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# Quick & Easy FLEXTRACK

DAP All Purpose Adhesive Caulk and topper tape – quicker ways to lay track

By Chuck Hitchcock • Photos by the author

**W**hile attending a weekend of operating sessions a few years ago, I found that many of the layout builders I visited were using new techniques for laying track. Instead of using spikes or contact cement, they were laying track with DAP All Purpose Adhesive Caulk and topper tape (a material used to insulate pickup truck caps).

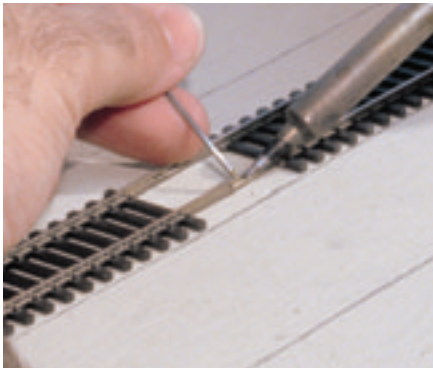
I found this interesting, but not useful to me at the moment since I was still operating on my Argentine Division layout. Later, however, when I began work on my new Argentine Industrial District Ry., these new tracklaying techniques came to mind and so I decided to give them a try.

▲ While attending an operations weekend, author Chuck Hitchcock learned that several layout owners were using DAP's All Purpose Adhesive Caulk and topper tape to lay their track. He'll explain how you can use these materials to lay flextrack.

### DAP All Purpose Adhesive Caulk

Gluing flextrack to plywood or other surfaces is nothing new. But laying track with DAP's All Purpose Adhesive Caulk is – and in my opinion a technique far superior to traditional tracklaying methods. The caulk is easier to use than other products because it doesn't have to be applied to both surfaces, and it stays workable for 15 to 20 minutes. This material is also very tacky, so hand pressure is all that is necessary to set the track in place.

Before laying any track, you'll want to build up an inventory of track sections, because the tracklaying process goes quickly. If you're laying straight sections of flextrack, cut a tie off each end and add a pair of rail joiners. For curved track, cut three ties off each end of the flextrack, add rail joiners, and solder the joiners together to create a 6-foot-long section of track as shown in fig. 1.



**Fig. 1 SOLDERING JOINTS.** To avoid kinks at flextrack joints on curves, Chuck solders two sections together before putting them in place. First, he removes three ties from each end; then he adds rail joiners; and, finally, he solders the rails together. Replacement ties can be added once the track is in place.



**Fig. 2 SPREADING CAULK.** Chuck lays about an  $\frac{1}{8}$ " bead of DAP All Purpose Adhesive Caulk and spreads along the pencil guideline. A thin layer of caulk is sufficient for holding the track in place. If the material squeezes up between the ties, you're using too much.



**Fig. 3 PRESSING IT DOWN.** Once Chuck had the caulk spread along the pencil guideline, he was ready to lay track. Since the caulk is very tacky, a mere press of the hands is all that is required to hold the track in place. A visual inspection helps ensure the track is aligned properly.



**Fig. 4 REMOVING TRACK.** One advantage of adhesive caulk is that it allows you to remove track without damage. In this photo, Chuck uses a putty knife to carefully lift a section of track. Chuck was even able to re-use some sections of track that he removed on other parts of the layout.



**Fig. 5 TOPPER TAPE ON STRAIGHTS.** For straight sections of track, Chuck leaves the protective skin on the tape while he applies it to the layout. Leaving the skin on keeps the tape straight and unstretched, and makes it easier to align along the pencil line.



**Fig. 6 TOPPER TAPE ON CURVES.** The protective skin has to be removed to bend the tape around curves. It's important not to stretch the tape on curves so it will maintain an even thickness. Once the tape is in place, Chuck lays a bead of adhesive caulk on the tape before installing the track.

With a track inventory on hand, you're ready to begin laying track. Start by tracing lines along the outside edges of the ties with a pencil. This not only ensures that the track will be aligned properly, but it gives you a precise line for spreading the caulk and laying the track.

Once you've finished tracing the outline of the track, you can start applying the adhesive caulk as in fig. 2. A thin layer is sufficient – if caulk squeezes up between the ties, you're using too much. When the track is where you want it, simply press it down with your hands, as seen in fig. 3. You may also want to sight along the rails to be sure everything is in alignment.

By using a sparing amount of caulk, you'll be able to take up track sections without damage if you decide to make changes. I was able to remove previously laid sections of track with a putty knife, as seen in fig. 4, and re-use them on another portion of the layout.

### Topper tape

The second option for laying track is using topper tape, a self-adhesive vinyl foam tape used to insulate pickup truck

caps. The tape provides extra height for modeling a heavily ballasted roadbed and is available in a variety of widths and thicknesses. However, since it's tacky on only one side, you'll still need to use the adhesive caulk to hold the track in place. The tape can be easily trimmed to width with a razor blade.

How you use the tape on the layout will determine how you apply it. For straight sections of track, leave the protective skin on the tape until after it's applied, as shown in fig. 5. On curved track, the protective skin must be removed before the tape is applied. It's also important not to stretch the tape on curved sections of track, otherwise the thickness will be affected. The finished curves can be seen in fig. 6.

### Putting it to the test

The track on the Argentine Industrial District Ry. has been in place nearly a year and I've had no problems. The adhesive caulk is much faster and easier to use, and it allows you to lay nearly perfectly aligned track. Now I'm using the adhesive caulk to bond plastic to plastic, wood to plastic, and wood to wood. So give it a try. I think you'll be pleasantly surprised with the results. ♣