The Trolleyville Times

December 2007

SEE CUSTOM TRAXX DEMONSTRATE DCC OPEF

Another Great International Railfair in Roseville, CA

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The 31st Annual International Railfair was presented in Roseville on November 10-11, 2007. Trolleyville has missed only one show since 1992, and we have known for some time how large was that mistake. This show is supported and promoted by the Sacramento Modular Railroaders, the European Train Enthusiasts, the Sierra Division PCR/NMRA and the Roseville Roundhouse Model Railroad Club among others. By getting all these clubs together (which is a major effort in itself), these people have ensured one of the best shows on the West Coast. They picked a time and a place and stuck with it all these years.

Vendors setting up on Friday had access to a dinner which included Tri-Tip Sandwiches, vegetables, salad and pumpkin pie. These meals were prepared and served by the Rainbow Girls for a reasonable charge. The Rainbow Girls also provided an all-you-can-eat pancake breakfast for $4.50 on both Saturday and Sunday mornings prior to show opening. The show promoters insure that you have no excuse to pick up those goodies that you see and want. Each year the mobile ATM is set-up right in the middle of the show. You can get your cash in the security of the vehicle where there are two ATM machines.

Rain arrived mid-Saturday during the height of the show, but it did not affect the nearly 1400 people who attended the show that day. It mainly affected the outdoor activities such as the live steam powered train ride, the live steam model activities and the large tool vendor who had set up a huge illuminated tent in front of Johnson Hall.

The rain affected neither the number nor zeal of the buyers as most vendors reported good sales. As usual, there were several traction items available at the show. We saw the Accucraft Large Scale San Francisco Powell Street Cable Car and it is a beauty.

San Francisco Rolls Out Car 1818!

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Early Thursday morning, November 9th, San Francisco Peter Witt 1818 left Geneva on its initial revenue run after being painted in the Milan 1930-1970 scheme of light and dark green. Being the current favorite of the fleet, just after Thanksgiving the car was decorated for the holiday season by volunteers with the blessing of MUNI.

With car 1811 in the original 1928 yellow & white paint, all three schemes that the cars appeared while in service in Milan are now represented in San Francisco. Car 1811 is shown at Geneva along with other Milan cars in orange.

Car 1818 ran in San Francisco for years in the orange scheme in which it was obtained until it was involved in an accident on January 20, 2007. It is shown below in June 2002:

Bowser's new Executive Line of ready-to-run freight cars and the Southern Pacific "Bi-Centennial" U-25B (nor largely sold-out) were displayed at the Trolleyville booth. Custom Traxx displayed four HO scale trolleys not only powered from overhead wires but also running on Digital Command Control (DCC). To demonstrate the adaptability of DCC, two analog trolleys, a SEPTA Light Rail Vehicle and a SEPTA PCC-II, were operated using address '00" during the show. As is recommended, when analog trolleys were stopped, they were placed on a dead section of track to stop the 'singing' of the motor.

So as we have said each year, if you missed this show, you missed a great one.

Overhead Wire Operation with DCC Demonstration at Allied Model Trains

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After a one day display at Allied Model Trains in October and a two-day display in Roseville, CA the previous weekend, operation from overhead wire using DCC has been proven to be viable. Saturday, November 17th presented another opportunity for Southern California rail fans to witness operation of streetcars from overhead wire using Digital Command Control (DCC). By this time, a fourth car had a decoder installed. This car was an MTS Imports brass model of the PRT/PTC 1923 Brill Double End cars, modified and finished in the 1940s "modernized" paint scheme, and shown below.

This car has directional headlights and red taillights. Miniatronics [18-712-20] 12 volt 30mA 1.7mm incandescent lamps were used for the headlights while Miniatronics [18-R03-10] 1.5 volt 30mA 1.2mm incandescent lamps wired in series with 330 ohm 1/4 watt resistors were used for the tail lights. All decoders used at this time were Train Control Systems M2 models. We prefer these due to their excellent support via their no questions asked one-year warranty on any decoder. For this second demonstration, module 970, used at the last demonstration, was paired with recently completed 941, allowing a wider operation. PCC 2128 and LRV 9011 are shown on module 941 in the next photo.

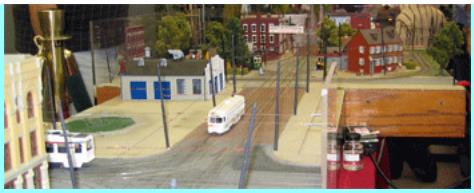
Car 1818 was built in Italy in 1928 and ran for years in the city of Milan until it and several of its sisters came to San Francisco. San Francisco now has eleven such cars, numbered 1807 (ex 1507), 1811 (ex 1911), 1814, 1815 (ex 1515), 1818, 1834, 1856 (ex 1556), 1859, 1888 (ex-1588), 1893 (ex 1793), 1895 (ex 1795). All cars were renumbered by MUNI into the 1800 class when the new Breda Light Rail Vehicles began entering the 1500 series as deliveries continued.

San Francisco is now 'the' trolley lover's paradise. They have earned the title through years of hard work and have been helped by the lack of vision of many other transit operators to raced to destroy the remnants of their trolley systems. So for trolley operators today, rank MUNI (San Francisco) in unqualified possession of first place and SEPTA (Philadelphia) as the sole occupant of last place and fill in from there. San Francisco residents and their transit system management (MUNI) love their trolleys and do everything to make them better and enjoyable. Many MUNI operators like their jobs. Two of them told us they did not ever want to retire. They had been on the job for over twenty-five years and loved every day they worked. The maintenance personnel are all top-notch and they seem to be encouraged in their jobs by senior management. Also the management of MUNI supports the trolley system, encourages ridership of the trolleys and continues to find ways to improve service. We did not get this impression when we visited SEPTA in May, hence the appropriate rating.

(DCC Demo, from col 1)

After using a RRampMeter produced by American Hobby Distributors designed for this purpose, we discovered that when the unit was first turned on, it tended to place 23.5 volts into a track circuit that should have about 14.0 volts. This higher voltage would last for as little as five seconds but sometimes required the track power to be recycled once or twice before the voltage would drop to 14.0 volts. Allied Model Trains replaced this unit with a second unit that performed as expected for about three days until it also malfunctioned in the same way. A third unit was acquired and it was used for this demonstration at Allied but after three days of flawless operation, it, too, malfunctioned in the same way. We tried to get a dialogue with the Digitrax Technical Support group but they just wanted to have us send the units back without any troubleshooting attempts or discussion with us. Digitrax could learn something about personal customer relations from Train Control Systems. They talked to us about the "fried decoders" and the reasons for them being damaged. As a result, we were a lot smarter. Allied graciously returned both of the first two Zephyr units to Digitrax and we are awaiting the results of their examinations. Thanks to Allied Model Trains for their "over the top" support, which seems to be the modus operandi of the "New & Friendly" Allied Model Trains. Meanwhile, we are looking at trying an entry-level NCE DCC system.

So for other HO scale trolley modelers powering their cars from overhead wire, these have been our experiences so far. First, as expected, clean overhead wire is a must but no more than in DC (analog) operation. The use of the ACT-6006 mentioned in the previous issue is extremely useful when beginning an operating session. The Southern California Traction Club is still using this for analog operation on their modules during appearances. Second, good trolley poles with strong springs help ensure good contact. Weaker springs that work for DC operations do not always ensure sufficient contact to pass the computer signals consistently to the car. Third, trolley pole reverse can be retained for operation on DC layouts but the front trolley pole must make great contact with the hook and this can be another contact problem that



The construction of module 941 is featured in the Trolleyville Schoolhouse, Room Two, Lessons 4 and 5. This module features construction of the intersection partially shown in the next photo. Los Angeles Railway Class M Car 2602, shown below left, is decoder equipped while the SEPTA LRV 9011 has not yet been decoder equipped.

Although our tests were going better than planned with DCC operation from overhead wire, we were troubled by a "quirk" in the performance of the Digitrax Zephyr units that we were using for our demonstration. We obtained our first unit in October and that unit seemed to perform as expected until we started to convert our fourth analog car. This car was our first attempt in using 1.5 volt lamps. When testing this car, we kept burning out the lamps even though we were using the prescribed resistance in series with them. We even had two decoders simply stop functioning without warning.

(See DCC demo, Column 2)

interrupts the computer signals to the car. Fourth, we are finding that the larger contacts work better on the overhead wire. The NMRA Specification S-5 brass turnings found on many brass imports, such as Fairfield and Soho work well along with brass trolley shoe castings. The worst performers are brand new trolley wheel castings with their tangential contact point. But after all these contacts have sufficient time to "wear in", they all seem to perform better. Fifth, we found it advisable to securely solder any contact, whether a turning, or trolley wheel or shoe casting, to the trolley pole only after ensuring a snug fit between both items.

In every case, once we started operations under DCC, we had no more problems than we had under DC (analog) operation. If you trolley operators have any questions, please feel free to contact the Times.

Light Rail Vehicle Models Wanted!

(Has The Time Finally Come?)

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Late last month, the East Penn Traction Club and the Southern California Traction Club sent a letter to over thirty model railroad manufacturers in the United States, Australia, Canada, and Great Britain proposing that they consider the production of a ready-to-run light rail vehicle (LRV). After all, several of these systems had begun operation since 1980 and except for models of the Boeing USSLRV cars sold by AHM/IHC/Mehano beginning in 1979, no other running model of a U.S./Canadian LRV has been made available. The letter suggested that maybe the Siemens SD100 vehicle as used in Calgary, Denver, Pittsburgh, Sacramento, Saint Louis, Salt Lake City and San Diego may be a good candidate for such a model. The letter made many points to support such a venture.

A few models of U.S. light rail vehicles have been made in brass from time to time and can be found from time to time on eBay. MTS Imports recently told the Times that they would import a brass model of the SD100 Light Rail Vehicle as used in San Diego if sufficient interest could be shown. If interested, contact MTS Imports at 845-342-5623 or email at mtsimp@warwick.net

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