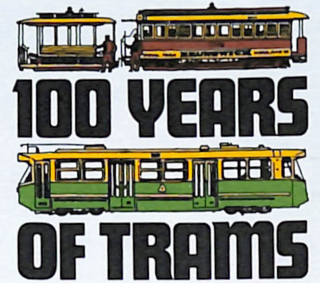


## Media Information



### THE CABLE TRAM

The first tram that ran on the Spencer Street - Richmond line was a cable tram and by the 1890s Melbourne's cable trams were the envy of the world for their charm and quiet efficiency. Rudyard Kipling, visiting in 1891, referred to the "music" of their bells. Another visitor wrote lyrically of trams "gliding down the stately streets with a 'swan-like' motion."

This motion was made possible by a remarkable system of underground cables in perpetual movement throughout the city. The trams were operated by means of a "grip" which could seize the cable through a slot between the rails and run along with it. To stop, the gripman (driver) released the grip from the cable and applied the brakes. The tram stopped and the cable ran on. To start again the grip had only to be reattached to the cable. It was simple but effective.

The trams themselves came in sets or "trains" with an open grip car or "dummy" at the front pulling a closed saloon car behind. Between them the cars were licenced to carry 44 seated and 56 standing passengers. No doubt in rush hour many more would have hung on to the sides and children would often cling to the back to get a free ride. Despite being open to the elements the "dummy" was unfailingly popular and seldom without passengers. They would have been welcome company for the gripman who was out in all weathers.

In the early stages trams travelled at 8 mph increasing finally to 13 mph. The service was fast and efficient - on the Brunswick line, for example, there was a  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  minute service at peak loading. Passengers were disgruntled if they had to wait more than two or three minutes for a tram.

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METROPOLITAN TRANSIT AUTHORITY

OF VICTORIA  
AN AUTHORITY OF

**VICTORIA TRANSPORT**

Small wonder that they became so popular so quickly. An observer in 1888 noted "The Melbourne wire tramways are a boon and boom, nothing so symmetrical possible even in San Francisco, their birth place. The whole city is wound up as a clock, ... Those luxurious aristocratic trams give the finishing touch to Melbourne polish."

The crew on a cable tram consisted of a gripman and a conductor. They worked hard and long hours. In 1891 gripmen were paid 52 shillings and conductors 50 shillings a week. By 1895 this had decreased to 40 shillings and thirty eight shillings a week respectively. One contemporary account claimed that gripmen tended to be taciturn and morose - perhaps because they were uncomfortably hot or cold. Conductors on the other hand were more jocular, showing off to the ladies with their daring as they straddled the abyss between dummy and trailer.

The conductor moved through both cars collecting fares using a bell punch. Instead of issuing tickets the conductor punched a small hole in long cardboard strips. To keep him honest a bell sounded at each punch.

Cable trams ran in Melbourne until the 1930s. By 1930 most cable tracks had been converted to electricity but the depression brought further work to a halt. The Second World War provided another stay of execution but the last one made its run on 26 October, 1940, to Northcote.

To celebrate the centenary of trams a cable tram will be on display in the City Square from Sunday, 10 November to Wednesday, 13 November, 1985.

But really it is as difficult to find ~~xxxx~~ good cause for an honest growl at the cable trams of Melbourne as to find the meanest ground for satisfaction with the street tramways of Sydney. The one a Government monopoly, the other a private speculation; the one a burden on the taxpayer, the other paying so well that its stock is at 200percent premium; the one dangerous, dirty, uncertain, the other safe, clean, and punctual as the town clock. Why the one so openly and manifestly condemned is kept, and the other not adopted in both ~~xxxx~~ cities, is one of those things which even a familiar visitor cannot, perhaps, be expected to understand.

Melbourne Argus,  
12 March 1887, p15.

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AUSTRALASIAN 12/3/1887 p 506  
The trials of the tramcar conductor are many. On the wire rope lines, in Melbourne, he is frequently being complained against for starting off with a sudden jerk before the passenger has got seated; and so now and again you see a gentleman or lady tumbling awkwardly into somebody else's lap or dropping to the floor. Cars run to time, and if the conductor arrives late at the end of the line he is bullied by the manager. After taking up an unusually large number of old ladies or gentlemen the car gets belated. It is impossible to make up lost time on the wire rope system, because the running is uniform from end to end; and the most a conductor can do if he is a man of nerve is to economise on his subsequent stoppages. Just as horses acquire a sort of mechanical habit of sliding on wooden pavements, when the rain makes them slippery, so the tram-riding public will, with practice, become skilled in the art of gliding into a seat, and complaints on the above score will cease.

NEWNHAM One of the favourite games of small boys was to tie a long piece of weighted string to a tin, drop it down through the slit between the rails, catch the moving cable and enjoy the sight of the tin racing along the track pursued by mischevous dogs.

NEWNHAM " The cable tram was an important feature of family life. To many older Melbourne families it will always be associated with warm summer nights when everyone tried to obtain an outside seat on the dummy to make the most of the fresh air on a run to a nearby city beach.

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### A sensational tram accident

Shortly before 3 o'clock on Thursday afternoon an accident happened at the intersection of Collins Street and William Street which was sensational in its character and serious in its results. A tram from Clifton Hill was passing Menzies Hotel and had reached the point of intersection of the two streets, when a spirited horse ridden by Mr. McIvey, of the Metropolitan Hotel, William Street, dashed down William Street, apparently far past control, and despite the warning bell of the gripman and conductor, and the shouts of the tramcar passengers, rushed headlong into the dummy. Mr. McIvey was tossed through the dummy onto the roadway on the other side, sustaining a serious gash on his forehead, and concussion of the brain; and a passenger named Charles E. Cole, 23 years of age, agent in Ballarat for the Commercial Candy Company, was struck by the horse, and cut about the head and face and bruised on the body. No others were injured, but the tram was badly damaged, and the horse was mixed up in the wreckage with many cuts and bruises and a broken leg. Mr. McIvey was removed to his home and Mr. Cole to the Melbourne Hospital, while the unfortunate horse, injured past all remedy, was shot by Constable Leorhan, of the Bourke Street West police station.

The Australasian 19th December 1891 Page 1188.

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The Melbourne wire tramways are a boon and boom, nothing so symmetrical possible even in San Francisco, their birth-place. The whole city is wound up as a clock, and the effect is comical if you happen to see a line of tram-cars stopped, like toys, through a hitch over the sheave-wheels, in one of our six great engine-houses, with their 150 foot chimney stacks, additions to Melbourne protuberances. Hallidie, the wire-tram inventor, was a smart fellow, and the affair is a miracle of ingenuity, circumvention of impossibilities. These luxurious aristocratic trams give the finishing touch to Melbourne polish.

Imperial Review, July 1888.  
p.7 McKinley & Co. Melb.

Between the rows of plane and elm trees set in the slabbed pavements a double line of cable trams ran down the middle of Collins Street. These trams had served the city and suburbs since 1885 and were a special feature.

An open dummy, its roof gaily festooned with iron lace, was loosely joined to a glassed-in car, like any of today. The dummy however was one of the most charming carriages imaginable. It seems that its name came to Victoria from an earlier but similar San Francisco tram, the first to move without visible means of propulsion, neither horse nor steam. A gripman stood in the middle of the dummy clutching and releasing an underground cable with long steel claws.

Curved wooden seats, slippery from use, held two persons and faced front and back of the car with no protection but a low iron fence that gave the traveller a sense of freedom and daring. Going forward was like riding on a cow-catcher of a train. The long side benches were wide ~~enough to~~ open to the world though an occasional pillar helped passengers to swing themselves on ~~ax~~ and off and could be grasped around curves.

Despite the hot summer months we, as others, would ride on this open dummy towards the sea front of St.Kilda to drink in the light salt breeze that rose at nightfall from the bay.

These trams as they travelled made part of the individual music of Melbourne, the muffled roar as they passed by, the whine as they rounded the corners, the grind of the brakes down the steep descent of Collins Street, the melody of the gripman's bell.

Maie Casey,  
An Australian Story 1837-1907  
Sun Books, 1965.  
pp 113-114.

MELBOURNE TRAMWAY & OMNIBUS CO.LTD.

To Gripmen and Conductors

Never take any chances of a Person, Carriage or Wagon getting out of the way. You are required to regard all persons coming at all in the way of the Car or Dummy as Infants, or Deaf, or Blind, and when you know they are neither Infants, nor Deaf, nor Blind, you must act on your part towards them as though they were, and it will be no excuse that you THOUGHT something.  
What we DEMAND is, that you Stop, and take no chances.

W.G.Sprigg Secretary.

Melbourne  
An illustrated history,  
B.Carroll.  
Lansdowne Press, 1972.



With the September rains, spring began to creep imperceptibly over the bush, reddening the tips of eucalyptus leaves. In the city with its plane trees, poplars, oaks and beeches the change was more noticeable, but the real drama of spring, which we awaited each year with unfeigned eagerness, was the coming of the wattle. We would see its fluffy golden puffballs begin to break on our own little leather-stemmed cootamundra; but we knew that just on the outskirts of the city it was in full bloom. Word passed along the schoolboy grapevine, 'The wattle's out', and the next free Saturday we'd be off on our bicycles into the nearest bush to cut branches and bring them home strapped to the parcel carrier over the rear mudguard, weaving and wobbling like a great yellow tail as we sped homeward. The bush at this time looked absolutely glorious, the trees hung with great swags and curtains of yellow blossom, the little gullies dusted with yellow powder and, close too, each twig displaying a cluster of yellow fluffy bobbles like groups of molecules in a chemical diagram. Adam Lindsay Gordon, an Australian poet whose constrainedly romantic verse is out of fashion now, summed up the magic of the Australian bush awakening from its sombre grey winter:

In the spring when the wattle-gold trembles  
 Twixt shadow and shine;  
 When each dewladen air draught resembles  
 A long draught of wine;  
 When the skyline's blue-burnished resistance  
 Makes deeper the dreamiest distance  
 Some song in all hearts hath existence:  
 Such songs have been mine.

In the spring the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board offered a special excursion ticket entitled *Sixteen Miles for a Shilling* which took you by means of transfers on a circular tour of the city and the inner suburbs. The great joy of this excursion was the section where we rode the cable car. The majority of the main tramlines in Melbourne were then served by cable. It must have been, in its heyday, the most extensive system in the world, certainly larger than those of either San Francisco or Seattle, and of course it operated on the flat. The cars were in no sense funiculars; they were not permanently attached to the cable. The cable ran about a foot under the street, and contact was made with it through a narrow groove no more than an inch wide which ran like a third rail in the centre of the track. On Sunday mornings, when

no trams ran in the Melbourne of my boyhood, you could cross to the centre of the deserted street and, by straddling the third rail, could look down the crack at the oily silvery serpent snaking by beneath. It emitted a low hum and on quiet Sunday mornings the street sounded as if it were gently snoring. The cables were powered by steam plants near the termini where the one-and-a-half-inch thick steel rope ran over an enormous drum.

Each cable car consisted of two parts: the dummy (a curious name for the part that did the real work) and the trailer. The trailer was, quite simply, a small enclosed tram-car, seating about thirty people, hitched on behind the dummy. No one ever wanted to ride in the trailer; it was no more exciting than sitting on a living room sofa, and with its wooden benches, curved to the dimensions of a human behind yet to be invented, much less comfortable. The dummy was the place; 'up front!' The dummy was essentially a hollow square of seats on wheels, in the centre of which stood the driver or 'gripman' with two levers at his disposal and a bell-pull over his head connected to a little gong in the white painted roof. One lever was a brake, the other, the working lever, ran down through the slot and ended in a mechanical claw which gripped the cable. When he received the signal to start from the conductor, the gripman went bong! bong! on his bell, released the brake lever, and pulled back slowly on the grip. The passengers felt first a slight slithery shudder as the car nudged forward, rather as of an automobile with an imperfect clutch; next a sudden and exhilarating jerk as the claw clamped firmly onto the cable and the little equipage was drawn smoothly forward with no sound except the soft swish of the wheels. When the gripman wanted to stop he simply disengaged the grip at the strategic moment, coasted to the stopping place and braked. He also had to disengage the grip when rounding corners or at intersections, and coast where the cable was constrained by rollers or where one cable crossed another.

Conductors and gripmen varied in response to their differing functions. Gripmen tended to be taciturn and morose, and when asked whether the next stop was the Hospital or Domain Road were apt to point to an enamelled sign which read, 'Do Not Talk to the Gripman'. Occasionally, though, they would relax, perch themselves on the corner of their little box and chat with the conductor standing on the front platform of the



trailer. Conductors were more cheerful and extrovert, perhaps because their work involved an element of daring and gave them an opportunity to show off to young ladies. In order to collect fares on the dummy they had first to straddle the abyss between it and the trailer and then proceed along the outward-facing seats, hanging onto upright stanchions with one arm as they dispensed tickets and change from a leather bag with the other. Thus poised perilously above the roadway rushing by beneath them at about fifteen miles an hour they swung themselves right round the dummy with extreme agility often whistling and calling 'Fez please, fez please' as they went.

Because of their sedate pace cable cars were often the victim of hit-and-run raids by intending passengers. When a car failed to stop on signal, athletic men would run after it and board the dummy from the side. If there were a spare seat all was well, but if not then the intending passenger had to stand clinging awkwardly to a stanchion while an angry argument went on between him and the gripman, which always ended in the passenger's defeat. He would let himself off, hitting the road at a run and soon be lost to sight. A favourite game among the 'larrikins' (delinquent teen-agers they would now be called) was to grab a free ride on the dummy while the gripman's eye was elsewhere, and then, when they saw the conductor straddling the gap to collect fares, leap lightly off onto the roadway with a derisive shout. For me the preferred seats were those right in front of the dummy where, with the wind in my face, I had the sensation of being on a boat moving gently through calm seas. Next best was on the seats facing sideways: 'Passengers are warned not to project their limbs outside the dummy.' On Anzac Day and certain other public holidays, the dummies carried crossed flags at the prow. The last cable car plied in Melbourne in 1940 and tears were shed as it slowly climbed the slope towards the Houses of Parliament, Eastern Hill and the boneyard. An era of calm, sedate and orderly progression had ended.

The Victorian State Railways had taken an early lead in electrification of track. When our family arrived at the end of 1920 certain key inner lines had already been converted, and during the Twenties the entire system was electrified. We spent many happy after-school hours watching the riggers and steel erectors put up the big overhead gantries and string the catenary. Nevertheless, and inevitably, it was steam that caught our fancy. We were all veteran engine spotters and

explorers of abandoned railways. With these Melbourne was only too well supplied, relics of the extreme optimism of the Nineties and the subsequent collapse of the speculative land boom. A favourite excursion was along the deserted Outer Circle, which had been flung far to the east of the city in the spacious days at the close of the century, and to which the city did not really attain until the 1950s. Fortified by a picnic lunch in a knapsack we set out like young archaeologists bent on finding traces of a lost civilization in the tumuli of abandoned embankments, the caverns of brush-choked cuttings, or the grass-grown ruins of deserted wayside stations. At one point a high wooden trestle bridge, several hundred feet long had been thrown across a tributary of the Yarra. This monolith, derelict in the sun-filled empty silence, was to us an impressive Paestum or Temple of Poseidon.

In pre-diesel days there was a great variety of blackened monsters to vary the tedium of a long morning's train spotting at Flinders Street, Spencer Street or Prince's Bridge. The A2, noble workhorse that pulled the Gippsland Limited and sometimes worked in double harness with the Dd, a lithe leaner brother, to pull the train double-headed up the long climb to the east. The DDe and its smaller brother the E, both tank engines used on short suburban runs and into the hills. The C's that hauled the Adelaide and the Sydney freights, big 2-8-0's with an enormous head of power. The K that hauled trains in the mountains. We were all passionate defenders of the broad gauge of Victoria and highly conscious of the fact that Melbourne, which had once exceeded Sydney in population, now took second place, as indeed did Victoria to New South Wales. We thought it ridiculous for the boys from New South Wales to have chosen four-foot-eight-and-a-half inches and what's more to try and impose it on poor little Victoria by persuading the Federal Government to build the Transcontinental from Port Augusta, S.A. to Kalgoorlie, W.A. as four-foot-eight-and-a-half.

Though most of us had never been out of our home state and a good many of us not more than fifty miles from Melbourne, we were well up in the railway geography of the six states, and were determined defenders of the five-foot-three. Didn't a broader gauge give you a more comfortable ride? Wasn't five-foot-three the only gauge shared by two adjoining states, Victoria and South Australia? So the New South Welshmen wanted a unified gauge from Sydney to Melbourne did

P.T.O.



# Ode to the trams, transports of joy

**A**FTER decades of being derided by interstate visitors, Melbourne's trams are making a comeback as they've turned out to be the ideal form of non-pollution commuting. Now cities around Australia are preparing to reintroduce them or to extend existing routes.

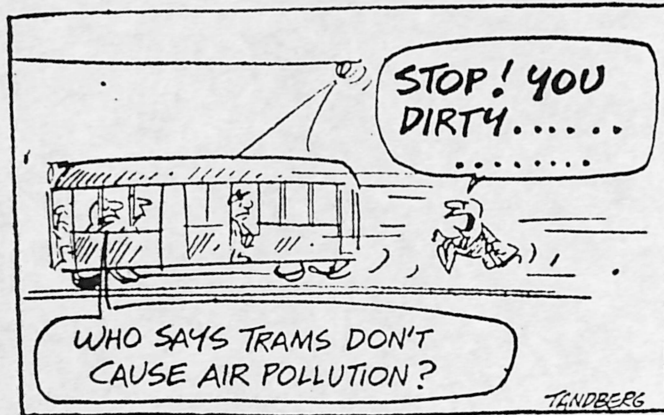
Just last week New South Wales Transport Minister M. A. Morris announced an \$8 million tram plan. According to my sources, similar projects will soon be unveiled everywhere from Brisbane to Launceston.

So TDT decided to commission a poem in praise of the tram, to accompany a filmed tribute.

Unfortunately, Sir John Betjeman, the Poet Laureate, was unavailable, as the Queen's got him writing jingles for the Conservative Party. (Then there's those extra verses of *The Good Ship Venus* that the Duke of Edinburgh wants for one of his reunions.) So TDT approached yours truly, giving me a 30-minute deadline.

Since then I've reworked the stanzas, brushing up the adjectives and adding the odd verse. And here is the result, a little thing I call *Tram, Tram, Tram Along The Highway*. Ahem . . .

I think that I shall never scan  
A vehicle lovely as a tram.  
At once so ample and inspiring  
Beneath its webbed plectric wiring.  
Serving bleak and rain-drenched  
stops  
Outside countless butcher's shops.  
More secure than childhood's  
pram  
That gentle juggernaut, the tram.  
Travel near or journey far  
(Please move further down the  
car).  
Designed to go in both directions  
With little clocks to mark the  
sections.  
Far better than a train or bus  
This doyen of the terminus  
With its familiar color scheme  
Of buttercup and bilious green.  
On the zones the crowds await  
Their 96 or 48  
To take them to their family's  
bower  
At 10 to 15 miles per hour.  
Lo, these proud titanic crafts  
Regaled by Melbourne's bitter  
draughts.  
While on the roof a fishing rod  
Points towards the distant God



And leather pouches full of coins  
Jingle on the connie's groins.  
Watch the connie's hands so  
nimble

(His thumb within its rubber  
thimble)

Punching out a tiny snicket  
From the two-bob paper ticket.  
Fascination never ceases  
At those small confetti pieces  
Falling to the butt-strewn floor  
Or wafting out the windswept  
door.

One is always thrilled or awed  
And never, never Tramways  
Board.

And when you've travelled hills  
and dales  
And want to stop it in its rails?  
As you near the place you  
dwell

Just tug the cord to toll the knell.  
I cannot understand the fuss  
About the double-decker bus  
Which both coming and departing  
Fills the air with diesel farting.  
Nor should steam's malodorous  
engines

Provoke such sentiment and  
legends.

Keep your toffy Rolls and tumbrel  
I'm happier to join the humble  
Who, twice daily, fight to cram  
Themselves upon a Melbourne  
tram.

So let's salute the Morris ploy  
The tram is the transport of joy  
And cities that have trams no  
more

Are up the creek without an oar.

**T**TALKING of Melbourne, all Australia is familiar with the Russell Street police headquarters as a result of its weekly appearance in the credits for Crawford's *Homicide*.

It's a tall, oppressive building employing the same architectural rhetoric one observes in war memorials and the larger public toilets. At the time of its construction, similar edifices were built all over Moscow to symbolise the czardom of Joseph Stalin.

Anyway, a few days back the corridors of this sinister pile rang to the sound of a pistol shot. This was immediately followed by a loud cry of expletive deleted.

According to the official story a young constable had been cleaning his musket when it discharged, wounding him in the thigh. As W. S. Gilbert put it so aptly in *The Pirates of Penzance*, the policeman's lot is not a happy one.

I was, from the outset, perfectly willing to accept this explanation. After all, from the time of Sir Robert Peel, the police have been notorious for their ineptitude. Thus such venerable nicknames as copper, bull and flatfoot suggest a certain lack of grace. And consider Charles Dickens' term for the whole sphere of law enforcement: Bumbledom.

Being proud traditionalists, the Australian police defer to no one in their clumsiness. Take the case of the prisoner found badly injured in his Sydney cell. There were wild allegations that the tipstaffs had worked him over. Not so. The perfectly reasonable explanation was that a 22-stone policeman had tripped on his bootlace and fallen on the miscreant once or twice.