

ON THE SPOT

A fix for tram junkies

Randall Wilson and Dale Budd have just released another book on Melbourne's old rattlers. **Karen Heinrich reports.**

For most of us, trams are quite literally a means to an end; a way of getting from A to B. For others, however, they hold a much greater fascination. Those people are called tram-spotters, and some of the more hardcore among them even record tram sounds for their own enjoyment. Elton John famously bought an ex-Melbourne W-class tram and shipped it to Windsor, England, where it now stands in his garden.

Randall Wilson and Dale Budd don't put themselves in that category, although they are clearly enchanted by trams. They have co-written two books on trams, which they believe are the most recognised and loved symbol of Victoria's capital city.

"We don't consider ourselves to be tramspotters," Wilson said.

"Although we are interested in the design of trams and the development of

their technology, our focus is primarily on the role of trams in public transport, and how they relate to a city — in this case, Melbourne. To a large extent, that relationship can be shown in pictures, and as photographers we have an interest in recording and showing that relationship to others."

Wilson, who grew up in Heidelberg in the 1960s, traces his interest in trams and transport more generally back to his teenage years. He vividly recalls the flash floods of February 1972 that marooned trams in Elizabeth, Collins and Bourke streets.

"It caused traffic chaos throughout much of the city," recalled Wilson. "Those trams which were running had passengers clinging to every foothold."

There are photographs of that day in Wilson and Budd's latest book, *The Melbourne Tram Book* (UNSW Press, \$24.95), a pictorial tribute to a 100-plus-year-old mode of transport that every



Randall Wilson and Dale Budd at the South Melbourne tram depot. PICTURE: MELANIE FAITH DOVE



other major city in Australia discarded in the mid-20th century.

Tramspotters will be delighted by the hundreds of colour images that include decorated trams, trams appearing in artwork, as well as current and former tram-network maps and precision tram drawings.

Friends for years and both Canberra-based, Budd is a director of the Federal Government's Railtrack Corporation and Wilson is a senior policy adviser with the Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources. Both men are keen photographers, and their work appears in the book.

Still, Wilson and Budd don't expect everyone to want to pore over the pictures. They are well aware that for every person who is enchanted by trams, there is another close behind who despises them.

"To the extent that motorists who share road space with trams are some-

times delayed by them, there will always be some people who are not admirers of trams," Wilson said.

"In the past couple of decades, we believe there has been increasing recognition of the role of public transport, including trams. Those who believed that all transport problems could be solved by an ever-increasing numbers of cars, and the building of freeways, are now in the minority."

Wilson said Victoria showed great foresight in keeping its trams during a period in which they fell out of favour in many mostly English-speaking countries.

Budd grew up in Sydney and laments that city's decision to halt its tram service in 1961.

He said this was mostly due to the view that buses were a cheaper form of street transport, and that public trans-

port was generally in a decline amid the (now-ridiculous) notion that everyone would travel by car in the future.

"If you look around the world today, nobody is closing down tramway systems any more and, in fact, there are a lot of new ones being started from scratch in Europe and in American cities such as Los Angeles, San Diego, Portland, Sacramento, Memphis and San Jose," Budd said.

In Memphis, particularly, a lot of ex-Melbourne trams are ferrying citizens to and from work. Wilson and Budd regard it as sweet vindication for Melbourne and for European cities such as Milan and Vienna, all of which embraced their trams.

"Courtesy of Surveyor General (Robert) Hoddle in the 1830s, Melbourne had a few good features going for it, such as wide streets and a reasonably flat terrain, (but) outside of Melbourne in the 1950s and 1960s, the

attitude to trams was very negative," Wilson said.

Wilson and Budd agree that Melbourne's trams are "here to stay", a phrase borrowed from a State Government-sponsored advertisement in trams in 1973, which Wilson said ended the possibility that they might be replaced by buses.

"One can be very optimistic about the outlook," Wilson said.

"Now the mood is to make cities more pedestrian-friendly, and trams are certainly a streetscape-friendly form of transport. I think we can see the infrastructure that goes with trams — such as tram stops and replacement of the tracks themselves — supporting an ease of use. Trams are here to stay, it's as simple as that."

Budd said a positive development for the retention of Melbourne's trams was the fact that tramlines were built in the Docklands precinct ahead of development rather than after the buildings were constructed.

"There's a photo in the book of a tram running through almost a wasteland because they put the trams in first, and good on them — it was a smart thing to do," Budd said.

"Of course, there are a lot of new lines on the drawing board, such as at Station Pier in Port Melbourne, which will be connected up in due course, and the Government is right now planning the Vermont South extension and later on that will go to Knox City. So the move is to expand the system and not to wind it down."