The Trolleyville Times

March 2011

Sound units for the Bowser PCC cars from both Soundtrax

East Penn Traction Club Meet! May 12-13-14, 2011!

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Are you one of those modelers who believe people move to larger scales because their eyesight is faltering? For many that is exactly why they move, but it cannot be said of Bob Robbins. Bob builds models of Illinois Terminal cars in ½" scale, and he builds them from the ground-up. His favorite media is styrene but he uses other materials when it is warranted. Bob builds the trucks from styrene pieces, he builds the body and roof from individual styrene strips and panels. And he builds the trolley poles from, you guessed it, styrene pieces. Bob makes sure every detail is present and accurate, all bolt and nut castings and rivets which are applied individually. It takes him about a year to construct one car.

Would you like to see how he does it? Come to the East Penn Traction Club Meet on May 13 – 14, 2011 and attend Bob's two part clinic. Even if your eyes are going bad and you would never build a model this way you will be amazed at the techniques Bob used to get an amazing level of detail.

New Bowser Trolleys Almost Here!

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The ship bearing the first five of the new HO scale all-electric PCC cars arrived in New York on March 1st and were making their way through U. S. Customs as we published this edition. The cars are models of SEPTA (Philadelphia) "Gulf Oil" 2111 and 2168; Toronto Transportation Commission 4336 and 4362; Johnstown Traction 403 and 417, Los Angeles MTA 3148 and 3165; and Pittsburgh 1600.

While these are the first of the traditional Bowser PCC cars, with any luck, these will be the last cars that will not be available with Tsunami sound. In late January, Bowser received the first sound equipped PCC from Soundtraxx. However, the board had been designed for the San Francisco F-line PCC cars and must be modified for the traditional cars, some of which (Philadelphia & Toronto) require operating roof lights. Unfortunately, we will not have the new circuit boards from Soundtraxx until possibly this spring.

With any luck, the new board could be made applicable to the Con-Cor HO scale air-electric PCC cars introduced last year. The good news for Con-Cor PCC owners is that the new board would correct all the wiring discrepancies in the Con-Cor car and will give the car the same properties of the Bowser PCC.

San Francisco Muni "Breda" Light Rail Vehicle by Miniatures by Eric

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For some now, Custom Traxx has been examining a pre-production model of the second-generation San Francisco Light Rail Vehicles (LRV) currently in operation on six light rail lines in that city. These cars replaced the original

Microscale Industries!

Still a vital player in traction modeling!

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Recently, one of our reporters had some time to pursue HO scale Pacific Electric modeling activities so he acquired some Microscale decals. He had heard that the 87-563, Pacific Electric Interurban Cars (1911-1961) and 87-564, Pacific Electric Striping (1911-1961) decal sets had been upgraded so he was not surprised at the results. The changes to both the 87-593 and 87-594 sets will not be immediately evident unless you have an older set with which to compare. You would see the improvements, mainly in sizing and arrangement of the numbers, which will benefit HO scale Pacific Electric modelers.

There were two other decals sets of interest to HO scale Pacific Electric modelers, 87-589 and 87-590. These sets were intended for modelers of the freight motors and diesel locomotives. Microscale has replaced 87-590 with both 87-1349 and 87-1350. There have been several improvements such as the addition of the gear ratios that were stenciled on the side of the electric motors and diesel locos.

The big news is the service that we received from Microscale. We ordered five decals from their web site using their shopping cart on Tuesday, February 1st and received them on Wednesday, February 2nd. Service does not get much better than that. For decal orders, call 800-722-5306. There is a $20.00 minimum!

The Model Rectifier Corp (MRC) TECH 6 Sound Controller 2.0!

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Our marvelous model railroad hobby has undergone quite a transformation in the last ten years. For a long time, model trains were operated with AC power first 120 volts and then 16 volts. Then we had DC power, eliminating the mechanical reversing unit. We developed Cab Control to give some flexibility in train operation. Just as we got used to cab control, Digital Command Control (DCC) appeared. At first, it was not very user friendly and not very well accepted by many aging model railroaders. But DCC improved. Decoders got smaller and cheaper and the mysteries of this new feature started to disappear. Of course by this time, locomotives with DCC capability started to be produced. Others were produced as DCC-READY, requiring only that a plug be removed and a plug-in decoder be inserted. Then appeared some train sets with decoder-equipped locomotives.

Things really started to change when Broadway Limited introduced sound to the hobby. We can still remember seeing and hearing the amazing sound of the first New York Central Hudsons running on the display tracks at the model train shows. This revolution continued until there were decoder-equipped sound capable locomotives that would play some of the sounds when operated in the DC (analog) mode....but...only SOME of the sounds.

Everyone wanted sound, but you had to go into DCC to get all of them. What about the modeler who wanted no part of DCC yesterday, today or tomorrow?

MRC has answered that question with their new line of Sound Controllers. There are currently two such units; the Tech 6 Sound Controller 2.0 and the Tech 6 Sound Controller 3.0.

The Southern California Traction Club obtained a sample of the TECH 6 Sound Controller 2.0 and put it through its paces last month. For the details of this evaluation, click here!

More Great Developments in San Francisco!

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As most of you know, San Francisco Municipal Railway sent their flagship car, #1 built by Holman in 1912, back to Pennsylvania for a complete rebuilding. They also are sending all eleven of the ex-Minneapolis, ex-Newark PCC cars, series 1070-1080, to the same

Boeing Light Rail Vehicles that replaced the PCC cars in 1982. Only two cities opted for the Boeing cars. These cars are often listed among the worst transit vehicles ever built. Boston eventually replaced their Boeing cars with Kinki-Sharyo (Japan) vehicles but San Francisco chose AnsaldoBreda (Italy). Currently 151 such vehicles are operating in the city. Miniatures by Eric has developed a very accurate HO scale shell and pewter floor for the car. The floor is designed for the Bowser 125100 traction power mechanism. As with any articulated vehicle, modeling the transition section is an engineering challenge. Eric asked Custom Traxx to test the power drive for the unit. A few problems were discovered which required modification to the shells and a revised set of shells was needed. Unfortunately Custom Traxx was occupied with issues surrounding the Bowser PCC and the Soundtraxx PCC sound circuit board so this review was delayed. Adding to the delay was the disappearance of the first set of replacement shells while they were in the hands of either the Canadian Post Office or the USPS. By the time the second shells arrived, the review was ready to begin.

This is a craftsman type kit. It requires some kit assembly knowledge. Experience with the Bowser traction drives will help in ensuring the maximum level of performance from the unit. Because this is an articulated vehicle, adjustments may have to be made in the transition section to ensure that the vehicle has enough flexibility to negotiate curves. Using our test vehicle, we had to file the bottom of the transition section to avoid interference with the center truck sideframes. We also had to do a small amount of filing of the inside of the shells in the area of the transition section to ensure that the car ran correctly around curves. All findings will be passed to Eric to incorporate into the production shells. There was also a suggestion for an alternate method of mounting the transition section which should greatly facilitate the production of model light rail vehicles. We are awaiting an upgraded transition section from Eric to test. This new section should eliminate most of the problems that we had with the car during our testing process.

This LRV kit, from Miniatures by Eric, [Eric Courtney, Busby, Alberta, Canada] consists of two body shells, transition section, two headlight/taillight assemblies, two air conditioning units, two anti-climbers, resistor banks, a pantograph, pantograph mounting base, four rearview mirrors and clear flush fitting windows. The kit also contains a pewter floor made for the Bowser 125100 mechanism. Custom Traxx provides a kit, 12701, with all the necessary Bowser items required to power the car. Custom Traxx also provides a decal set, CN-1499, which contains all the markings and destination signs to complete the finishing of the car. See their catalog, Section V, for more information.

Finishing the shells is recommended prior to assembly. First we prepared and airbrushed the interiors with Floquil Weathered Black, 110017. For the shell exteriors, we used Floquil Old Silver, 110100. For the charcoal skirts, we used a 50-50 mixture of Old Silver and Floquil Weathered Black. For the red stripe, we used Microscale 1/8" red striping (PS5-1 1/8). This is reasonably close to the 8 1/2" striping on the prototype. Where necessary to match the red striping, as in the case of the anti-climbers, we used Accuflex 16-153, CB&Q Chinese Red. We finished our model with Custom Traxx CN-1499 decals, designed for this car. The lower black dasher that contains all the headlights and taillights was finished with Floquil Engine Black, F110010.

We also recommend that the sideframes along with the Bowser #1341 Sideframe mounts be installed after the body shells have been securely mounted on the floor. Take care to ensure that the sideframes are mounted with the bearings in the center of the wheels. If the sideframes contact the shell, either file the edge of the sideframe or remove some material from the shell skirt.

As we went to press with this article, we had finally gotten the unit to run on the 12" radius curves of the Southern California Traction Club test track and had installed the facility, Brookville, for complete re-wiring and upgrade of electrical equipment. Recently both the #1 and the first PCC, 1071, dressed in Minneapolis colors returned and began testing. Our friends in San Francisco provided some excellent photos of the test runs that occurred on February 24th. Car 1 is shown just prior to leaving the Muni Metro East (MME) facility for the test run.

Both car 1 and 1071 are shown in the next photograph near the San Francisco Railway Museum on the Embarcadero:

Cars 1 through 43 were designed following the recommendations of transit consultant Bion J. Arnold and were known for a while as the "Arnold" cars. Cars 1 through 20 were built by the W. L. Holman Company of San Francisco and were delivered between December 1912 and early 1913. The A line opened on December 28, 1912 as indicated on the next photo:

43 cars, designated Class A, were ordered but Holman was unable to complete the order, so cars 21-43 were built by Union Iron Works, also a San Francisco Company. Incidentally, the low bid on these cars was made by the Jewett Car Company of Newark, Ohio but a San Francisco company was chosen mainly due to civic pride. Jewett did get the next order for the 125 Class B cars, delivered beginning in 1914, at a cost 9% less than the Class A cars.

Car 1 is then shown at the Jones Street terminal sandwiched between cars 1050 and 1063, the first and last of the ex-Philadelphia PCC cars:

flush-fitting windows. These windows were excellently vacuum formed and the side windows snap into place similar to the those on the Bachmann Peter Witt and the Bowser PCC. A small dab of adhesive on the inside of the car holds them securely in place. The most difficulty we had was with the windshields and the windows adjacent to them. These single window castings required some form of adhesive to secure them. We used Woodland Scenics Accent Glue. Each body shell mounts to the floor with four screws. The holes in the floor are provided but the hole in the body shells are not due to the different floors used by the European modelers. We merely drilled the holes and tapped them for 00-90 hex head screws and used them to secure the shell to the floor. The unit weighs about 11.3 ounces before any weight was added but we will probably add 1.0 ounce to each body shell adjacent to the transition section to aid with the tracking of the unpowered center truck. Our test model was handled so much that a lot of the detail was hurt in the process.

With careful assembly by an experienced resin kit assembler, this will be a nice addition to a modern model traction operation.

Two more photos of car 1 showing the outstanding work on restoring and renovating the interior and another with the Bay Bridge in the background completes this story:

Muni and the City of San Francisco should be commended for recognizing that a city MUST celebrate its history to be relevant today and devoting the time and resources to make this piece of history available to the citizens of tomorrow. Why isn't Seashore's PRT 6618 being enabled to make similar trips on Philadelphia's Route 15 in September 2012, 100 years after it was delivered. Boston could be planning a similar event using the Mattapan-Ashmont line. It appears that the historical transit minds are now in the west and those of us in the west are sure fortunate that they are. San Diego is almost ready to run their 1940 era PCCs. It is so obvious where such progressive minds aren't!