THREE TIMES around the tree

by Neil Besougloff

We all saw the movie The Polar Express, right? In one scene, the Polar Express passenger train spirals up a mountain peak like a red stripe around a barber pole.

Here’s an O gauge track plan in which a train spirals up and down a white slope beneath the boughs of a Christmas tree. The track plan you see here features O-42 tubular track curves, a tunnel, and a 45-degree crossing. It all fits in a 6½- by 6½-foot space.

Elevation plays a key role in this plan. One of the three loops is flat but at a height 5½ inches above the base of the layout. The other two loops are split between climbing to the upper level of the layout and descending to its base.

The best way to build this layout is by using the “cookie-cutter method.” First, fit pieces of plywood together to create a 6½-foot square. Then set down your track, and use a marker trace its roadbed path (about 1 inch to the left and 1 inch to the right of the ties) on the plywood.

Next, where the track climbs or descends, use a saber saw to cut those lines. Don’t, however, completely cut out those pieces. Lastly, use shims below the cut sections to raise the track roadbed to the necessary height.

If you are still confused, look at the diagram on the next page, which shows how the cookie-cutter method works for a figure-8 layout.

If you’re not into cutting cookies, you can use Lionel or MTH graduated tres-
16 inches on center

1-by-4 select pine frame and crosspieces

Risers and braces as required

1-by-4 pine risers with 1-by-1 cleats

½-inch plywood roadbed, cut out as needed for track, structures, and scenic features

“Cookie-cutter method”

LIONEL O GAUGE TUBULAR TRACK COMPONENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Description/Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>half-straight (65505)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>single straight (65500)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>custom-cut straight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>0-42 curve (12925)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>0-42 custom-cut curve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>K-Line O-42 right-hand track switch (K0374)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>45-degree crossing (65545)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>track bumper (260)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Suggested accessories

**Lionel**
Number/Product
356 operating freight station
445 railroad switch tower

**Gilbert**
Number/Product
571 truss bridge

Tunnel beneath raised 45-degree crossing section
Tricky scenery transition where inner line descends while outer line climbs
Grades up and down to raised section of layout

Orange or maroon American Flyer no. 571 truss bridge adds a touch of color to the winter scenery

Tunnel portal
K-Line O-42 track switch creates short storage spur
3½-foot-diameter opening for base of Christmas tree
Retaining wall between levels of track
Lionel no. 356 operating freight station
Lionel no. 445 operating switch tower protects crossing
Lionel no. 356 operating freight station
45-degree crossing (65545)
track bumper (260)

“Cookie-cutter method”