

WHAT'S SO GOOD ABOUT THERAPY? 

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THE Melbourne Weekly

AUGUST 16 - 22, 1994



TRANSFORMATION

The Lowdown on the Wheel World

COVER STORY

Between the Lines

Passenger numbers are down, conductors are an endangered species, automatic ticket machines are in and the old green rattler has been classified by the National Trust. Times are changing for Melbourne's trams. Angela Martinkus and Michelle Griffin take a look down the track.



TRAM TOURISM

Yes, OK so you've heard it all before - but you're about to hear it again: Trams are Melbourne's best tourist attraction.

"Melbourne without trams is inconceivable," says David Grant, chairman of the Tourist Commission.

Craig Opee, owner of the Colonial Tramcar restaurant, is also pretty keen on them. By the end of this year his third restaurant tram will be on the rails serving its moveable feast to tourists and locals alike.

For \$75 (\$85 at the weekend) you can rattle around the city for three hours while digging into smoked salmon, followed by chicken breast and chocolate mousse for dessert - all washed down with as much beer and wine as you can take.

The National Trust love the old trams and have classified what's left of the W-class fleet (about 100 are in service and another 100 are in storage). Last month the PTC and National Trust announced that 43 of the W-class trams will be restored and kept on the rails. Met manager Eric Keys says the old rattlers will go wherever the tourists go.



AS SAFE AS HOUSES

Mum's the word on the number of accidents involving trams. The Public Transport Corporation (PTC) does not release records but figures from a Melbourne City Council accident survey indicate a relatively low body count.

Between 1982 and 1992, there were 212 tram accidents; eight fatalities (all people getting on or off the tram), 105 serious injuries and 99 minor accidents. Since Swanston Street was closed to traffic the number of accidents has dropped by 48 per cent.

Tramways union secretary Lou Di Gregorio reckons minor accidents have increased in the last 12 months. The problem is an understaffed maintenance department, he says. Workshop manager Russell Brooks says that's rubbish. Staff numbers have been pared down but now it is more efficient than ever, he says.



THE MIGHTY FLEET

It currently costs the PTC \$150 million per year to keep its fleet of about 470 trams on the rails. The fleet consists of: 152 B-class trams, 70 A-class, 228 Z-class and about 100 W-class trams.

Only 53 W-class trams will stay in service. The rest will be in "active storage" and will be hauled out to provide additional services when big events like the Grand Prix and the Grand Final are on. Another 100 W-class trams, in various states of disrepair, are in stored in depots and will stay that way until transport minister Alan Brown decides what to do with them.



BYE BYE CONNIES

In February last year the fate of the conductor was sealed. Out they go and in come automatic ticket machines and driver-only trams. Driver onlys are already used on 70 per cent of tram routes but only in non-peak periods. They will be all over the network by December 1995.

The PTC will give details on the phase-in of automatic ticket machines over the next couple of months. At the moment though, it's up to the driver to collect fares which can tend to slow things down a little. Teething problems, is how the PTC puts it. "Once we get the automatic ticketing the driver will get back to normal speed," says Met business manager Eric Keys.



When the new ticketing system is introduced the 754 conductors currently working the system will be nothing more than a memory. To replace them, the PTC is training a fleet of Customer Service Employees (CSEs).

These blue-suited mobile information officers will rove from tram to tram checking tickets, answering questions and even helping the elderly on and off trams. There are currently 21 working on the trams and by the end of next year there will be 110.

According to PTC public relations manager Ray Wilson the average daily commuter is likely to bump into a CSE about twice a day. "It might just look like they are just hopping on and off trams at random but there is an involved plan," Keys hastens to add.



FARES PLEASE

Auto ticketing is almost here. Anelink (a local consortium) won the tender last year and has been working on the ticket machine's design and manufacture ever since.

Over the next year the machines will appear on trams and in more than 1000 retail outlets including petrol stations and newsagents. When passengers climb aboard they will either buy a ticket or validate the one they have already got by swiping the magnetic ticket through the machine.

Tickets will be the same size as a phone card and will have a magnetic strip that will store information such as how much time is left on the ticket.



FARE DODGING

Melburnians are ingenious forgers, says Kew depot manager Geoff Hatfield, who has confiscated some beauties. Tickets that were stuck back together, punched out up to eight times, photocopied, painted over and even layered. The most ingenious fraud so far, a blank weekly ticket, with the new date stamped and erased every week on the clear plastic card holder.

Get sprung without a ticket and it'll cost you \$100 and the roving CSEs, revenue protection officers and

THE CONNIE'S TALE

Roberto D'Andrea, 33, is one of the last conductors. By the end of 1995, he will be a driver full time, locked behind a glass window in front of the controls. Many of his good friends, friends he made during the great tram strike of 1990, have already left. They were people like Mal the Poet, who stuck his poems to the panels of the fleet.

Roberto joined the tramways five years ago. Six months after he started, the great five week strike of 1990 began. Roberto found the solidarity and determination of the time uplifting.

"If we'd realised in 1990 how tired we would be when the issue came up again, maybe we'd have done things differently," reflects Roberto. In February 1993, the tramways' stalwart union secretary, Lou Di Gregorio, signed an agreement with PTC's management to phase out conductors on the condition that everyone who wanted to stay could; retrained as drivers and customer-service officers.

Driving has its charms, says Roberto philosophically, but it's the human stuff he loves.

"The city becomes like a country town to us. You start to wave to people on the street. I keep my Italian alive by working Lygon Street."

Sometimes, he says, it's not even necessary to have common language or culture for trams to work their therapy. Roberto describes one evening during the Gulf war when a Palestinian man boarded the Preston tram, drowning his obvious sorrows.

"He was very sad but couldn't explain it too well because he didn't speak English. He came on board with this big rubbish bin and inside he had ice, cans of VB, a bunch of flowers, some pita bread going soggy, some tomatoes and a blown up map of the world. He spoke to me in Palestinian most of the way. It was absolutely lovely and he stayed on board the entire trip. He gave the driver the flowers and me the map of the world," he beams. "Tram travel can be very therapeutic."



TRAM ART

Melbourne's art trams are a dying breed. Although there are still a few sailing around town, the program of commissioning the city's artists to design-a-tram has ceased.

Mirka Mora painted the first "art" tram in 1979 when 20 were commissioned in a joint venture between the PTC and the Ministry of Arts. Seven years later another 18 were commissioned including the now deceased Leunig tram.

Mora's tram, with its colourful design of leaves, angels, snakes, birds and a cyclops was a bit of a crowd stopper in its day. "The tram was sold by the Ministry of the Arts a few years later - which was stupid - I think it's now living in someone's garden in Mt Eliza," she says.

THE HISTORY
The first tram came to Melbourne in 1852 - a cable tram. Not all art trams have had such a happy fate. Clifton Pugh's tram was involved in a car accident and de-commissioned. The PTC donated it to the Museum of Victoria but it is yet to be restored. It is now stored in a suburban depot and a few of the panels have been lifted by punters happy to have their very own Pugh at home.

The plug was pulled on the art trams program for financial reasons, says the PTC's Ray Wilson. "It was all getting too costly and difficult to administer."

Those trams still on the rails will stay until contracts with the artists expire. Then, when their 15 minutes of fame is over, they will be painted over in the corporate uniform of yellow and green.

TRAM TIMETABLES: WHAT TRAM TIMETABLES?

So you want to take the tram into the city. How do you find out what time they go? It's obvious. Consult the timetable... if you can find one.

The PTC is pretty touchy about the subject of tram timetables. Not surprising considering there haven't been proper tram timetables posted since the summertime frequency timetable. That was introduced at the end of 1992 and turned into an autumn timetable, then winter... and we're still waiting.

For most tram users it is a matter of just turning up at the stop and waiting, patiently, for the next one to come along. (For the record it varies between a four minute and an eight-minute wait during the peak period.)

A program introduced to review all tram services running out of Bourke Street has improved services by 200 per cent, says Keys. The first line to get the special review treatment was Bundoora. There are now new - and more realistic - timetables at every stop on the line. The result? Business has increased by 10 per cent, according to the PTC.

Next in line for the efficiency overhaul treatment are the Swanston Street routes - trams travelling to Lygon Street, St Kilda Road, Malvern and Carnegie -

which will be completed by 1995.

Meanwhile at other points on the Met, trams continue to hunt in packs. Tram passengers say the most notorious routes for the herd mentality are the number 1 (Coburg to South Melbourne) and 8 (Preston to Toorak).

CARRIAGE CRIMES

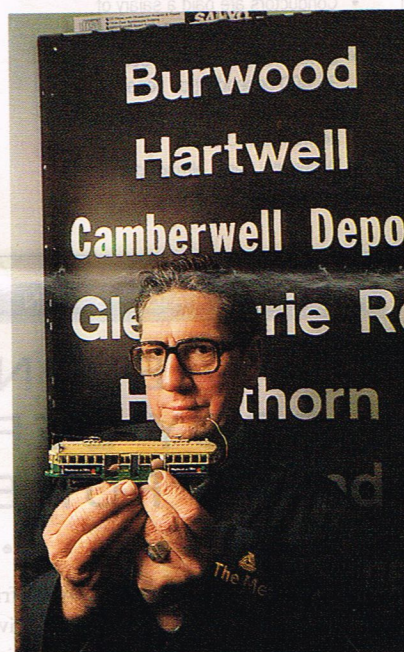
An encounter with the odd drunk is the worst passengers are likely to encounter travelling by tram. The PTC says the roving CSEs will keep trouble at bay, especially at night. But union boss Lou Di Gregorio says it is not just the passengers he's worried about - it's the driver.

"When the machine plays up, people are going to go up to the driver. He'll say 'I'm sorry sir, got nothing to do with me, and the passenger will get angry.' Happily for them, the drivers will be locked into their little cabins safe from irate passengers.

Misbehave on a tram and you



The Preston Workshop: a healing ground for sick trams.



THE TRAM BUFF

Norm Cross was only four years old when he discovered his special affinity for trams. "We lived at 268 St George's Road, and the number 268 tram came past the house and I read the number. From then on I could quote numbers and makes of almost any tram," he says in his deep voice, as steady and rumbling as the trams themselves.

Fifty years on, Cross still lives at 268 St George's Road, and he's still mad on trams. His house is stuffed with memorabilia - three large scale models built by hand, 70 model trams, and several tram signs, panels, and parts he's souvenired in his 40 years as a tramway mechanic. "I'm on intimate terms with every tram on the system - I've worked on them since 1959, and I've written two books." Norm wouldn't call himself a tram spotter. "No, not a spotter - although I do go out with a notebook and take down numbers..." he admits.

classified by the National Trust in August 1992. The trams are no longer for sale and now come under the auspices of the federal "Protection of Cultural Heritage Act" and can't be taken out of the country without a permit.

The PTC says it costs about \$50,000 to restore one W-class tram. The 53 to be kept in the fleet are all being restored - 43 to the original cream and green livery; and 10 others working the city circle route are painted in a burgundy and gold. The \$2.5 million restoration program will be finished by the end of the year.

SICK TRAMS

Every week around 20 trams go down with some illness or other - the most common complaints being brake trouble or problems with the traction engine. They're packed off to the Preston workshop where all mechanical repairs are done under the loving care of workshop manager Russell Brooks.

ON THE LINE ADVERTISING

Advertising has been on for as long as trams have on tracks. But in the techno-1990s you would think advertising on the old rattler was obsolete. Think again. Advertising on is big business.

Buspak Advertising has had a contract for advertising on (and buses) for the last decade. Each year it pays over \$2 million to the PTC for the right to have its advertising.

With a ready market of commuters with nothing to do but the advertisements, potential advertisers are well placed getting their message across. It's the right sort of message.

Not everything passes the PTC's power of veto. Time the amusement arcade recently approached the PTC

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what it thought was a great idea to replace the buzzing sound when you pull the cord with that popular refrain: "Hasta la vista, baby." The PTC didn't share Timezone's enthusiasm for the proposal.

The PTC's Wilson says lingerie ads showing bras and panties are also a bit too risky for the trams.

Want to advertise on a tram? Here's what you pay:

- An all over painted tram (like the Toohey's Red tram): \$10,000 per month.
- Panel ad on the outside: \$555 per panel, per month.
- Inside panel: \$260 per month.

TEN TRAM FACTS TO IMPRESS YOUR FRIENDS WITH

- Trams weigh between 20 and 25 tonnes.
- A W-class tram is 46 ft long, a B-class tram is 70ft long.
- Trams cruise at about 55kms but can handle a speedy 70kms with ease.
- The tram network has 230 kilometres of double track on 28 routes.
- The average tram travels 40,000 kilometres each year.
- About 370,000 tram passenger journeys are made on an average day.
- Conductors are paid a salary of between \$28,000 and \$30,000.
- Drivers receive anything between \$30-35,000 depending on penalties.
- 757 conductors currently work on the network's 470 trams.
- Driver-only trams already operate on 70 per cent of routes.

THE HISTORY

The first tram came to Melbourne in 1885 - a cable tram line running between the city and Richmond. Twenty years later the electric tram was born.

From little things, big things grow. Almost all of Melbourne's tram network was built by small suburban tramways trusts.

In 1919 the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board was formed to take over all the independent lines and convert them from cable to electric traction. In the 1950s, when other cities were busy dismantling their tramways, Melbourne built more of them to cater for the 1956 Olympics.

The first Z-class trams arrived in Melbourne from Sweden in the early 1970s, painted a day-glo orange entirely appropriate for the decade. The Metropolitan Transit Authority took over in 1985, and introduced the A-class and articulated B-class trams which run on the light rail.

At the beginning of 1990, the then Transport Minister, Jim Kennan, introduced the ill-fated scratch ticketing system and the tramways union introduced the ill-fated five week tram strike to preserve conductors on the system.

Both concepts won a two year reprieve until the end of 1992, when the new Liberal State Government came in with other ideas...

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FACTS ON FUNERALS

VIEWING THE BODY BEFORE THE FUNERAL.

A "viewing" is a good way for friends and family to spend time with the deceased because it gives them the chance to bid farewell in their own way.

Viewings are generally arranged at a time suitable to the family before or at the time of the funeral. The body is seen in the coffin or casket dressed in clothing provided by the family or in a shroud-like burial garment.

A viewing can help people to come to terms with the reality of the death. This is especially important if it was an unexpected death or if there are family members and friends who had not seen the deceased recently. Children can also benefit from attending the viewing.

Sometimes people will place sentimental items in the coffin. Personal letters or cards, drawings from children, flowers from the garden, toys and photos are typical examples. It is a very personal time between the family and the deceased ... a time to respect the memory.

Viewing also helps to positively confirm for the family that the Funeral Director has the right body. For more information, please contact your local branch.

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