

RAILPACE 101:

08: Railpace Photo Selection Process

Our Photo Selection Process for Railpace Newsmagazine

Contributors occasionally ask us just how we do photo selection for Railpace each month.

It's actually a matrix of **subject matter, timeliness, composition, technical quality, and individual participation.**

Although we don't use a formalized, paper-scoring method (hey, we're talking train pictures here!) a lot of thought and evaluation goes into our monthly photo selection process.

Let's be specific, and look at a few of the many attributes that may get a particular photo into print.

Subject Matter:

Railpace is the Northeast's own rail magazine, so images from Maine to Virginia, and from the seacoast west through Ohio and West Virginia; and in Canada from Ontario and the Atlantic provinces, are top candidates.

Images from elsewhere in the country are less likely to be selected, unless it's something **strongly tied-in to the East**, such as an NJ Transit engine out West, or an engine or equipment moving to or from its home in the Northeast.

Railpace covers **mainline, shortline, commuter, Light Rail and rail transit, diesel, steam and electric, organized fan events, museums and preservation efforts.**

The Same Old..... Same Old:

Keep in mind that many of the "annual" organized rail events get rather repetitious, year-after-year.

We may run a shot of this year's event, to acknowledge that it occurred, but to avoid getting into an editorial rut, we can't justify running a "blowout" on most of the regular events, year-after-year. How many times can we run the same image of New Hope & Ivyland #40 on the trestle at Hood, or East Broad Top #15 at the station in Orbisonia, or the RBB&B Circus Train at North Elizabeth, NJ (spare us!), the annual Santa Claus train, etc. etc.

That doesn't mean we can't use *any* shot of these fine events, it just means you should **think of new, creative angles, different photo locations, different equipment**, etc., instead of the Same Old, Same Old... that we ran last year, and the year before, and the year before that. Look at an issue or two from previous years to see the photo coverage that we published of that event, and keep in mind that a couple dozen *other* photographers are probably e-mailing us more of the same

Timeliness:

Railpace is a **NEWS** Magazine, thus photos taken **within the last month** are top contenders.

That roll of film you finally got around to getting processed from last winter's Santa Claus Train just doesn't cut it.

And timeliness can be measured in days or even hours— following a major rail event, such as a Rail Fest, fan trip, railfan weekend, open house, new line opening, new service inaugural, etc., **we get deluged with dozens of shots from multiple contributors.**

Your chances are best if you **get your images here fast**, as we are often on deadline, and trying to get coverage of that event into the next issue! You snooze... you lose. **Think like a journalist**, and scoop the competition!

Composition:

Photo composition is a very important attribute in photo selection.

In a 3/4 "action" shot, strive to avoid cutting off the train, even if the main point of interest is the lead locomotive. Everyone knows what a Dash-9 looks like. By including the train, and even a bit of the scene in your composition, you help establish location identity.

Recently we've been deluged with photos of motive power and trains photographed "somewhere in the woods," with little or no "location identity." **Most photos that don't get published are declined for this reason alone.**

Include some "prop" in your photo that indicates **where it is taken**, which often is the reason it's newsworthy to begin with.

Try to avoid shooting in mid-day, high-angle, overhead sun during the longer days of the year, which mutes colors, reduces contrast, and blacks out running gear. And avoid shooting on the wrong side of the sun (dark side).

Just Say No when the weather is dark and gray, unless it is something that absolutely cannot be re-photographed (properly) in better weather, such as the Lake Shore Limited detouring on the D&H, etc.

We understand that rail events happen in all types of weather, but since color space in the magazine is limited, and we are overwhelmed with great material, we pick the best— and the brightest!

Technical Quality:

For digital photographers, this means sending us your **out-of-the-camera, high-resolution, JPEG file**, before editing. If you try to pump up color or contrast, sharpen, and make other changes, we are forced to guess what you did, and sometimes "Edit un-do" your efforts to try get your image into the proper mode for 4-color reproduction.

For film shooters, this means finding a decent quality photo processor.

Equally important for both digital and film shooters, is contributing images that are in-focus, not blurred, properly exposed, normal contrast, with accurate colors.

To maintain high quality, we cannot accept color prints or film negatives.

Participation:

Railpace has always maintained a photo policy "open to everyone." There is no "Good 'Ole Boy" network here, where the same photographers monopolize the news and feature pages month-after-month. Take a few minutes to look at the past few months' issues, and you will see **many new names each month**.

We do make an extra effort to select photos from first-time contributors and our younger readers, subject of course, to the qualifications listed above. You don't have to be "famous" or be a pro— just send us the quality images that we are looking for.

Making the Final Cut

Sometimes, a photo will be selected and placed in the layout of the magazine we are currently preparing, only to be "bumped out" by a last-minute news scoop or a better-composed view.

The jilted shot may be used the following month, or it may just be sidelined. Such is the milieu of news reporting, whether print, radio, or TV— The kitten-rescued-from-the-tree story may run on a slow news day, but be bumped the minute something gets blown up in Iraq. The same is true in the world of rail news.

We do appreciate each and every contribution we receive from our reader/ contributors.

Each month, we are blessed with an abundance of really great material— far more than we can possibly include in each issue, and we strive to avoid running "postage-stamp-size" photos in an attempt to shoe-horn everything in.

If you've had a recent photo published in Railpace, congratulations! If you have contributed, even on more than one occasion, but have not seen your work in print, consider the preceding qualifications for photo selection, and please continue to share with us more of your work!

Thanks for your support of Railpace Newsmagazine.

If you have questions or suggestions, kindly e-mail us at: railpace@ptd.net