

# A little History of Split Jaw Rail Clamps

By Jeff Lange, [Rose City Garden Railway Society](#)

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As most of you know, I still run track power for my entire outdoor layout, so I try to maintain good connections between each section of track that I have installed. My original LGB track came in different lengths of straight and curved sections with rail joiners attached, one at each end. Putting these sections together worked well initially but, with time, the joints began to loosen and slightly pull apart thus, disrupting the flow of electricity through the rails. I purchased the additional black plastic LGB track clips that attach underneath the tie strips, holding two sections of tracks together. Again, this worked well for a while until I began to elevate track on plastic pipes to gain elevation for the layout by a shaded tree-covered hillside. There was nothing underneath those track clips but air, and they began to work loose from the plastic tie strips and fall to the ground. I needed something more permanent to hold the track together at the joints, especially on the newer elevated sections of plastic PVC pipes.

I first learned about G scale track rail clamps when a fellow club member told me about an online publication called *Large Scale Online*. A company advertising on LSO by the name of *Hillman Rail Clamps* was selling metal rail clamps that attached on the ends of sectional track, holding each piece together. They were, at first, solid on both sides and required removing the existing rail joiners to install them. It required a bit of practice to join two separate pieces of track together, using the tightening tools available at that time. I purchased some of those clamps, attached them to my existing track, and for a while, they worked well. I believe they were steel, not solid brass, since they never faded in color to match the bronze patina that the LGB brass track takes on when exposed to sunlight and weather.

I first met Jerry and Jan Chapman at one of our club open houses, who joined our club shortly after I did. Jerry was developing a new type of rail clamp made out of brass. One side of each joiner was machined into two separate pieces, giving the 'split-jaw' effect when tightening the joiner onto two different rail pieces. These clamps were much easier to install

and weathered exactly as my track. I was happy to purchase them from Jerry, as did many other club members. Jerry's business rapidly took off when he proved how well the clamps worked on his own lengthy layout track in conducting electricity through the rails by connecting only two wires at one point near his transformer. I was impressed! I had previously purchased some long 5 foot pieces of LGB rail that were bendable. The rail sections came in a tube of twenty shipped over from

Germany without any rail joiners attached. Separate purchases of tie strips were required when using this type of rail. Jerry's first rail joiners were Brass code 332 and fit perfectly over the end of the sections to hold them securely together. My new dilemma was, do I manually remove the brass rail joiners from each sectional piece of track? Should I use his rail clamps to put the track back together? I decided to wait for a more cost-effective solution - once removed, an LGB rail joiner is ruined and cannot be re-installed. Glad I waited because Jerry eventually developed a new Brass Code 332 Over the Rail Joiner Clamp that worked perfectly after being installed over my sectional pieces with the existing joiners. As a bonus, the existing rail joiner left in place on the sectional track, in addition to the over the rail joiner clamp over the top, gave additional strength to the joints in my track, especially on the elevated sections. Especially true for switches that need positioning on flat surfaces and the ends kept parallel with the tracks leading up to and away from each switch. These over the rail joiner clamps work well with Aristocraft, LGB, and Piko code 332 Track.

Long story short, I have now installed exclusively Split Jaw Rail Clamps on every section of track and switch on my almost 1000 foot layout. With 16 LGB switches and a combination of pre-formed sectional and longer bendable track, this amounted to a large number of clamps. By purchasing Jerry's clamps in large discounted quantities and driving to his shop in Portland to pick them up saved me from paying sales tax and shipping and allowed me to see his manufacturing process and various products in pre- production and design. Jerry also graciously offered a club discount to our members interested in purchasing his products.

After many years in business, Jan and Jerry were getting ready to retire and close the business. Jerry notified the club that the last of his orders for all his customers were coming soon. I quickly took inventory of the track that I still had not installed and thought that I had purchased just enough clamps to finalize my layout at that time.

But, along came the 2019 National Garden Railways Convention, which our club hosted in Portland. I was inspired to make a larger switching yard on the patio, with longer runs for multiple trains. I needed to add additional track, switches, and also more rail clamps. Unfortunately, I had not figured in that I would not find any more brass, code 332, over the rail joiner clamps (coded BR 332-OJSJC), which were now on backorder from Jerry, and not available any longer. I again thought I would have to begin removing the existing rail joiners and use the smaller rail clamps I had leftover. I put the track expansion project on hold until I could find more of the type of clamps I needed. I searched to no avail, many G scale websites, e-Bay, and the advertising indexes of past issues of Garden Railway Magazine. After some time passed, I discovered David Bergmann's website as the new owner of Split Jaw Products, LLC. *(Product Review and pictures follow this article)*

*Installation and Maintenance:* The solid section of each joiner, regardless of what code of track, or type of material (brass or stainless steel), should be mounted on the inside edge of each track, with the 'split' section going on the outside. This adds additional strength to the rail joints, especially on curved sections. For those who run track power (like me), clean the surface of your track periodically, check each joiner after a long period of inactivity (usually the winter months) to make sure they are tightened properly and still making contact with each rail at the joints.

## Product Review

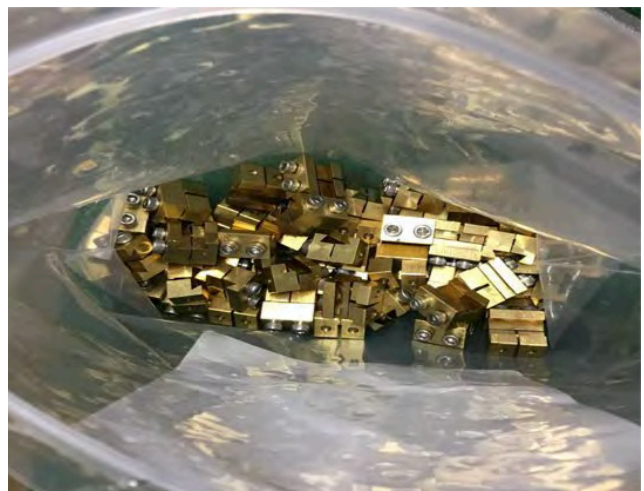
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[www.railclamp.com](http://www.railclamp.com)

Recently, I contacted Mr. Bergman and ordered a large bag (60) of BR-332-OJSJC, to finish up the installation of my extended trackage, rail yard, and large radius sectional curved track. When I mentioned Jerry Chapman (the founder and owner of Split Jaw in Portland) had offered a discount to current Rose City Garden Railway Society members when we ordered items from his company. David graciously offered me a 10% discount on my order. My cost per clamp from [www.railclamps.com](http://www.railclamps.com) ended up being approximately \$3.55 apiece, including shipping costs. Refer to the end of my review for David's extended offer for an RCGRS club discount.

The pictures I've taken show the larger over the rail joiner clamps attached to both Aristocraft code 332 brass track, and LGB code 332 brass track. One picture shows a size comparison between the two different types of rail clamps, with the larger pair being the ones I purchased recently. They install the same as the smaller version but fit perfectly over the existing rail joiner.

Packaged - over the rail joiner clamps





Comparison of Code 332 "normal" vs. " over the rail LGB rail joiners and Split Jaw over the rail joiner clamps



Aristocraft track with new over the rail joiners being installed



LGB track with new joiners being installed

