

## Dear Editor

Recently I have seen a new emphasis in NARCOA on the care and feeding of hi-rails, especially the very well written SETOFF article by Tom Falicon, and I wanted to add a couple of things I have learned in two years of hi-railing.

I got the hi-rail bug three years ago from Doug Gentiles on one of Warren's runs on the Lehigh RR. Doug gave me some good advice as well as his opinion that RAFNA Railgear, made and sold by G and B Specialties in Berwick PA. was as good as it gets. Doug puts 6000+ miles on the rails each year, so when my wife and I decided to build a new hi-rail I went and spent a day with Jake Sanute, the gentleman who installs the Rafna gear in Berwick and travels all over North America training others to do the same.

I had pretty much decided to upgrade from my 7.3 liter Ford workhorse to a new Ford diesel, but Jake changed all that when he explained the difference in front end construction between Ford and GMC trucks. They are both well built, but the geometry is very different so when the large hi-rail rims and tires are put on, the Fords have to have steering stops welded in to keep the tires from hitting the truck. This really increases the already big turning radius. Steering stops are not required on GMC trucks, even with the 19.5 inch 16 ply tires I run. So the choice was easy, and I am very glad I didn't buy the truck first!

During the installation, Jake mentioned that anytime I felt that the gear might be out of alignment to just spray some paint on the wheels and run a few miles to see how it wore off. I went him one better because I take a moment after each run to paint the wheels so they look decent 'till the next run and don't get all rusted. This year, during the Lehigh run I looked at the front wheels, and as you can see from the pictures I attached, the gear had been tracking with the flange of one wheel tight to the railhead, as evidenced by the total lack of paint near the flange on one wheel. This makes it far more likely that you will "pick a point" and possibly end up on the ground.

When Jake and I did the annual inspection this year he taught me how to align the gear and I bought a set of fixtures "just in case". We set the truck on our 2x4 tracks and checked it out. One wheel was 1/4 inch out of position and about 1/8 inch out of perpendicularity with the rail, probably as a result of some of the less-than-perfect rail I had run on. With those seemingly tiny adjustments made to put the gear back in specification the tracking went back to right down the middle of the wheels. I found it hard to believe that such small adjustments made such a noticeable difference in tracking.

So after two seasons and about 1800 miles of hi-railing I still don't have any tire tracks on my re-railing blocks, and I have a very happy spouse!

**Keith L. Knowlton**

