



MELBOURNE CELEBRATES ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF TRAMS

Next week Melbourne trams will celebrate their hundredth birthday.

On 11 November, 1885 the first cable tram in Australia set out from Spencer Street on its way to Richmond. The streets were lined with people fascinated with this apparition that ran with no obvious means of propulsion.

Within days the tram had become extremely popular. It provided a fast, efficient service and people obviously enjoyed riding in both the open 'dummy' car in front as well as the saloon car which was pulled behind. Street urchins could often be seen clinging to the back to get a free ride.

Before long, Melbourne's tramways were widely envied. A Sydney correspondent writing in 1890 noted that "the cable tram system in Melbourne is known all over the world for its completeness and for the general excellence of its management... Rapidly, yet steadily and almost gracefully, the dummy and car glide along the rails moved by an unseen force ..."

This unseen force was a system of underground cables, driven by massive engines and running in perpetual motion beneath the city streets. The tram was operated by a 'grip' which grasped the cable and moved along with it. This simple but effective device was superseded in 1910 by electric traction which remains with us today.

../2



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Over the 100 years of tramways operation, there have been 44 different models developed. Melbourne's distinctive older style ('W' class) trams were first introduced in the 1920s. Variations on the early prototype have now been with us for over 60 years. Today they co-exist with the more streamlined 'Z' class which was first introduced in the mid '70s.

To take us into the next 100 years, the Metropolitan Transit Authority have developed an even more sophisticated light rail vehicle which is attracting as much worldwide attention as our early cable trams.

The Minister for Transport said today, "Melbourne's trams are one of her best loved features. They were maintained through the 1940s and '50s when other Australian cities let them go - and we can be proud that our trams now, as then, are the envy of the world."

The Minister will officially open celebrations on Sunday, 10 November at 12 noon. The occasion will include a cavalcade of historic trams, a balloon launch and will take place in front of a magnificent tram display in the City Square. The Minister will also be laying a plaque in the Bourke Street Mall to commemorate the 100th birthday on Monday, 11 November. (See attached schedule for a complete list of events).

For further information:

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8 November 1985