The Trolleyville Times

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Custom Traxx may still produce HO scale models of the San Francisco 1101 series

TCS Upgrades Their Trolley Decoders !

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The DCC-ready Bowser PCC car was introduced to HO scale trolley modelers a little over two years ago and with sound capability two months ago. Over these last two years, the cars have demonstrated themselves to be durable, reliable performers.

A few years ago, Train Control Systems (TCS) introduced the M4T decoder. this decoder was a plug-in that required no further action of the part of the user unless the car was a TTC (Toronto) PCC requiring one wire to be soldered to the circuit board to enable the Advance light to work. Philadelphia (SEPTA) PCC cars required a T6XT decoder. It was still a plug-in but required soldering two wires to the circuit board to enable both the Subway light and the emergency Beacon to work. everyone seemed to be satisfied with the operation of both the TCS M4T and T6XT decoders.

Of course, operation from overhead wire is a problem even in the DCC arena but in DCC strange things happen including cars going into reverse when dirty wire is encountered. TCS came up with the Keep-Alive™ capability which allowed operation to continue during brief power losses. This permits much slower, smoother operation under wire.

But then TCS sent the Keep-Alive™ decoders to the Southern California Traction Club (SCTC) for testing. The first ones were quite large and were difficult to fit into the Bowser PCC but when the installation was complete, we could not believe the difference. At first, we removed eight inches of overhead wire on one of our test modules and replaced it with fishing line. The car ran right through it. It began to slow down when it had traversed five to six inches. But the lights stayed on and the car made it every single time and at normal streetcar speeds. But then we noticed something spectacular. The car ran so slowly and smoothly at very low speeds, much lower than we could ever run even in the two-rail mode or in the old DC mode. We marveled at the cars running at what we calculated at 15 scale miles per hour (smph) throughout the entire module without any stalls. Train Control Systems (TCS) reported the SCTC (George Huckaby) experiences with the Keep-Alive™ decoders on their web site testimonial page. *"...The Keep Alive almost totally eliminates the dirty overhead wire problem. We recommend that trolley modelers have one in at least one car to clean overhead wire prior to operating sessions. You could advertise this benefit if you like. We have a section of track on our test track that is rarely used. It usually takes 15 minutes of cleaning and running to operate on it. Our unit with the Keep-Alive™ decoders ran flawlessly the first time without a hitch. This will be great for those who operate on overhead wire and do not run often..."*

During the Pacific Electric Weekend reported in column 2, the SCTC demonstrated the Keep-Alive™ decoders in several Bowser PCC cars being operated on their City Streetcar Line. Their 16' by 26' layout is shown in the Museum Town Hall during that same weekend with members (left to right) George Jones, David Lyman, Pete DeBeers and John McWhirter manning the display.

Orange Empire Railway Museum Celebrates "Pacific Electric Days"!

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Every June, the Orange Empire Railway Museum (OERM) celebrates the Southern California Pacific Electric heritage by operating every single piece Pacific Electric rolling stock that will move for the pleasure of their visitors. Preparing for this weekend, June , all the PERy equipment is staged in the Abbenseth Carhouse yard for the occasion as in the next photo.

In this photo, can be seen Birney car 332, Hollywood Car 717, Jewett car 1001. The photo was taken from the roof of line car 00157. One of the favorite events of the day is the two-car train of Blimps. This usually occurs only during this weekend. The next photo shows the train leaving the main platform:

Pacific Electric eventually corralled over 70 "Blimp" coaches and combines, all second-hand, from two different properties. The first group, coaches 300-318 came from the Northwestern Pacific (NWP). When the Golden Gate Bridge opened in 1939, the NWP abandoned service and the cars became available. By 1942, they were in Southern California on the tracks of the Pacific Electric. Car 314, shown above as the second car of the train, is a member of that group. The first car in the train is car 418. This car is a member of the series containing coaches 400-437, 450-459 and combines 496-499. All of these were acquired from the United States Maritime Commission (USMC) in 1944. The cars had been ordered from ACF, and the Pullman Car Company by the Southern Pacific for their Interurban Electric Railway (IER) in 1910, and 1913, respectively. Combine 498 is also at the Orange Empire Railway Museum and is currently under renovation.

There is always a coupling demonstration during both days of Pacific Electric Days and the public lines up to see something that is over in an instant. In the next photo, the crowd is awaiting the coupling of 314 (right) to 418 (left).

The new units are the KAT14P-1inch for most of the Bowser PCC cars. These are intended for the same cars currently using the M4T. For the Bowser Philadelphia PCC cars with two operational roof lights, the decoder would be the KAT16P-1inch. Custom Traxx should have their stock by the time you read this. Both decoders are $49.95. The same installation procedures used with the M4T and the T6XT apply here except that this decoder is a little larger and will fit after some preparation and coaxing. The KAT12/14/16 decoders are a little larger than the TCS T1 series of decoders. Click here for a comparison photo of the decoders. Also click here for a photo of the KAT14 installed in a Bowser PCC. TCS will be eliminating the JST plug in some future KA series decoders which will reduce the size of the decoders.

Orange Empire Railway Museum Changes Vendor Swap Meet Policy!

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For many years now, the Orange Empire Railway Museum has held spring and fall swap meets in March and September, respectively. For many years, it has been the custom of a few vendors to set-up on Friday evening and remain on the property overnight until the swap meet began early Saturday morning.

A few years back, several security concerns erupted when parts from the Ventura County #2 2-6-2 steam engine which was under renovation, suddenly disappeared. During the investigation that followed, several security measures were instituted, including a ban on the overnight stays.

After completely studying the entire issue, the policy on overnight stays was revised. To remain overnight on the Friday before the swap meet, vendors must first be members in good standing for at least a year previous to the swap meet and comply with some restrictions on movement around the museum during their stay. They must submit the attached form in advance, get it approved and have it on their person when they are approached by security personnel. For your information, here is the entire Museum policy on this matter. We would advise vendors not to ignore this policy as they could be evicted late in the evening when motel rooms in the area may be scarce.

Not to be overshadowed by the bigger cars, Pacific Electric, being a complete transportation system, operated 68 Birney car, series 310-388, for the feeder and lightly traveled but still essential lines, all built in 1918-1920. In the next photo are two such cars, 331 and 332. Car 332, shown at left, was leased to Tucson, AZ and masqueraded as their car 10 for many years. It is still in the Tucson Rapid Transit Company paint scheme. Tucson had acquired their original car #10 from the Douglas Traction & Light Company in 1924 but trolley service ended in 1931. The car was scrapped shortly thereafter.

Scrapping began in 1934 and the were all gone by 1941. They are seen in front of the Museum Reception Center.

Our final photo is of museum member #1, Ray Ballash, standing with Pacific Electric "Hollywood Car" 655. This car had been very well preserved by Richard Fellows, and converted to run on rubber tires. It has been placed back on Hollywood Car trucks but at this time has not been completely returned to operational status.