

The Roundhouse



The newsletter of the Lancaster & Northwestern Railroad Club

December 2004

An attraction to traction

By Revell Walker

During one of our recent meetings, fellow member Don brought in his traction (street car) project, a scratch-built streetcar hearse. Never heard of these before, but I guess back in the day, electric streetcars roamed America's cities and towns, and people used them as a major form of transport. It was fashionable to be taken to your final resting place in one of these things. I admired the work that had gone into it so far, and it got my creative juices flowing for the winter building season.

Streetcars, interurban and light rail cars are a fascinating breed, which are starting to make a return to the Los Angeles region and the U.S. in general. The red cars of San Diego are proving their worth and the line is expanding, and this year the MTA has added the Gold Line from Union Station to the outer reaches of Pasadena to its system. From Europe to Japan, I've ridden them and enjoy how they share the roads with auto traffic at street level. Anyone who has grown up in the last 50 years can have fond memories of riding a Pacific Electric to the fair grounds or other outing. This author has grown up riding the "L" system of the Chicago Transit Authority, with its tunnels leading to downtown and the "Loop" above ground and the Illinois Central motorized units (MUs) out to the near suburbs. The hum of electric motors and the smell of ozone is the stuff of nostalgia.

On the modeling scene, HO and O gauge hobbyist have enjoyed traction models for many years. In our gauge, it's been LGB offering the most traction models, and they've added their excellent New Orleans Perry Model 300 to their line up (made famous in the Brando film "A Street Car Named Desire"). This represents the high end, while Bachmann offers open and closed types streetcars on the inexpensive side. Hartland Locomotive Works (HLW) has produced several designs, the most recent a Birney streetcar. Even with this, it isn't enough. Traction is still the province of the kit basher. Thus, I present to you my latest work-in-progress, an interurban based on Bachmann's Jackson-Sharpe Combine Coach.



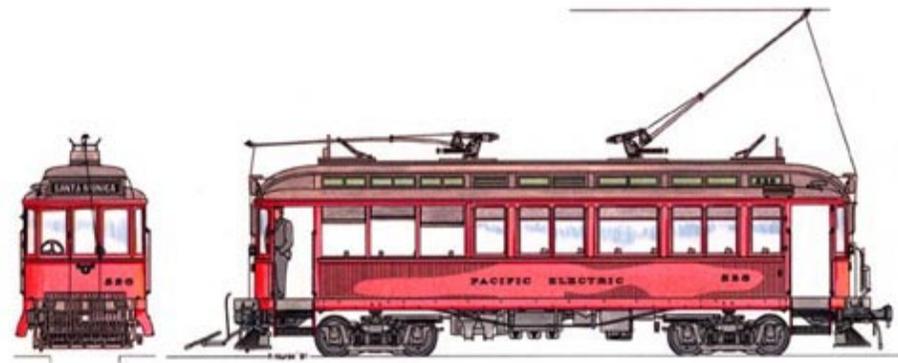
This is how the project looks this month. Perhaps by January I'll have the interior going, so stay tuned.



A Bachmann open bench trolley gave its roof planking, trolley pole, and motorman control posts for the project. The original trucks from the coach were retained. I shall use Magic Carpet Drive motors from North West Short Line to power the model, which will save a lot of messing about with motor block configurations. These units pop in where a set of wheels once were, and are wired up for electrical pick up.



This coach conversion started with the removal of chassis and floor of the original coach. A new floor was fabricated from light plywood. The trucks were moved in slightly.



See the “Red Car” in action in San Pedro

For 60 years, the Los Angeles area was served by a vast network of electric railway lines operated by the Pacific Electric Railway. Affectionately known as “Red Cars”, the Pacific Electric’s trolleys and interurban cars blanketed the Los Angeles area on more than 1,000 miles of rail lines. The last remnant of the system was abandoned in 1961. Forty-two years later, a small piece of the system has been resurrected in San Pedro, as the Port of Los Angeles Waterfront Red Car Line.

Riders can experience the thrill of a real 1920s-era trolley ride, thanks to the remarkable railcars that have been built to serve the line. Regular operation is conducted with two new replica railcars carefully patterned after an actual 1909 Pacific Electric “Red Car” design. A third car, restored in the 1960’s from an actual 1907-vintage Pacific Electric car, is available for special operations including charters.

The 1.5 mile line connects San Pedro’s cruise ship terminal with other attractions along the waterfront. The \$10 million dollar project was financed and constructed by the Port of Los Angeles, the independent City agency which manages the

bustling port facility. The line uses parts of an old Pacific Electric right-of-way that continued to be used for freight operation long after the original Red Cars were gone. The line was rebuilt to accommodate trolley operations with traditional 600-volt DC overhead trolley wire. The four stations feature ADA-compliant high-level platforms that make boarding and alighting easier for everyone and the new cars easily accommodate wheelchairs.

The line opened for public operation on July 19th, 2003. The fare is one dollar for everyone, with children 6 and under free. The fare is collected on board the cars, and your ticket is good all day for unlimited rides on the Red Car and the rubber-tired San Pedro Electric Trolleys.

For a closer look

After reading Revell’s article you just might want to see a real interurban. A web site for a PDF of a brochure on this line is at:

<http://www.railwaypreservation.com/images/red%20car%20brochure.pdf>

The main website that this came from:

<http://www.sanpedro.com/spcom/redcar.htm>

The train doctor

A rough-running diesel engine

This month’s case is about a rough running USA Trains F-3A diesel loco. The A unit had symptoms of stripped drive gears. It would move slowly and make a whining noise. Removing the forward motor block cover confirmed the prognosis. There are two ways to fix the problem. You can replace the entire motor block, a \$30.00 prospect, or you can replace just the drive axles for about \$10.00 each. Once you do this, it runs like new.

Another wear problem with the axles of USA Trains motor blocks is the plastic drive gear itself. This gear often gets cracks along the sleeve section the axles fit into, which creates a loose joint and resulting axle slippage. Again, the fix is a replacement drive axle.

After a few of these actions, you will have quite a few used axle sets lying around the workbench. Don’t throw them out. There’s a lot of life left in them. Enter North West Short Line to save those parts with new replacement drive gears that won’t split and extend the life of the used drive wheels.

Knowing this info, if you are ever at a swap meet and are offered a USA Trains GP-9 or 38-2 or other four-axle loco with motor block ills for \$50.00, TAKE IT! A new set of axles, cover plates and shoes will have you back in service for a lot less money than new!

Doc





Club members build a boxcar at Area 51



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**Lancaster & Northwestern
Railroad Club**

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