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MAY 2009

Coming Meetings

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June 13/14 Toowoomba Train Show

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July 18th Graham Emery

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August 15/16 Lynn Zelmer (Rockhampton)

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September 19th Justin Walker

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October 3/4/5 Sydney Anniversary Convention

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November 21st Ian Wellings

All meetings start at 1.30pm unless otherwise stated.

Our Appearance at the AMRA May Show

Well we finally made it to the best and biggest Model Train Show in Australia. The AMRA May Show has been one of our aims since we first started thinking about public displays.

This year we managed to get there after a lot of gnashing of teeth with our new free modules. Seven modules made by five members were joined together to make our industrial switching layout. It was just after Christmas that we somewhat idly talked about a new display layout.

Paul Skehan volunteered to be the co-ordinator and produced all of the ply and wood bits we needed to put together our module. Then suddenly Glenn announced that we were accepted for the May Show and the race was on.

The first working day that we got our modules together, it all worked! Then we took them home and worked on switch control, industries, grade crossings, electrical refinements and it went together once again fairly well. The next join up was the actual Show and all was running well easily within the hour and that included several delays while we talked or helped a few others.

Of course it wasn't finished but at least it looked that it would be soon. Most importantly we received some favourable comments and didn't feel a bit ashamed of our showing.

We were able to talk to the public and have them operate our trains. This was done by adults and by

children and all who tried it seemed to enjoy the experience. A few lapsed modellers look like taking up the hobby again and several fathers mentioned to me that this is what they wanted to share with their children.

One thing that showed up on my end of the layout was that girls seemed to be better engineers than the boys. I had several give it a go and plead with parents for a train set! They seemed to get the hang of driving and moving freight cars through a complicated series of points quicker than boys yet did it more gently. Perhaps we should be casting our net for more members towards them. There is still a lot of interest in trains by the youngsters and that might be even though fewer travel in them. Reminds me of the state's official warning of a level crossing which is a silhouette of a steam train – not a diesel, yet everyone seems to know what it means. A large number of drivers seeing these road signs would never have seen a steam train.

Other modules are on the way and I'm sure those of us at this Show are working on further additions to our modules. Our next public appearance will be at the ever friendly and enjoyable Toowoomba Model Train Show.

The nice thing is that now some of us can have private join ups for a bit of running and operation. Besides many of us who didn't have layouts now have the facilities to test or run trains at home on our own.

Good News About the AMRA Show

The word from Bill Dunn is that AMRA are assured of the present locality for the running of their May Show for **2010** and **2011**. After that it will be a year by year decision dependent on development plans. Nominations for next year's Show open on 1st September this year.

Comment

Having to have a module ready for the May Show certainly put some strain on ideas and manual skills. One of the most important things about our modules is that they are durable yet light. That's even more important to most of us who are getting on a bit and perhaps have had trouble with our tendons, muscles, etc. Some of us have removable wheels on one end of our modules so that they can be wheeled into the location easily without lifting.

Thus the things we incorporate into the modules need to be light too so that Paul Skehan's great lightweight design isn't loaded up with permanently installed anchors like switch motors, transformers, etc. Bob Cuffe and I pondered about this over a couple of weeks and tried to dream up the ultimate switch motor. A conversation with Ray Nunn about this

problem answered our concerns. Ray mentioned that he regularly operates on a layout that has switch (points) operation done by wooden dowels. It seemed to perfect answer. Utterly reliable, lightweight, cheap and easy to install.

Bob and I bought our “_” dowels at Bunnings and we were away. They did all that was expected of them over the Show and we have jokingly named them “biotronic control”. They look like they will last for years yet but I have been thinking about making them so that they operate from both sides of the module. Bob wanted to have a street traverse his module. He likes railroads operating in the street and this was his opportunity to have it. The street was made of styrene sheeting and there are several crossings and several turnouts in the street. It didn't cause any problems to train operation but fitting it must have been a mind-blowing affair.

I wanted a pickle factory in my module, the industries of which concentrate on food processing and manufacture. During construction, it suddenly dawned on me that I have no chance of completing it as I envisaged. So in the space I had, I made the factory but just left the rear chopped off and unfinished. One of our module operators who had been there all weekend only realised this as I was packing up after the show. It looks great and the viewers didn't notice.

My largest factory is a jam and jellies manufacturer. This was chosen because of the variety and number of cars that would be needed to service it. It is just behind the pickle factory and has a long loading bay on the ground floor and then three floors above that. The loading bay, doors and walls are on a sector plate while the other three floors are stationary. Not quite completed yet, it will allow me to swing the sector plate and store at least a dozen or more freight cars inside the factories in that area. The divide between the swinging and stationary parts of the factory is barely noticeable.

It will appear that the module contains 8 -12 industries instead of the visual five.

All of this shows just how sneaky we can be and allows us to have a lot more perceived action on our modules than there actually is.

Freight Cars

I've always felt as though we missed out on a lot of fun in Australia as we haven't followed the American trend in freight car super-detailing and accuracy. Too much of our stuff is put on the track straight out of the box. Perhaps, now having an industrial freight layout in our module lash-up will change that a little.

Weathering is the first and perhaps easiest change. It gets rid of that plastic look and if done in harmony with industries and other structures, it pulls the whole of the scene together.

A lot of us aspire to having trains traverse a bridge on our layouts that is eye height or even higher. That means we are going to see underneath the freight cars. A simple addition of a couple of No.10 paper staples and a longitudinal piece of wire on the underside immediately gives the impression that the brake rigging is there for a purpose. Far better than just seeing a slight bump under the car.

The variety of freight cars is enormous. Firstly there are the different uses like, box, reefer, flat, etc. The second type of variety is within each use. So you could have boxcars of different construction, outside-braced, ply-sided, double-sheathed, etc. Overlaid on this there could be the variation of differing manufacturers like Pullman Standard, ACF, etc. Then there is another variation of the differing railroads. So a boxcar of one type and manufacture can have the road marks of PRR or NYC or ATSF and many others. The PS-1 boxcar is a fine example. Finally there are the detail differences brought about by upgrades, batch runs and other peculiarities.

I have three boxcars marked for Nashville Chattanooga and St. Louis in my inventory and all are differently painted although coming from the same order and period. These things did happen in the prototype.

I know modellers who like a particular feature on a freight car and don't have it as it wasn't supposed to be used in the era they model. Well it seems that such regulations were not adhered to too strictly. One of the best starting places to learn about this fascinating subject is from the NMRA publication about post World War II freight cars before they run out in Chattanooga!

I know I have pushed this book in Newsletter many times but for good reason. Nearly all of the hundreds of photographs were taken in the period 1946-48. Many of these freight cars would have still been in use up to the '60's and beyond. Ninety per cent of the photographs were taken around Harrisburg, Pennsylvania but in yards of different ownership. So all foreign owned freight cars got to these yards by interchange.

Yet many of the non-interchange rules of the '30's have been ignored. Cars are shown from all areas of the United States so this publication isn't geographic specific.

I would assume that there may have been some restriction on fancy paintwork during WW II which had just ended when these photographs were taken. We had such restriction in Australia, all meant to save resources. A lot of shelf grocery items came in black and white or red white and blue as I remember from my younger days.

That means that some of the fancy paintwork on freight cars in these photographs must have been done before 1941 when America was brought into the war.

Lack of labour with men away at war would have resulted in the longevity of some. Also obvious from these photos are the weathering patterns. Another stand-out is the chalk marks on cars. All-in-all this book must be one of the most useful books for anyone with even a vague interest in freight cars.

Humorous Item?

For much of his life, my father worked for Q.G.R. as a sign-writer. One of the guys who used to do their equivalent of Floquil painting and Microscale decalling on the 1:1 scale stuff. Only they rarely used decals and if they did, they hand made them themselves.

He worked with an assistant at Normanby yards (later at Wacol) which was quite different from what it is now.

In those days government jobs were seen somewhat as a charity in some cases and all levels governments had an over-population of handicapped people. The government did this to free private-enterprise from such responsibility and to, with charity, give these people some form of employment.

One day they had a couple of handicapped people in and gave them the job of cleaning up a huge lantana bush at the corner of the yard adjacent to Gilcrest Avenue and Kelvin Grove Road. This bush had been an eyesore for many years. Cleaning it up revealed that the bush had, over the years, grown over two freight cars. I wonder if this sort of thing happened in the U.S.

Cross Purposes

It's amazing how many things seem related in some way. I remember a discussion at the home of John and Toni Saxon when they lived at Clontarf, Sydney. At the dinner table was Tony Koester, dean of operating model railroads. They were in Australia because he was invited to be the keynote speaker at one of our past conventions. It transpired that both Tony and I were also interested in motor racing and in particular the Indianapolis "500".

I mentioned to him how I remember seeing a movie when I was a kid of racing cars being transported around America in boxcars. These boxcars were left on sidings as close as possible to race tracks and the mechanics worked on the cars in them. They acted as temporary garages. The period was in the late '20's and early '30's. Winning race drivers were welcomed by crowds at depots when they arrived by train. Neither of us had seen anything relating to this in the MR or RR press. However there is reference to it in the motor racing press.

This was in the "Open Wheel" magazine of August 1987, in an article by Phillip LeVrier about Henry Banks, U.S. Champion of 1950. To quote Banks in that article, "Back in those days (1929), the drivers would rent railroad box cars to haul their race cars to the track. They'd leave the box cars on the railroad tracks and use them as garages".

In the movie I saw, called dramatically, "Devils on Wheels", one place I recall this was done was in Richmond, Virginia. So it could have used boxcars in the yards of the Chesapeake & Ohio, Richmond Fredericksburg & Potomac, Southern, Atlantic Coast Line or Seaboard Air Line.

Sadly, I didn't know much about U.S. railroads at the time and I wasn't yet modelling so those few moments of railroad action were lost on me. The racing action though was pretty wild in those days of board tracks and dirt tracks, 160mph Miller racing cars with tyres that seemed hardly wider than bicycles tyres.

The 25th Convention

It seems like a good contingent of Queenslanders are heading south for the Convention. Have you made definite arrangements yet?

Fresh Ideas

The editor would like to hear any stories about how you became interested in model railroading. Please send your story in for future publication. I'm sure other members will be intrigued.