

Day three  
of a Sun  
special series  
by Michael  
Wilkinson



PEAK-HOUR crush (above left) jostles at that single entry; trying to sort out that exit door (above): grit your teeth.



"CLANG! CLANG!" It's dead easy. We're off driving a new tram.

# CLANG, CLANG

# -ALL ABOARD FOR FRUSTRATION!

Never driven one before, though that doesn't make any difference.

All it took was a few seconds instruction. One pedal for the accelerator, one for the brake, and the push button clang clanger.

It's wowie fun. Hurting up and down the Tramways test track at Preston.

Only thing is the orange trams aren't anywhere near this much fun for lots of people. In fact, they're infuriating machines of the worst kind — machines you just have to grit your teeth at.

The people suffering are the very ones the trams are supposed to be for — the passengers.



Trouble can start even before boarding. In peak hour, two or three trams will close their automatic doors before you get aboard.

The problem is there's just the one entrance — not like the old models which have up to six entrances, as well as the rear driver's compartment.

Once you're on an "orange" there can be the hassle of getting a ticket. You have to stand in a queue, sometimes while the tram is moving, and wait to get to the con-

ductor, who's seated alongside an electric machine.

As one conductress commented last week: "These electric gadgets have a habit of snagging."

"They're not like the old clipboards; with them you only had to rip the tickets off."

After this, if you're lucky it can be an enjoyable ride. The padded seats are much more comfortable than the bare boards of the early "green" models.

If you're not so lucky, a warm, almost claustrophobic feeling will start to overtake you. The explanation for this is twofold:

Most importantly, there's a heating problem with some of the trams. This is the first winter we've had them and regulating the warm air isn't always as easy as expected.

Partly this is a mechanical problem with the heaters themselves.

But, it's also a human one.

Crews who pick up the trams early in the morning have been turning the heaters to "high", stripping to shirt sleeves as they get warm, and keeping the trams that way.

Secondly, the claustrophobia often is the result of a narrow, confined appearance.

Actually, the "oranges" aren't appreciably narrower than the older models, although they are longer (54ft, as against 48 ft. in the oldies).

Getting out can be even more cause for teeth gritting.

There's only one exit and again, there's one of those automatic doors.

You're supposed to push a button, then hold on to a

central metal pole to keep the door open.

Do things wrong and the door will close with you in between — or, worse still, the tram will move off before you make it down the steps.



Forty-one of the "oranges" are now in service and they're costing \$200,000 each, as against the originally budgeted \$130,000.

Critics of the model — officially known as the "Z" class — say that the main reason for the problem is that the body design originated in Sweden.

"What works in Stockholm doesn't necessarily work here," said a leading unionist.

For its part the Tramways acknowledges there are problems, that at least occasionally, people are having to grit their teeth.

It especially acknowledges this can happen at the peak-hour city stops, though the board comments: "People should realise they're not packed in like the old models. There's normally another tram only a few minutes behind."

The board says most other problems are temporary and are dwarfed by the cost savings of the "oranges."

For example, the old

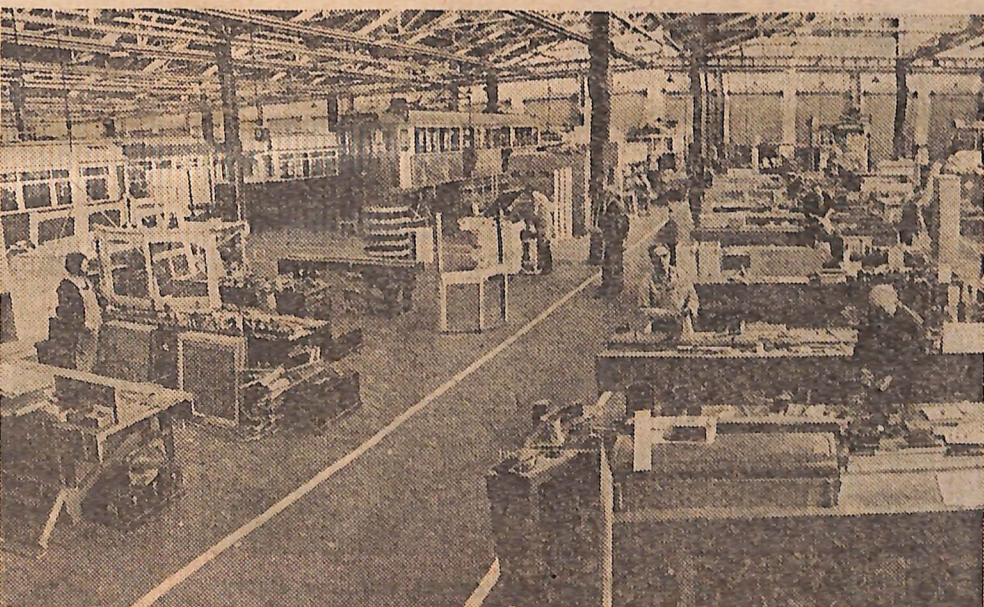
"greens" have to be serviced once a day, against a month and more for the "Z" classes.

Fare-wise, the new models have enormous appeal for the board. It's been found at least 98 per cent of their passengers pay.

With the "greens" more than a million dollars a year was lost in fares.

In summary the board says: "We're doing everything we can to make the new trams the best possible. We're confident we'll attain this pretty soon."

And when that happens there'll be just one word all round — wowie!



**TOMORROW: MORE FROM OUR TRANSPORT CRISIS**

TRAMWAYS workshop at Preston: brakes maintenance once a day.

# The old, old story...

**RIDDLE: What's green and yellow like a banana and clogs the roads?**

Answer: The Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board.

That's only one of the jokes the "smarties" are telling about our off-the-rails tram system.

As the report above details, the MMTB has a series of problems with the orange trams. Some of these problems would be almost laughable if they weren't true.

Yet, it's not really fair to joke about the board, or highlight one problem area on its own, without considering the overall picture: how one problem compounds another.

Here's how this investigation found the tramways at June '76.

● **Trams** — 679 in the fleet dating back as far as 1921. A total of 440, or 64 per cent, were made before 1940.

The older models have brakes so ancient they have to be adjusted every day. Maintenance costs last fiscal year topped \$5,095,776.

● **Buses** — a total of 272 in the fleet, with the oldest dating back to 1951, and 117 —

or 43 per cent — made before 1955.

No power brakes on the older buses. Drivers are refusing to take them on short runs and dub them "the bone rattlers".

Maintenance bill for buses in the past fiscal year was at least \$2,215,770.

● **General finances** — the loss this year will be about \$23 million, compared with \$20.5 million last year and \$11.6 million a year earlier.

Expenditure on new equipment — capital items — was a mere \$7 million to \$8 million in 1975-76. This year the delivery rate for new trams has had to be halved because of the capital funds shortage.

● **Employees** — total of more than 4000, requiring at least \$30 million in wages this year. Despite this, short of at least 200 people, mostly drivers and conductors. The shortage is a major cause of tram and bus cancellations.

● **Delays** with trams, traffic congestion is a major cause of delay. Today, 20 per cent of each peak hour trip is spent with the tram stationary and cars blocking the track.

● **Passengers** — total of people carried down from 354 million in 1945, to 133 million last year, and expected to be another seven per cent down this year.