

Model Railway Photography

Guidance notes prepared by Peco Publications

You will need a digital camera and a separate tripod. The camera will need;

- adjustable shooting modes on a dial; Auto, P, A, S, M etc.
- adjustable white light balance
- auto focus facility
- self timer
- tripod mounting screw
- viewing screen for live-view composition (although normal viewfinders can be used)

Also ensure that the camera image resolution is set to maximum.

There are four key requirements for achieving photographs of model railway layouts that are suitable for publication with a digital camera.

These are;

- 1) Getting as much even lighting on the subject as possible
- 2) Getting maximum depth of field (ie image in focus from front to back of the picture)
- 3) Getting the correct colour balance in the picture
- 4) Avoiding certain elements of the scene clashing with others (eg the front of a loco hidden behind a signal)

Taking each one in turn;

1) Getting as much even lighting on the subject as possible

If the layout is portable take it outside on a bright but slightly overcast day. Direct sunshine can create heavy/dense shadows, so it is best avoided. If the layout is permanently housed in a room without it's own lighting, then you need to find ways to maximise the available light. Purpose made photographic lights are expensive but portable workshop lights, as sold by Screwfix and other DIY outlets can be used. These can be up to 1000 watts and if need be, be directed at the ceiling to bounce the light back and create even illumination. Naturally, as these are designed primarily for garage or workshop use, care must be observed and the manufacturers safety guidelines observed. If such portable lighting is not an option, then use maximum power bulbs in the room lighting fixtures and introduce portable lighting fixtures; lamp standards, angle poise etc.

Electronic flash is only really useful when a powerful stand-alone unit with a rotatable flash head (on-camera integrated flash guns are rarely any good) is used. Even then they need to be diffused or bounced off the ceiling to create

even illumination. Diffusing or bouncing the light also reduces the amount of light falling on the subject and underexposure might occur.

2) Getting maximum depth of field

To ensure as much of the picture is in focus, set the shooting mode to A (aperture priority) then set the aperture to the maximum f number (smallest aperture). depending on the camera this might be, f8, f16, f22 or even a higher number. In aperture priority mode the camera will automatically determine the exposure time. Usually, with indoor lighting, this might be anything between 1/10 second and 15 seconds depending on the amount of illumination. Obviously, as it is impossible to hold a camera steady for these exposure times, the camera must be mounted on a tripod to hold it steady during the exposure. Compose the picture by adjusting its position on the tripod. Let the autofocus facility focus the lens - this usually selects the optimum focus for the picture. Then use the self timer facility (set to a max of 10 seconds) when you press the shutter - this ensures any vibrations you may set up in the camera when pressing the shutter die down before the camera makes the exposure.

3) Getting the correct colour balance in the picture.

For this you use the white balance adjustment on the camera, the easiest is probably to set it to auto white balance (AWB) though more accurate colour balance can sometimes be achieved by setting the white balance to match the illumination source (ie Sunshine, daylight, tungsten, fluorescent, etc)

4) Avoiding certain elements of the scene clashing with others

This is a matter of composition and is of course subjective, but it is about positioning stock on the layout so they form a pleasing composition. Avoid situations where signals obscure the front of the loco, or where signals are immediately behind the front of the loco and appear to 'grow' out of the loco chimney.

Download the photos as jpg files and forward them in that format either by e-mail - we can take it from there.

These notes are meant as a guide only and do not guarantee results.
Observe manufacturers operating instructions on all equipment being used.
It is the users responsibility to ensure his or her own safety and no liability will be accepted for any incident occurring whilst following these guidelines.