

Jottings on my trip to Milwaukee 2010 - NMRA 75th Anniversary Convention

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The trip commenced with a short stay in Toronto to visit friends and to spend a day railfanning with Jason Shron, the President of Rapido Trains. Unfortunately, our planned visit to the Toronto Maintenance Centre and to the John St Roundhouse to view the latest exhibits never materialised due to Jason needing to be at the warehouse for a delivery of models from Rapido's factory in China.

Not to be outdone I took transport to his Concord premises where I was able to view the latest products arriving as well as collecting my CP Caboose I had ordered. Jason's company shares the premises with True Line Trains so it was a good time to say hello to Darren and look over TLT's products including the new CP Minibox pre-production samples and the CN U2g locomotive. The quality of models from both companies is raising the bar to which other model manufacturers are going to have to match or better in the future.

Mid-afternoon Jason considered it time to take me to his home to see the modifications to his basement and see developments to the replica interior of a passenger car he is building down there! He had purchased a VIA Passenger Car (accident damaged) with the purpose of removing the parts he needed for his base-ment project: tables, windows, vestibule fittings, doors, brake-wheel, luggage racks etc. Once these had been removed he sold the coach for scrap, the trucks to someone else, making a profit on the whole deal!

At the bottom of the basement stairs you are to be faced with the passenger car external door (not yet in place) but once inside the vestibule you see the lift up step plate, inner door into the car and the corridor connection door and gate. The roof fittings are almost complete and the brakewheel is yet to be fitted. Inside the car the roof formers have been fitted and tables, seats and luggage rack and window frames are ready for installation. Jason's intention is to have four tables with appropriate seating, which will be used as a crew room by those helping operate his proposed layout. Beyond this area, an etched glass door, used to separate smoking and non-smoking sections in the car, will be positioned to section off an area with sleeping arrangements for guests who stay over. It is quite an impressive set up as alongside all of this is the remainder of the basement, which now includes most of the garage area as well, which is where he will build his layout of the Kingston Sub east of Toronto. This area, 44' x 20' approx, will have a three-level layout depicting Toronto Union Station plus Spadina Yard housing all his Turbos and Passenger Cars. I don't know how the guy does all of this as well as running his business and managing his large Dr Who collection.

From Toronto it was off to Milwaukee, where I now had a couple of days to kick my heels before registration on Sunday. These two days were originally planned for Sue and I to see some of the area around the city but unfortunately family circumstances prevented her travelling. Seeking something to do on the Friday I went along to the NMRA BoD meeting – despite many “closed session” discussion periods during the day (committee only) it was an experience! Saturday I opted to take the Hiawatha service to Chicago – a \$34 return ticket (seniors rate) for the one and a half hour journey takes you past many interesting junctions and crossings. Traffic passing was mostly CP freights but nicely interrupted by a couple of EJ&E freights on both outward and return journeys. A number of BNSF locos were sighted at the power stations passed en route.

Not familiar with Chicago and only wanting to see the city, I opted for a cruise on the river and lake. Then it was on to the “L” – I had always wanted to ride the L since seeing it portrayed in so many movies. I found out the best way of covering the route was to take a service to the first station outside the loop, and cross to the reverse direction for a train, to complete the circuit. I boarded my train and alighted at the first outer station at Clinton (pink route I think!) – what a bonus, it overlooked the Metra

station below. Out came the camera for a few pictures, but after a couple of shots a voice came over the PA system asking “will the guy taking pictures at the end of the platform, stop immediately”. No explanation, nor did I seek one, knowing how sensitive these issues are. It was time to finish the circuit and head for Union Station for the return to Milwaukee.

Sunday was registration and time to talk and shake hands with those met at previous conventions and to discuss plans for the week. European members registering were well-represented: Norway 11; Switzerland 4; plus the regulars from Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg and Germany. Apart from Nobby and self, Peter Borchers, Rai Fenton, David Burman, Tim Brown and family, and Ted Smale were from British Region.

In the afternoon those who had booked the Beer & Bratwurst wandered across to the local park to partake of the BBQ and drinks. This was something that could have been missed apart from the fact that Nobby, Peter and I were able to sit and chat with Neil Besougloff and David Popp from Model Railroader, resulting in an invitation to David's home to see the latest MR layout. As this was for Wednesday I had to refuse due to Contest duties, but the others accepted.

Many lunchtimes and early evening meals were enjoyed in the Hilton hotel sports bar. Usually all migrated to the bar to discuss the daily events amid much laughter. Patrick Bopp and his friend René, we were sure, had permanently reserved seats in one corner! It was here one evening that Nobby showed the new NMRA logo to one of the bar girls serving the food and it was she who christened the new logo “The Boob”!

Another evening Nobby recounted his and Peter's Harley Davidson trip where the advertised tour of the factory did not take place as it had closed two weeks before. Nobby also suffered on his evening dinner cruise when his meal and tour cost \$105 only for him to find out if he taken the tour independently it would have only cost \$65 (\$40 for transport from the hotel to five blocks down the street was a bit of a rip-off!) and he ended up with rubber chicken to eat as well! Poor Nobby had the worst of the deals, as the trip to the Wisconsin Southern loco facilities resulted in the company being unaware anyone was to tour their premises! However, all was not lost, the Walthers tour was a resounding success with some great deals to be had in the Walthers store – it was rumoured that some people picked up real bargains, such as DCC sound locos going for \$70 – these items were mainly factory and QC test items. The tour to one of the power stations was another great trip; it was especially appreciated when they learnt that the last four cars of the train passing through the unloader had been held back until the tour arrived so all could see the unloading process. Peter, Rai and David also attended Ops SIG events plus other tours and clinics.

For those attending National Conventions over the past three years Nobby has tried to get the Brits and the Euro guys together for a meal one evening. Well this time not all could make the meal, but those that did enjoyed watching Patrick munch his way through a 20 oz steak! This same evening as we walked back to the hotel “The Empire Builder” bound for Chicago arrived at the train station with the two preserved Milwaukee cars in the orange and red paint scheme on the rear of the train. These two cars were to arrive back in town the next evening and be switched into a spare track for use by Walthers for a two-evening corporate event. For those of us fortunate enough to have invitations (mine as a guest of Rapido Trains) the two cars, the Superdome and Beaver-tail observation Car, plus an Amtrak Amfleet Club Car were set up to allow guests to wander through the cars and enjoy food and drinks – members of the Walthers family greeting everyone on arrival. At the end of our evening Stacey Walthers-Naffah asked if we would like to view the other private cars belonging to the Mellows family (Charter Steel Company) parked close by – what an opportunity! There were a

total of five cars parked, but we were invited to view three of them, with the executive chef providing the tour. These three cars, two business cars with verandah ends and a skyline dome positioned between them, we were told slept eight people only; bathrooms were bigger than mine at the Hilton, one having a full tub. All the cars had been rebuilt using black walnut panelling, and the china, crystal and silver was the largest and most valuable railroad collection in the country. What a fantastic tour, and one that those able to view these cars won't forget quickly.

I managed a couple of clinics, one with Bob Hamm on Contest entries and judging – always a useful update for me concerning any new thinking relating to AP and judging. Wednesday was Contest judging all day – there were a total of 77 actual contest models, not including photographic and art & craft entries. Bob Hamm had put out a prior request for past winners and others to bring along models for display, including photomatch and popular vote entries, resulting in a total of 322 showcase models!

The Silent Auction room hosted a record number of items (someone said over 2200 items for sale) and the action just before the bell was as usual, quite frenetic. This year's RPM room was disappointing, as I estimated no more than 40 or 45 models were on display. Apart from a few, the quality of the models also failed to impress a number of people, by the conversations overheard in the room.

The display of models from the past 75 years was very interesting; glass case displays showing models and kits from each decade,

ie '30s, '40s, '50s etc – staff from Walthers and Bachmann on hand to answer questions.

Friday morning the Train Show is open to convention attendees only, and I took the opportunity to follow up my letter a month earlier to many of the manufacturers asking for prizes for our anniversary convention at Kegworth. For the rest of the weekend I helped out at the Rapido Trains booth, and whilst a little unsure when asked some of the questions, I think I managed reasonably well, but it was useful to have the other Rapido guys there to answer the difficult questions.

From Milwaukee I flew to Halifax, Nova Scotia to spend a week with Dave and Pam Gunn – both send regards to NMRA friends back in the UK! David warned me before I set out from the UK that the village was putting on a Tattoo and asked would I help out with some security stewarding. I agreed of course and looked forward to the event. What an event it turned out to be, with 250 performers – marching, pipe bands, dancers etc and guest of honour the Lieutenant Governor of the Province. We did spend an evening in the basement with the model trains, and seeing Dave's latest construction masterpieces, the buildings on his layout are wonderful! He and I also enjoyed a day out railfanning watching the switching in Stellarton CB&NS Yard and taking photographs. We also managed to catch the CN switching taking place in the Truro CN/CB&NS Interchange Yard on the way to the airport for my flight home – all in all a very hectic three weeks!