

Big Train Show (BTS) in Ontario, CA on June 1-2, 2013

Most west coast large scale model railroad fans know or have heard of the Large Scale Train Show that used to be held on the Queen Mary every June. This show had so much relevance at the time. Large Scale model railroading had been driven by the garden railroad craze at the time. G-scale, as it was called then, was a great novelty with cute little steam engines with European looks.

Vendors and patrons started complaining about the Queen Mary. It was difficult to get in and out of exhibition hall for the vendors and it appeared that maintenance on the old ship was being deferred. The single elevator was out of service much of the time and patrons were told not to take any baggage of any type on the escalators. Finally, the owner of the BTS moved the show to the Ontario Convention Center (OCC) a few years ago and made arrangements for the show to be held at that facility for five years.



Although this is fine building with excellent facilities, the move to Ontario was doomed for three reasons. First, the G-scale craze was dying due to the fact that many garden railroads were being edged out by home additions. Second, LGB, the prime supplier of G-scale rolling stock and track went bankrupt and supplies of track all but dried up. Finally, the OCC was not the attraction that the Queen Mary was and the weather in Ontario in June was much more unpleasant than the Queen Mary in Long Beach, CA.

After two unprofitable attempts at conducting the show at the OCC, the BTS was sold outright to the OCC which immediately started off with the rather asinine, politically driven rule that only two vehicles at the same time could be driven inside the hall for loading and unloading, forcing the other vendors to sit outside for long periods of time in the hot Ontario desert sun. Despite the very nice and comfortable facility, this just left a bad taste in the mouth of both the vendors and the module railroad clubs, most of which tend to be rather senior citizens. This single issue killed the facility for the Great Train Expo (GTE). They held a show there on December 4-5, 2009 and the Southern California Traction Club (SCTC) participated. Neither the GTE or the SCTC was returned since.

The next photo shows a view of the hall during the show on Saturday, June 1, 2013.

Orange Empire Railway Museum Hosts the Southern California Traction Club!

Each June, the Orange Empire Railway Museum (OERM) honors the memory of the "Red Cars" that operated in Southern California until 1961 with a tribute "Pacific Electric Days". The Southern California Traction Club has been invited to display their layout in the Museum's Town Hall for this occasion since 2008. This year was no exception as the club made their 104th public appearance and set up their complete 16' by 26" layout for this years tribute in the assembly hall known as Town Hall.



Inside of the main assembly room, the club setup their modules in their display that appears as follows:



During the day, while the club is operating, the museum gets out vehicles that are not normally operating such as the 1001 and the 1624 shown below:



Also one of the "Big Red Cars", also known as "Blimps" is on hand for visitors to view and ride.





The bottom line to this show is that it is still mainly a Large Scale Train Show and for large scale modelers, it still serves a purpose. For other modelers, it is almost worthless. We do not think that this show is a money maker for the OCC but it does serve a purpose of filling the hall for a weekend in June, that may otherwise be empty. A discussion with one of the OCC Executive Staff did not change our opinions.

Meanwhile, Bachmann, a major player in the large scale market, was on hand for the show. They displayed some of their HO scale traction as shown below:



It is very interesting to note that they are producing the SEPTA PCC. This was the car that SEPTA Board forced Bachmann to cease production in the 1980s. Bachmann also showed some HO scale background buildings that modelers may find handy. We noted a theater, a hotel, a bank and a hobby shop.



We caught a very nice N scale Southern Pacific passenger train on one of the modules:



For a larger view of the hall, [click here](#). The most ridiculous decision made by OCC was not to pay the layouts for being there for two days. The layouts are the main draw for the show as over 75% of the floor space of the hall is dedicated to them as shown in [the floor plan](#). Instead of any form of payment voucher slips for \$10.00 worth of food redeemable from the OCC Concessions is provided to each of the layout participants. Below is an example of the concession voucher given daily to each of the modular layout participants:

Also one of the museums Birney Safety Cars, this one formerly Pacific Electric 332, which is still painted as Tucson #10, was available for a lively ride around the loop line. Note that Hollywood Car 717 is behind number 10.



The club attempted to tell the history of the Pacific Electric with a display showing twenty-two HO scale models:



The museum allows two or three members to sleep in town Hall next to the module display, so, before shutting down for the night, those members do night time runs on the layout producing the spectacular scenes like you see next. Bowser PCC cars were used for both this and last years night runs:



But before the night runs can begin, there is always the evening barbeques on Friday and Saturday evenings in front of the Museum Birthday Caboose. Shown below are Dave



Lyman, Pete DeBeers and John McWhirter enjoying their repast.



This author went to the 2013 BTS and had a roast beef sandwich and coke. That cost \$11.83 (including California's onerous sales tax). [Click here](#) to find out what your eating choices are inside the hall.

During the day, testing of the new Bowser drive for their New Orleans streetcar continued. the drive was installed in the oldest car owned by George Huckaby, a PSM Brill Suburban obtained in the late 1950s, painted for the Philadelphia Rapid Transit:

After the December 2009 visit to the OCC after all these factors became known to them, the Southern California Traction Club's Board of Directors voted not to participate in this show or any show held in the OCC.

Ensuring that his data base on Train Shows remains complete, Dave Swanson of Competitive Intelligence Advertising visited the show and was caught talking with Claudia Canfield of the Canfield Circus display.



All in all, this is one of the fun shows for the club. they look forward to this appearance every June. See you next year!

Dave was the founder of the Great American Train Show which was the center of model train shows from the mid-1980s until 2001 when the company was sold. Dave is also the founder of both the Great Train Expo and the World's Greatest Hobby on Tour shows both of which continue today with staff personally developed and trained by Dave.