

for attracting more than its share of trendy commuters, but what about the rest? Armed with Metcards and a camera, M spent two days and nights chatting to “tram tribes” on six routes — the 86, 96, 57, 78, 48 and 19.

Regular commuters betrayed a sense of pride in the character of their lines. For example, the number 96 felt cool, with its combination of St Kilda rockers, hot backpackers and East Brunswick retrosexuals squished together on a sleek French bullet tram.

Travellers on the 57, from the city to Maribyrnong, said theirs was the “badass” tram, redolent of booze and “eau de armpit” — and not only when the races are on at Flemington.

And the 86, from Bundoora to Docklands, via Smith Street, Collingwood, lived up to its reputation, if only through its passengers’ stories of the weird and wonderful.

Among the 86-ers are Thornbury comedian Justin Heazlewood (aka the Bedroom Philosopher), whose album *Songs from the 86 Tram* lampoons its hipsters, housewives, bogans and bad boys.

Yet it also preaches a message of acceptance that rings true for tramriders on any route. “You can choose your friends,” Heazlewood sings, “but you can’t choose your tramily.”

96

From rock to riches

East Brunswick to St Kilda beach
39,700 daily passengers
13.9 kilometres long

The 96 embraces a spectrum of coolness, from the middle-class hipsters and faux-hemians of Melbourne’s inner-north to the old St Kilda guard, who remember when the suburb’s train was replaced by a “light-rail” tram in 1987.

“It [St Kilda] used to be a very hard place back then,” says Harry Puki, 54, on his way to work at the Melbourne Convention Centre. “It’s not any more. Still, I’ve seen a lot of things on this tram that I couldn’t explain. People are friendly. Sometimes too friendly. But you put up with it. We’ve all got our problems.”

David Valladeres and Valetta Fenton are both on their way to Centrelink in South Melbourne to get their pensions. They say they met in St Kilda 20 years

ago. “Back in the day, eh?” says Valladeres.

Frenchwoman Louise Fromageau, 28, has only been in St Kilda for three months. “I’m working as a kitchen hand, but I’m a translator. The trams are pretty clean, reliable. I think they feel less oppressive because you’re not underground.”

The tram itself is also French — one of the special-order C2-class trams leased to cope with crowding on one of Melbourne’s busiest tram routes. However, their sleekness and stripped-back interiors are not universally popular. There is a Twitter feed, too rude to name, that lampoons the tram as a “French slut”, and online chatter testifies to it being regarded as snobby

and stuck-up by other commuters — particularly those on the 86.

But Megan Clement, who catches the tram from the city to her home in East Brunswick, disagrees. “It’s Melbourne’s premiere tram line,” she says, referring to its listing in *National Geographic* in 2008, when it was named one of the world’s “top 10 trolley car rides”.

Clement, an editor, adds that while her leg of the journey is full of “attractive, inner-urban professionals” it still has its share of characters. “There is a man with a small bird on his shoulder who does chin-ups on the railings. He’s a regular. He talks to himself and wears the tiniest short shorts you’ve ever seen.”

Learning our lines

Which tram route picks up inner-urban hipsters and ageing rockers? And which mixes trolleyed nonnas with students and nuns? **Natalie Craig** finds the answers.

PICTURES JUSTIN McMANUS

June 19, 2011



78

Cole O'Reilly



48

David Wetzler

THE TICKET

their long blue coats, sunglasses and David's charisma, it's little surprise Melbourne's inspectors have gained cult status. There are people following the inspectors' every move, in feeds like @tramcops and @inspectorupdate, as well as a popular tumblr page called "Tikileaks", where people post photos of the squads, adding their own captions.

It was only when alone that they could express their desire for each other and their desire to be together.



96

Harry Puki

48

Business and pleasure

Docklands to North Balwyn, via Bridge Road and the MCG
18,100 daily passengers
13.5 kilometres long

The 48 is patronised by shoppers, eastern-suburban commuters, footy fans and an inordinate number of bankers. Futuristic Lego buildings tower over its initial "super stop", at Victoria Harbour, Docklands, which at 5.15pm is packed with pinstriped office workers.

An empty, double-carriage tram packs out immediately, and the dozen souls left stranded on the platform watch our departure like desperate castaways. Mercifully, the tram purges half its passengers 500 metres later at Southern Cross Station and we're able to get a seat.

Mitchell Evans, a financial planner, shoots us an empathetic look. "It's every man for himself down there ... I prefer driving."

But David Wetzler, 36, says he's a fan of the tram. "Wouldn't do it any other way," he says. He's also a big fan of Hawthorn, wearing his scarf on a non-game day. "Yeah, this scarf's 30 years old now - hand-knitted by Grandma. She's no longer kickin' on."

Wetzler alights near Kew Junction, where he's going for dinner. There are only a half-dozen people left, reading or talking on the phone, on the uphill stretch to North Balwyn. The return journey is mainly taken by people heading to the bars and restaurants of Richmond, including a young man wearing a loud apricot T-shirt, but no coat. "Beer jacket will keep me warm," he says.

Fiona Sherwin, 25, of North Balwyn, is on her way to dinner. A physiotherapist and master's student, she catches the tram frequently to town, and says it's fairly uneventful. "I listen to music or I study ... Sometimes I listen in to other people's conversations."

The following day we meet James Coughlan, a banker at ANZ. He explains that the proliferation of blue ANZ lanyards on the 48 is probably due to the fact the bank employs "several thousand" people along

its route at its Docklands and Collins Street offices — enough to populate a large country town.

We also meet Lauren George, 22, of Sunshine, and Stephanie Calder, 22, of Carlton, on their way to the Bridge Road shops. "I've never had a problem with this tramline ... No one ever talks to you or tries to pick you up on this line," George says, frowning. Maybe the 48 is merely repressed? "Maybe," she concedes. "I have had the whole sexual eye contact thing."

19

Students and shoppers

Sydney Road, North Coburg, to city
35,400 daily passengers
10.2 kilometres long

Be prepared to get out of your seat a lot on the 19. Plaid canvas shopping trolleys are extremely heavy when full, and the grannies, nonnas and yayias on the route need frequent help hoisting them inside.

Plodding down traffic-choked Sydney Road from North Coburg to Brunswick, route 19 picks up shoppers at Melbourne's longest multicultural bazaar, before heading into the city via Parkville and the edge of Melbourne Uni.

Peter Parzkinkas, 76, wearing a tracksuit top and sunnies, is bemused when we ask him where he's come from. "I'm Greek. Of course!" We clarify: "Where have you come from today?"

"From Coburg. I've been living in Coburg since 1970," he says, jovially.

Every year, he says, something changes. "The Pentridge jail, it's gone. The Kodak plant." The tram? "No, it hasn't changed much."

But unlike in 1970, the 19 along Sydney Road is a minor tourist attraction. Max Nordstrom, of Sweden,

and Freya Ulfsson, of Finland, made the journey after reading about its cheap clothing.

"We're going to the op shop, to Savers?" says Ulfsson. "I need some warm shoes," she says, showing us her fringed, black velvet sandals. Two stops later, a dragnet of tram inspectors circle the smiling couple, giving them a ticket costing more than a new pair of shoes.

Closer to the city, near Parkville, Natasha Ritchie looks striking with black hair, red lipstick and facial piercings. She agrees to pose for us in a photo, but only if the passenger opposite, a nun, poses with her.

"I don't know her!" says Sister Marguerite, laughing as she moves across the aisle. Ritchie says she's on her way from Brunswick to work. "At the Social Research Centre."

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86

Free spirits

Docklands to Bundoora, via Smith Street, Collingwood
44,200 daily passengers
22.2 kilometres long

No tram offers a greater smorgasbord of humanity than the 86. "It's like god took Melbourne and just hit shuffle," sings Heazlewood on his album *Songs from the 86 Tram*.

The tram takes in shiny Docklands, grungy Collingwood and hip Northcote. It terminates about 15 kilometres from Melbourne in Bundoora, one of the few trams to cross into transport's zone two.

We catch the 86 in and out of town for five hours on a Thursday night, meeting students, housewives, hip-hopping teenagers and a father juggling his three children with groceries and a can of Jim Beam.

Despite its boisterousness, Hannah Vassils, 21, a call-centre worker on her way home to Northcote, says it's much livelier on Saturdays. "Everyone's drunk and everyone's laughing at everyone; it's like a party on the tram."

Heading north up Smith Street to Northcote, we approach Emmanuel Avila, who hastily puts away a beer bottle. "Oh, I thought you dudes were tram inspectors," says the Canadian on a working holiday. He's on his way to the Northcote Social Club. "A couple of bands are playing, kind of an indie vibe I suppose."

Winni McCarthy, 22, a photographer's assistant who catches the tram home from work in Thornbury, refers to the scene as "hipped-on". "The people on the tram, they're either sort of ultra-cool — you know the trendy dressers in their vintage clothes and their Ray Bans — or they're the washed-out junkie types, kind of all greasy and gnarly," she says. "I once had this really weird guy insist I give him my phone number. I just pretended something outside was really interesting."

But the 86 tram stories get stranger than that. "There's the man with the wicker stool on his head," says a colleague who catches it regularly. "Then there's

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"It was only when alone that they could express both their desire for each other and their desire to be real police," writes one observer, of a photo of two inspectors alone on a pedestrian island. "He would fine her for 'stealing his heart' and she'd sign a warrant requesting a total body search."



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"I don't know her!" says Sister Marguerite, laughing as she moves across the aisle. Ritchie says she's on her way from Brunswick to work. "At the Social Research Centre," she says, rolling her eyes and laughing. "It's a call centre, it's not that interesting. I do other things, though."

Sister Marguerite teaches Vietnamese at the Centre for Adult Education on Flinders Lane. "I do go to the city at this time with a lot of young students going to the uni. Chat about hobbies, the weather, whatever. It's a very friendly tram."

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