenics (WS). I have also used Galoob Micro Machines toys that are slightly larger than N scale, vehicles from board games and some Hallmark Christmas ornament vehicles.

Kent Charles made the custom decals on an ALPS printer for the vehicles shown. N-Joy a day at Travis Tower! 🚗



*Above: Tow Mater stops by to see Lightning McQueen at 3:30PM. After he learned Lightning would be at Harry's Hot Rods, Tow Mater came for a visit from Pammelia, Iowa, where he can usually be found in Dr. Bob's parking space at Hochstetter Hub. Both vehicles are from the movie "Cars" and are from a Disney/Pixar board game called "Tractor Tipping."*

V-8 Club. Quoting Harry, "I build cars to drive, even though I put them in car shows from time to time. The fun is in the journey, not the destination." That is true of model railroading as well.

The truck stop model is built of DPM building modules, various corrugated sty-

HO Scale

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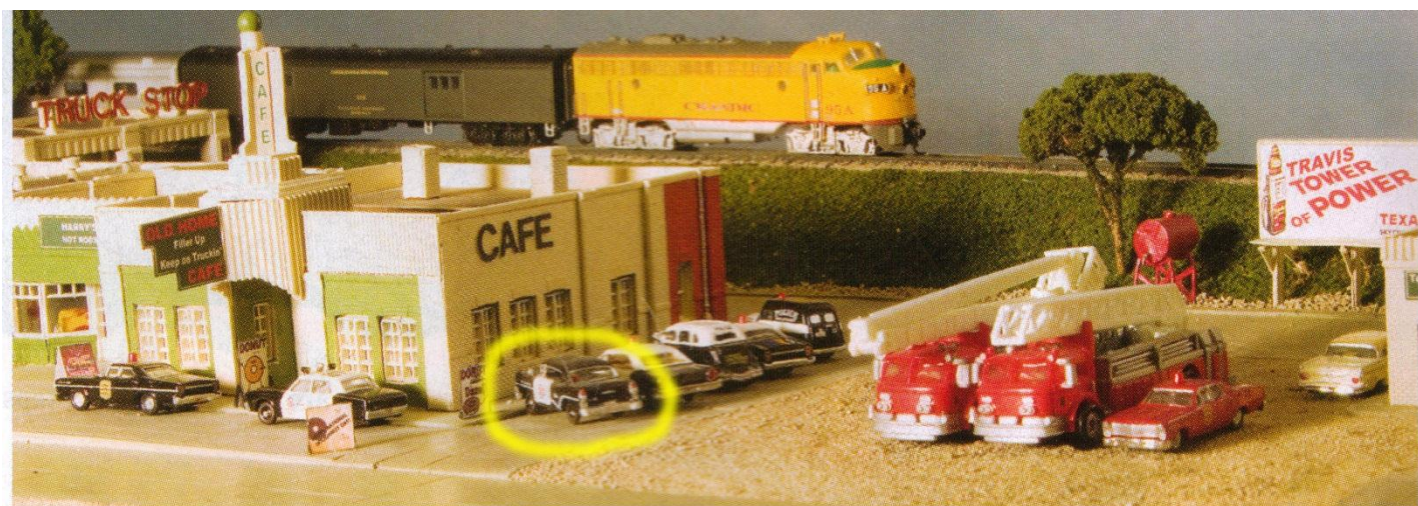
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