

THE MELBOURNE L CLASS CARS

The two most heavily patronised services on the Prahran and Malvern Tramway Trust's system were the East Malvern and Glen Iris to St Kilda Road routes. To cope with this ever increasing patronage, the Trust designed and commissioned James Moore Ltd to build the first four motor bogie cars to run on its system.

Whilst the cars were being built, the Trust was absorbed into the newly formed Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board who upon delivery classified them as the "L" class and numbered them 101-106 as they were to have been in the P&MTT roster.

These cars with their four entrance drop centre with three and two seating were the highest and widest cars to run on the system. They were also the heaviest until the advent of the Y1 class cars.

The equipment fitted to them was straight out of the General Electric and Brill catalogues with their Brill 77E trucks with GE247 motors. 101-105 were equipped with GEK35AA2 controllers whilst 106 had GEPCM controllers which were later replaced with GEK35JJ controllers. The cars were placed in service between 31/3/21 and 14/9/21.

The Board decided to standardise the destination boxes in all cars and between 8/1924 and 3/1925 the "L" class cars received same. As the early "W" cars were fitted with a driver's emergency door and as a safety measure to drivers the cars were fitted with these doors between 12/1926 and 4/1927.

Between the period 11/1929 and 8/1931, the cars were fitted with route number boxes, had louvre shades fitted to the saloon windows and were painted green and cream in lieu of the previous chocolate and cream livery.

During the early thirties, the Board embarked on a standardisation program to convert the "W" and "W1" class cars to "W2" class. Between March and July 1934, the "L" class cars were taken in hand and converted to a three entrance, two and two seat drop centre layout as an approximation of the W2 class. This converted a narrow aisle in the drop centre to a wide one.

In December 1935, the cars were filled with rear vision mirrors. To standardise the brake system on all four motor cars, the Ls were filled with self lapping valve brakes between 4/1937 and 9/1938.

To overcome complaints about Melbourne's inclement weather by the drivers, doors were filled to the left hand side of the cabins in September 1938.

Between 6/1939 and 4/1940, the present type route number boxes were fitted.

Following the threat of industrial action, the cars were filled with windscreen wipers in April 1944.

The drop centre in all cars was raised 4" between 1/1946 and 8/1947 to equalise the distance between the road and the step and the step and drop centre.

When the trucks were converted to 28" wheels, new body bolsters which were made of cast steel were fitted but owing to the deteriorating track in St Kilda Road, they soon cracked necessitating the cars to be withdrawn. These bolsters were replaced by prefabricated steel bolsters. This work was carried out between 2/1949 and 7/1951, and entailed modification to brake gear. The windshields were rebuilt with slimline pillars to enable the drivers to have better vision. 103 and 106 were filled with lined white ceilings in March and May 1952 respectively. About this time, the standee windows ~~and~~ ^{at} the ends of the saloons were sealed off to strengthen the bodies. During the 1954/55 New Year vacation period, the six cars were stored at Malvern and during this period 101 was taken to the Footscray lines for clearance testing. Although it is not known whether 101 did in fact go to Williamstown Road, it was definitely stored at Footscray Depot.

To improve the driver's lot, the cars were fitted with curved aprons and for the passengers the saloon seats were upholstered. The ceilings in 101, 102, 104 and 105 were painted with colour flex in lieu of the varnish to improve the lighting. This work was carried out between 7/1958 and 12/1959.

To avoid the necessity to re-canvas the roof of the cars, they were sprayed with the plastic liquid envelope roof and their GE high speed trolley bases were replaced the Board's standard bases together with being fitted with carbon skid trolley poles. This work was carried out between 11/1962 and 10/1963.

The "L" class cars were transferred from Malvern to Glenhuntly when that depot opened in the mid 1920s and was their home until early 1974 when 101 and 102 went to Brunswick, 103 to Essendon, 104 to South Melbourne and 106 to Malvern. 105 remained at Glenhuntly. They were then only to be used for service if there was a shortage of cars. Early in 1946, 104 had spent six weeks at South Melbourne when there was a critical shortage of cars.

On 6/5/80, the "L" class cars were officially placed in storage but as late as 23/2/81, 104 was on run 43 from South Melbourne Depot to West Coburg and return. It is believed that 105 was also in service at this time.

During their service the cars travelled the following mileage:

101	1052811 Miles	(1695025 km)
102	1063302 "	(1711917 ")
103	1091665 "	(1757580 ")
104	1084756 "	(1746457 ")
105	1090691 "	(1756012 ")
106	1066123 "	(1716458 ")

In May 1981, 104 and 106 were repainted chocolate and cream to be used for sequences in the film "Squizzy" which was to be made in Melbourne.

It is believed that these venerable cars are now up for disposal and it is to be hoped that some if not all of them will retire to operating museums where present and future generations may see in service what was a modern commodious means of mass transportation in the 1920s.