



Report on the

2017 AMRA (NZ) Convention

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AMRA (NZ) is the American Model Railroaders Association of New Zealand. This is an informal organisation in New Zealand for people who model American prototype trains. The organisation has no central committee and there are no formal clubs. Instead, there are groups of American modellers in several parts of New Zealand. Every two years since 1979, one of these groups or a local model railway club has hosted an AMRA convention, usually over the long weekend at the start of June.

This year's convention was the 20th and was my first AMRA convention. It was held at the Porirua Club in Porirua City, Wellington and hosted by the American Central Model Railroaders. One hundred and twenty-five people attended, on par with the biennial convention of the New Zealand Association of Model Railway Clubs. Two attendees were from Australia.

The convention ran from 9am Saturday to 10:15am on Monday. There were several 'Extra Fare' events. These were operating sessions on the Wednesday and Thursday before the convention, an operating session after the convention, and a dinner on Friday evening at which Paul Hobbs gave a presentation entitled "The Passenger Train – why it is what it is". The pre-convention operating sessions were booked out several weeks in advance.

Clinics

The convention began on Saturday morning with a short official opening at 9am by Kel Sherson, the long-serving superintendent of the New Zealand division of the Australasian Region. The rest of the morning was devoted to four 40 minute clinics, organized in two parallel streams of two. There were four more clinics on Sunday morning. Despite there being just eight clinics, there was a good range of topics, as the following list shows.

- Darryl Bond, *Adventures in Railway Photography*

- Allan Davidson, *Kitbashing HO American Trucks*
- John Gillies, *Box Cars 101 Revisited*
- Paul Mahoney, *Logging Railroad Modelling – How to make layouts more interesting*
- Tony Owen, *Railfanning in the USA*
- Brian Roulston, *Ideas for Easy Tree Making*
- Philip Sharp, *How to set up and operate JMRI Operations*
- Doug Weir, *Using the Official Railway Equipment Book as a Modelling Tool*

Layout tours

Saturday and Sunday afternoon from 1pm to 5pm were devoted to layout tours. There were two tours, labelled Eastern and Western, each of five layouts. Both tours ran both days. People signed up for a spot in a private car to take them on a tour. Those on the Western tour were permitted 25 minutes viewing time per layout, giving 125 minutes viewing time for the tour, around 50% of the time allocated for the tour, a good percentage. The Eastern tour required more travelling than the Western tour and the percentage was around 40%, still a good percentage.

Unlike the mini-AMRA in Hamilton last November, no driving directions for the tours were supplied. The drivers were given the addresses of the layouts and expected to use a GPS to navigate. This approach worked well provided the GPS map was up-to-date, ours was not, and meant the organisers saved significant administrative time by not having to write directions.

Table 1 contains a brief description of the 10 layouts on the tours. Most layouts had two decks, all used Digitrax DCC as their control system, and no layouts were small. As shown by the **Era** column all layouts are set in the second half of the twentieth century. The column entitled **Features** lists some of the features I found interesting.

The track on Ian Munro's layout is all handlaid. When I arrived at the layout, a regular user of the layout was switching with a diesel locomotive at the interchange with Penn Central. The sound of the locomotive was more realistic than what I heard at the HO scale layouts.

Kelvin Head has been working on his layout for 15 years and it now has extensive scenery and a large number of buildings and streets with working lighting. Kelvin has set up a dedicated router for running trains using an i-phone, i-Pad or Android, something my local club has had preliminary discussions about.

At Tony Owen's layout I got into a discussion with another visitor about the desired width and spacing of the upper and lower decks. I found I could see the back of the lower deck without standing too far back. The visitor who was about five centimetres taller than me either had to stand too far back or stoop.

George Jones' layout is in a double garage. The floor of the hallway leading to the garage is several steps higher than the garage floor. When you enter the garage, you look down on the layout and get a good view of the whole layout from one spot. George has several newspaper clippings on the wall that made interesting reading.

The standout for me on Kel Sherson's layout was the large steel mill complex on the lower deck.

Alan Dunstan has block detection and signaling fully working, and one-off electronic features such as a photographer on an overbridge taking flash photographs of passing trains, and a hotbox warning that can be set to go off every nth train that passes a point. As on all but one double deck layout I saw, Alan has a helix connecting the decks. The helix used to be hidden behind a wall. Alan has since cut a rectangular hole in the wall to expose part of the helix. This part is senicked, giving a window into the helix, a pleasing effect.

Stewart Hainsworth's layout is still being developed. One interesting feature is the design of the removal section that permits entry into the centre of the layout. The section is mounted on a frame that sits on four castors. The gate is opened by rolling it into the centre of the layout, the first rollout I had seen.

Mark Lawrence uses a helix between decks, and has mounted the lift out sections on aluminium channel, eliminating the warping of the sections. Mark spent a few minutes explaining to a group of us what he did to get realistic desert scenery.

Roger Thomas has two helixes on his layout, one in the main train room and the other in a small dedicated alcove. The track is not attached to the top of the helix decking. Instead it sits in a groove several millimetres deep. This groove eliminates movement of the track caused by thermal expansion.

My last layout of the convention was Marcus O'Reilly's. Our GPS map did not include recent changes to the Hutt Motorway and we arrived late. Marcus has a large purpose-built shed in his backyard for his N scale layout. The shed includes a spacious office and a bathroom. The N scale locomotives were dwarfed in the large shed.

Other activities

Darryl Bond gave a presentation entitled *Adventures in America* after the banquet on Saturday evening. Darryl's presentation was built around sets of his railfanning photographs taken in different regions of the US. The last set included the Tehachapi Loop.

There were four trade stands and by all accounts they did a good business. The stands were closed 1pm to 5pm on Saturday and Sunday to permit the traders to go on the layout tours. There was a buy, sell and swap session on Monday morning that generated a lot of interest, delaying the start of the business meeting.

There were displays. These included rolling stock ranging in scale from 1960s OOO to O, and Andrew Salter's model of the Levin Feed Mill. Although the model is not an exact replica, it is a close copy, and there was a lot of discussion about it.

The convention ended with a business meeting. Kel Sherson in his role as divisional superintendent first presented three awards. Paul Hobbs received the Bone-Hopkins award for his contribution to the Australasian Region, Stan Agar his 25 years NMRA membership award, and Brian Moosman his 50 year NMRA membership award. These awards were greeted with warm applause and had the secondary benefit of promoting the NMRA and the Australasian region. Next it was the six door prizes. The winners were drawn using electronic wizardry that included a handheld, wi-fi and a large screen on the wall. Then there was a discussion about who would host the 2019 AMRA convention. The discussion was a formality because a group had already agreed to be the host. The intent of the discussion was to publicize this agreement and make it official. The 2019 convention will be in Tauranga. A group from Palmerston North said they would host a mini-AMRA in the last quarter of 2018.

Owner	Railroad	Era	Scale	Features
Ian Munro	Colesburg & Port Allegany	60-70s	O	Track all handlaid, loco sound
Kelvin Heads	SP & Santa Fe	Mid 80s	HO	Extensive scenery, cellphone

Tony Owen	Arizona & New Mexico	1996	HO	Deck width & spacing
George Jones	UP, some BNSF & CN	Mixed	HO	Raised view, wall mementos
Kel Sherson	NKR – Whitby Division	1949	HO	Large steel mill
Alan Duston	Cascade & Shady Pine	1986	HO	Electronics, scenicked helix
Stewart Hainsworth	UP Canyon Sub	1996	HO	Removal section
Mark Lawrence	SP Jaw Bone & Trona	80s – early 90s	HO	Nelix, desert scenery, AI channel
Roger Thomas	UP Evanston Sub Division	75-96	HO	Two helixes
Marcus O’Reilly	D & RGW Colorado Sub	90s	N	Purpose built shed

Table 1. A brief description of the 10 layouts on the tours.