

The 2016 mini AMRA convention

Report by Philip Sharp

Introduction

The Hamilton American Model Railroaders (HAMR) hosted the 2016 mini AMRA convention at the Glenview Club, Hamilton, November 11-13. Auckland was well represented, although only two members of the NSMRC attended, Mark Jackson and me.

Program

Friday, November 11

6:30pm -	10:00pm:	Registration
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Saturday, November 12

9:00am -	9:15am:	Official welcome.
9:15am -	10:00am:	Relax, morning tea.
10:00am -	10:00am:	Clinic
11:00am -	11:15am:	Clinic
11:15am -	1:00pm:	Relax, lunch
1:00pm -	5:30pm:	Layout tour
5:30pm -	7:00pm:	Relax, trade stands
7:00pm -	8:30pm:	Dinner, quiz
8:30pm -	9:00pm:	Hands-on clinic

Sunday, November 13

9:15am -	11:30am:	Buy, sell & swap
11:30am		Official closing

Attendees were invited to visit John Hart's layout in Ragland and Dave Gardiner's layout in Te Aroha on Sunday afternoon.

Modular layouts

There were two modular layouts at the venue all weekend. One layout was a free-mo and the other was a layout of Peter Dix, see Photographs 1 and 2 at the end of this article. These two layouts received a lot of attention from attendees during the breaks. Part of the free-mo layout was used for the hands-on clinic on Saturday evening.

Friday Evening

For most attendees, the main activity on Friday evening session was catching up with old friends and making new acquaintances. This was augmented by running trains on the modular layouts two layouts and viewing the photographs and videos of American prototypes being shown continuously.

Clinics

There were two clinics on Saturday morning. The first was

entitled "Forty-five years of Amtrak" and given by Paul Hobbs. Paul's presentation was polished and contained many photographs of Amtrak rolling stock. Alex Shepherd gave the second clinic which was on the current state of Layout Command Control (LCC). Alex described the effort that has gone into ensuring that LCC will be simpler to use than DCC. LCC has developed to a point that it is now possible to buy components for controlling some parts of a typical layout.

Layout tour

The layout tour was on Saturday afternoon. There were seven layouts and all were either American HO or New Zealand Sn3.5. None were small and at least two used DC instead of DCC. The layouts included a well-wooded, convincing depiction of the Raurimu Spiral and two single-deck layouts that had up to four levels of tracks and tunnels. Drivers were given written instructions, some elected to use their GPSs.

Saturday Evening

The dinner on Saturday went merrily, so much so that the quiz was cancelled.

There was a hands-on clinic after dinner. The first part of the clinic required the participants to complete the simple task of changing a control variable on a Digitrax cab. I had never used a Digitrax cab and failed my first attempt. The second part of the clinic had the participants using a Digitrax cab and Soundtraxx Tsunami decoder to accurately replicate the sound and motion of five prototypical locomotives in a consist. The superiority of a Digitrax cab over a MRC cab was evident.

Sunday morning

Although the only activity planned for Sunday morning was a Buy, Sell and Swap, the session on Sunday morning was well attended, and many attendees were present for the closing.

Final comments

The convention was not without its glitches. Mid-day Saturday, an operator of the HAMR layout with help from others worked in vain to get his cab to accept a new locomotive address. After an hour the gathered experts concluded that another operator had hit the emergency stop button on their cab earlier in the day. The problem was fixed when the operator returned with their cab.

This was my first mini AMRA convention. It gave me much to think about and I look forward to the AMRA conventions in Porirua, 2017 and Tauranga, 2019.



Part of the free-mo layout. Photograph courtesy of John Hart.



Part of the HAMR layout. Photograph courtesy of John Hart.



Sheryl Hart, partly obscured centre left, regaling Philip Sharp, Elizabeth Mead and Mark Jackson on one of many topics she articulated upon during the Saturday dinner. Photograph courtesy John Hart.

