The Trolleyville Times

September 2014

More Bowser PCC cars soon. . . . . Los Angeles (LATL), Philadelphia (SEP

"WOW Sound" Demonstrated in Southern California!

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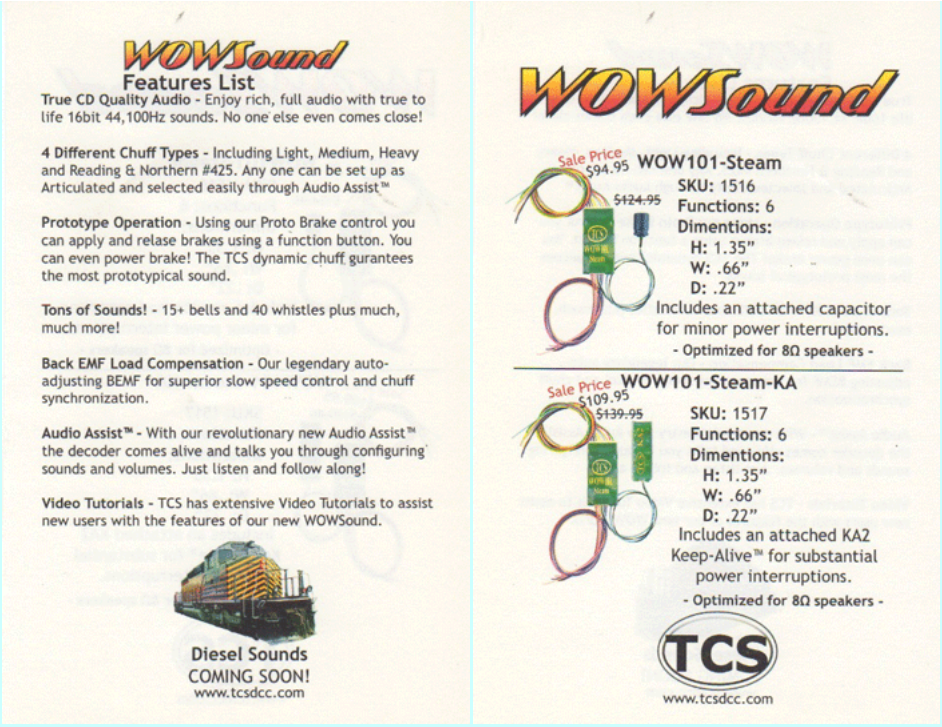
Train Control Systems of Blooming Glen, Pennsylvania was in Southern California in July recording diesel sounds for their extensive library when they also decided to introduce the local modelers to their newest DCC/Sound decoders. Between August 1st and August 8th, they demonstrated their ***"WOW Sound"*** decoders at Allied Model Trains, Culver City; Arnie's Trains, Westminster; The Original Whistle Stop, Pasadena; The La Mesa Model Railroad Club in Balboa Park, San Diego and Railmaster Hobbies, Bellflower. They would also visit Roger's Railroad Junction in Lodi, CA; Railroad Hobbies in Roseville, CA and the Western Depot in Yuba City, CA.

We were present at the demonstration at Allied Model Trains on Saturday morning, August 2nd. TCS representatives J. D. Forsythe (addressing the group) and John Forsythe, owner of TCS (facing the camera) are shown at the very beginning of that presentation.

Both the sound and the features are impressive.



On top of that, they have the "Keep Alive™" technology to eliminate most of the problems caused by dirty track. Those of us who operate using live overhead wire love this feature. As they said, they are now working on the diesel version. We know for a fact that they have some trolley sounds, so we might see that in the future. For a review of their presentation, click here! You must listen to the sound for yourself. This is the main feature, sound quality. The second most impressive feature is Audio Assist. This allows you to select from a wide variety of whistles, bells and other sounds without having to know one single CV. This is the definition of User Friendly.

Do not forget to check out their web site. There is a lot of information available to you there.

The Birney Safety Car!

(A Little Bit About Them....)

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Edward Havens

The four-wheel Birney Safety Car, the street railway industry's answer to motorized jitney competition in the 1920s, proved to be unpopular with both big city transit operators and the public and wound up on short shuttles and lightly patronized lines -- some lasting into 1930s and 1940s. They fared better in small towns and cities, many acquired as secondhand castoffs. The very last commercial Birney operation was in Colorado on Fort Collins Municipal Railway, ending in June 1951.

One shuttle example was Third Avenue Railway System (TARS) which operated Birneys on its isolated Dyre Avenue shuttle in the Bronx. The only existing photos of this 10-block operation, a truncated version of the Mount Vernon Fifth Avenue line abandoned Oct. 29, 1930, show 1650 series Bradley-manufactured Birneys rebuilt by TARS and originally used at Westchester, the northernmost part of the New York-based TARS system. The Dyre Avenue shuttle at the insistence of Bronx politicians was launched Jan. 5, 1934, and was abandoned June 28, 1938. Three Birneys were used on the line. No. 1651 was used on the shuttle in 1934-35.

One of the TARS Birneys, 1656, was rebuilt as a rail grinder car in 1932 and was renumbered No. 1.

In HO scale, Bachmann imported models of Birney Safety Cars a few years ago in various liveries including Baltimore, Philadelphia, Sacramento Northern and TARS, which was among the most colorful:

In O scale, Corgi imported a die cast Birney Safety Car which among various paint schemes included the TARS scheme while being operated on Steinway lines.

TARS never owned but operated the financially troubled street railway property in Queens on Long Island. Steinway ran 29 Birneys including cars built by American, Brill and Wason from 1930 to 1939. Some modelers have used Q Car Co. mechanisms to power their 1/48 Corgi Birneys:

A surprising number of Birneys have been preserved and restored in North America, including this Sacramento Northern car in dark green livery. Car No. 62 was a former San Diego Electric Railway Birney that served Sacramento Northern and then was one of six resold in 1944 to Sacramento City Lines which used them until December 1947. Bay Area Electric Railroad Association (BAERA) saved No. 62 from scrap and it now operates at Western Railway Museum, Suisun City, California.

A rail transit historian who is an authority on Birney cars is Dr. Harold E. Cox of Forty Fort, Pa., who wrote "The Birney Car", now out of print but in complete text online: http://streetcars.telcen.com/books/birney/index.html

Ken Kidder imported various versions of the single front door four-wheel Birney in both O and HO scales. The Soho model in HO of a Los Angeles Railway Birney was similar but more detailed:

The only brass Birney model in HO with Brill mushroom vents on the roof was imported by Fomras. In the next photo is a standard Ken Kidder Birney in HO remotored with a contemporary Hollywood Foundry drive:

The vents on most HO brass Birney imports were stamped and were not as detailed as on the Corgi models. Here is a close up of a model of the Brooklyn car:

Seashore Trolley Museum, Kennebunkport, Maine, currently possesses the entire fleet of the former Denver & South Platte Railway -- two Birneys numbered 1 and 2. One is restored with its original Littleton, CO, livery.

The other is painted as a York Utilities Co., Sanford, Maine, Birney. The Fort Collins, Colorado operating trolley museum has two of its original Birneys and one is fully restored and was duplicated on a Corgi O scale model. Car 21 is shown in the next photo:

Orange Empire Railway Museum (OERM), Perris, California, owns two ex-Pacific Electric Railway Birney Safety Cars. The mighty PE, known for its large "Blimps" owned 69 of the little cars. The former Pacific Electric Railway 332 was leased for 10 years to Old Pueblo Trolley, Tucson, AZ, which restored it as Tucson Rapid Transit Co. No. 10 which last ran in 1930. It remains at this time in the Tucson livery at OERM.

This is the other ex-Pacific Electric Birney, 331, at Perris.

Both 331 and 332 were sold by the Pacific Electric Railway in 1940 to MGM Studios for movie use. Both cars were used in the 1952 Hollywood movie, "Singin' in the Rain."

Recruiting Club Members!

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Recruiting members for your model railroad club can get really tough. Everyone notices that the ranks are getting thinner and that hobby shops are closing due to low participation. It is even tougher for the few traction clubs that are out there. The mammoth East Penn Traction Club in the Greater Philadelphia area boasts a lot of members but only a small few actually run the club and do the work.

The Southern California Traction Club found itself in the same position by the spring of 2014. Although they had sufficient membership to perform club functions, they did not have enough participation. So on July 1st the club decided to go in a different direction.

First, they abandoned all plans to recruit from within the model railroading hobby. Most of the hobbyists have already chosen their area of interest, whether it be main line railroading, narrow gauge, steam era, transition to diesel era etc. The flyers are still in local hobby shops but they does not seem to a lot of activity in those places. The club has been concentrating on persons affiliated with ground rail transportation.

Second, the club decided to open membership to more than local modelers. Many persons interested in electric traction do not have access to a well-stocked hobby shop or a model railroad club. While they have access to the internet, they do not always have access to that "how-to" person, the person who can answer any questions. So the SCTC announced their new E-membership in the July 2014 Trolleyville Times.

The club just told us that so far their efforts have been successful, having acquired one new club member, a local LRV operator, along with their first E-member, also working in the transit industry. We will be reporting how they are doing in later issues.

How About an HO scale Light Rail Vehicle Model!

(Trolleyville Editorial)

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Here we are in 2014, with San Francisco about to order its third generation Light Rail Vehicles, with Philadelphia celebrating over 33 years of service from its 1981 Kawasaki LRVs and San Diego, who started with 14 vehicles on its "Tijuana Trolley" now having over 150 vehicles in service and yet there has not been one model of a US Light Rail Vehicle since the 1970s AHM/Mehano Boeing SLRV. Those models did not perform any better than the prototype.

Manufacturers are requested to consider that with the attractive lighting and sounds available from these vehicles a very attractive and sellable vehicle could be made. Some of these cars have turn signals, brake lights, STOP signs, huge illuminated destination signs and ADA announcements ("The Doors are closing"....etc). Just check out the rear end of a Philadelphia single-end Kawasaki car, PCC-II or and Los Angeles Blue Line Nippon-Sharyo Blue/Expo Line LRV.

At this time, there are LRV operating in cities from Sacramento to Salt Lake City to Saint Louis to Cleveland to Boston and not one model. Someone may be missing out here. Surprising that there are no Ready-To-Run models of Toronto CLRVs or ALRVs after their many years of operation. If the manufacturers feel that a "loaded" model of a Siemens S70 would not sell, and they are right, our hobby is indeed in sad shape.

[Hint: There are a lot of younger citizens riding public transit these days, especially the Light Rail Systems!!]

Bowser New Orleans Streetcars with ESU LokSound/DCC!

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Bowser has continued their practice of offering their HO scale trolleys as DC Models or DCC models with sound. The DC models were until recently called **"DCC Ready"**. This meant that the car was set up by the factory to operate on Direct Current (DC) but a DCC decoder could be added by removing a plug and substituting a decoder that attached with the same plug. For the Bowser PCC cars introduced between 2009 and 2013, the plug used was an NMRA 8-pin plug.

With the arrival of the New Orleans 900 series streetcars in June, Bowser introduced the concept of **"DCC/Sound Ready"**. To add sound to any Bowser trolley model, both a sound decoder and a speaker must be added. Placing a speaker in a car normally requires the speaker to be located and installed plus the fact that leads must be attached somewhere on a circuit board. This usually required some soldering must be done even if the decoder can be a "Plug-In" type. Soldering on a circuit bard requires some skill and this skill is not present with many newer modelers.

Accordingly, Bowser decided with the New Orleans 900 series streetcar that they would change two items on the trolleys. The first is that the Overhead/Two-rail switch would be located under the floor, accessible from the outside of the car so that the modeler no longer would have to disassemble the car to make use of it. The second decision was to install a speaker in all streetcars and wire it to the circuit board. This can be accomplished with the use of a 21-pin plug. One of the main reasons for the Bowser switch to ESU LokSound for their trolley sound decoders was the ESU adoption of the 21-pin plug.

So now to convert a non-DCC car to DCC, all one needs to do is remove the 21-pin plug and plug in a decoder equipped with the same plug. If the decoder is a sound decoder, you get sound also without any other action required! Hence the term **"DCC/Sound Ready"**! The next run of PCC cars, dressed in Philadelphia's SEPTA Phase 1, Pittsburgh's Mod Desire, los Angeles' LATL "Fruit Salad" and Toronto's TTC Red Rocket" scheme will also embrace this new feature. They should be here by October 2014.

Getting used to ESU decoders will require some effort. According to NMRA Standard 9.2.2 "Configuration Variables For Digital Command Control All Scales" July 2014, in the range of CVs from 1 to 256, only four CVs are required by NMRA Specification as mandatory [M] to have the decoder labeled to conform to the practice, CVs **1** *[Primary Address]*, **17** *[Extended Address]*, **18** *[Extended Address]* and **29** *[Configuration Data #1]*. The others are either recommended [R] or optional [O]. So we must get used to different CVs for both lighting and sound issues. The ESU decoder is different from those most of us have been used to. So far in HO traction with the Bowser PCC and New Orleans 900 series trolleys, we have become accustomed to the Train Control Systems (TCS) and Soundtraxx decoders but the ESU decoders now standard in Bowser trolleys should be considered different, advanced or at least a "new breed". So expect some adjustments.

Our webmaster lived in the greater New Orleans area in 1979-1981 and became very familiar with the St. Charles streetcars with his friend, Alex Rivas, who was an operator on the line at that time. At that time both headlights remained on during night operations. The cars had no rear taillights of any kind. Car 952, now operating in San Francisco, has had a rear red taillight added above the center destination sign. The stock Bowser New Orleans models all feature reversible headlights. There is no easy way to change that on the **"DCC Sound Ready"** cars. But, we were told by ESU-USA, located in Muncy, Pennsylvania, for those **"ESU LokSound DCC/Sound"** cars, first change CV31 to 16 and CV32 to 2, then change CV257 to 16 and CV273 to 16. If you wish to do the same thing with the destination sign lights, just change CV481 to 16 and CV 497 to 16.

This appeared to be simple enough but it was not. CVs higher than 255 are "indexed" and may not be accessible from your command system. **Indexing** means that other CVs must have certain values in them before you can access them. This is what ESU meant by stating to "first change CV31 to 16 and CV32 to 2". These are the two Index CVs as defined by NMRA Standard 9.2.2. Our Digitrax Zephyr Xtra (DCS51) would not even take the values for CV257, 273, 481 or 497. We asked Digitrax about this and got the following from techsupport@digitrax.com:

"...ESU should have a work around for programming CVs above 255. Using their instructions, you should be able to program these higher non-standard CVs..."

We checked with Bowser Manufacturing. Lee English, Bowser CEO, affirmed that there is such a workaround. It requires the use of five CVs to program each Indexed CV. Such procedure may be obtained here.

We were also advised that one should NOT attempt to program the Indexed CVs on the programming track using the NCE Power Pro throttle. This is apparently due to a firmware issue in the Power Pro, that causes the wrong CV to be written (e.g. a write to CV275 will instead overwrite CV19).

[Note: This particular problem seems to only affect NCE Power Pro systems and only Programming Track writes. Reads and Program on Main seem not to be affected. NCE Power Cab Systems seem also not to be affected. As usual we always recommend that users contact NCE directly as they may have more up-to-date information!]

There are two possible workarounds:

1. Use the NCE Power Pro throttle with Program on Main instead of Program Track, or

2. Use JMRI/Decoder Pro, the option we took due to our experiences with the Digitrax Zephyr (DCS 51).

In JMRI/DecoderPro, the CVs will appear as follows:

CV257 is 16.2.257
CV273 is 16.2.273
CV481 is 16.2.481
CV497 is 16.2.497

This "shorthand" method XX.Y.ZZZ means that CV31 must be 16 and CV 32 must be 2 to access these four CVs. The hard working volunteers at JMRI have vastly simplified the issue. So using JMRI/DecoderPro all one needs to do is the following:

For non-directional headlights:
Set CV 16.2.257 to 16
Set CV 16.2.273 to 16

For non-directional destination sign lighting:
Set CV 16.2.481 to 16
Set CV 16.2.497 to 16

HINT: Ensure that you record what the CVs were before you change them in case you want to change them back some day. This is why some modelers read and record all CVs "right out of the box" before they do anything to the vehicle. For the two pre-production cars that we tested, the default value for CV 16.2.257 was 20 and for CV 16.2.273 it was 24.

We tried making the headlights non-directional and it worked.

Now we have a little more knowledge of the ESU decoder in the ESU New Orleans Streetcar. Please let us know if there are any other issues with the ESU New Orleans Streetcar decoders as we are still learning about the vast capabilities of these decoders. Feel free to contact us via email with any of your questions and we will try and get answers.

Note: ESU decoders have many more CVs to read than other decoders you might have been accustomed to, so if you "Read All Sheets"*, this may take up to one half hour so be prepared. We know of one traction fan who prints and stores DecoderPro runs for all his DCC-equipped vehicles. If you select Print ALL IN THE PRINT MENU, you will be getting over 150 pages so be selective when printing. Eliminating the FUNCTION MAP will save a lot of paper. After all, it is the list of CV values that is really useful.*

Thank you, Dave Heap, for your patience!