

# Torino: Winter gala at a 'forgotten' tramway

It has been said before but bears repeating: Torino (Turin) is western Europe's forgotten tramway. **Mike Russell** reports on the city's inaugural tram heritage event, which was enthusiastically embraced by locals and visitors alike.

Italy has no real tradition of tramcar preservation, so when Torino's first Trolley Festival in December was such a success even the organisers were surprised! Torino (Turin) is sometimes known as western Europe's forgotten tramway, but even less well known is that the city's newly-formed Associazione Torinese Tram Storici (ATTS) can muster a large fleet of historic Torino tramcars.

ATTS was formed in late 2005 to promote and develop Torino's historic trams. It has official backing through partnership with the tramway company, Gruppo Torinese Trasporti (GTT), formed in 2003 as successor to the Azienda Tramvie Municipali (ATM), which in October 1907 took over the privately-owned SAEAI (Società Anonima Eletticità Alta Italia) company and operated the city tramways continuously thereafter. The Association's President is Roberto Cambursano. GTT's head of tramway operations. This arrangement has enabled the historic fleet to be taken under the protection of serious local enthusiasts, emulating the successful and well-proven formula followed in Switzerland and Germany for many years.

## December debut

Most European tramway festivals take place between late spring and autumn, avoiding the harsh winter. ATTS deliberately chose to do things differently. The group's thinking centred on a desire to maximise public participation, figuring that in the summer

months too many Torinesi decant to the lakes or coast to escape the city heat, resulting in a potentially severely depleted attendance. Instead, ATTS selected the pre-Christmas period, in which the city would be thronged with Saturday shoppers. The prognosis was fully vindicated, final attendance estimates being around 8000. So great were the numbers wishing to ride the vintage trams that the service had to be doubled after only an hour and a fifth car had to be drafted in to clear the crowds by mid-afternoon. With various sales stalls, the GTT restaurant tram (2841) doing good business, a display of historic photographs, and an interesting model layout featuring Torino trams in car 209, there was plenty to see and do.

## Remarkable survivors

The oldest working tramcar is four-wheeler 116, one of 130 built in 1911 on a Boeker truck by Diatto and restored to its mid-1920s state in Torino's own Tortona works in 1976 from works car T416. After use for city tours and private hire duties, it was placed on static display in 2000 at the base station of the Sassi-Superga rack tramway, but in 2006 happily received a further works overhaul and was returned to operating condition.

Before the formation of AMT, Torino tramway services were provided by three companies - one Italian (SAEAI), the other two Belgian but under common management, and fully absorbed by ATM in January 1923. It is one of the former Società Torinese di

Tramway e Ferrovie Economiche (STT) Belga cars that was restored last autumn as 209 (its authentic number is uncertain), one of a batch of 27 five-bay cars built in 1911 under licence by Diatto on Brill 21E trucks. Reconstruction to original condition, in STT dark green and cream livery, was carried out in a very short time by active members of ATTS working at Sassi, but the car is currently minus electrical equipment and thus inoperable. It was retrieved from derelict state as withdrawn former works car T426.

When the reconstruction programme of the fleet of large Peter Witt bogie cars built in the 1930s (2500-99) took place in 1982, only 90 cars were rebuilt; the other eight survivors were retained as works cars and future museum vehicles. These classic bogie cars were built for crush-loading on short-stage services, a necessary feature of Italian public transport, and were ideally suited to Torino. 2595 from 1932, one of those on Moncenisio bogies, is currently the only working example, having been restored in 1999 in the two-tone green livery imposed upon all Italian urban transport under Mussolini in 1927. It has since been regularly seen around the city on private hires and tours. A second example, 2592, was retrieved by ATTS for restoration shortly after the December festival. It has already been moved to the Sassi workshops and restoration work is programmed for completion in mid-2007.

Many readers who visited Torino in the later twentieth century will recall the Fiat bogie cars that were once the mainstay of



The first renovation job by the recently-formed ATTS is of former works car T426, now restored to its 1911 state in the green-and-cream livery of its Belgian-owned operator, known locally as La Belga. The interior has yet to be fully fitted out and the car currently lacks electrical equipment. It was displayed on Viale Primo Maggio.



Several current Torino works cars were on display in Viale Primo Maggio. Rail-scrubber T420 has a new body which renders it unrecognisable from its former state. Behind is Sabbiera (sand car) T427, fitted with a new metal body in 1989; whilst six-axle articulated car 2877, rebuilt in 1982 from a pair of large Peter Witt pre-war bogie cars, is in the rear.



The first tramcar preserved in Torino was Diatto-built four-wheeler 116 of 1911. When restored in the ATM works in 1976 it continued to be equipped with a trolley-pole like the rest of the fleet, and acquired a pantograph later. In May 1983 it is seen turning from Via Rossini into Corso San Maurizio whilst on one of its regular children's city tours.

services. The first six were ordered during World War Two; 3001 was damaged in a 1943 bombing raid.

After the war two batches totalling 125 cars were ordered and the survivor is one of the second series (3203) of 1958, with Fiat bogies built under licence from Commonwealth. In 1959, a further thirty cars of similar outward design were built using old Moncenisio (Brill-licensed) bogies and electrical equipment salvaged during the rebuilding of the 2100-2240 series short Peter Witt cars into the first batch of six-axle articulated cars (2800-57). This group is represented by 3279. In 1976/77, all were subject to mid-life refurbishment by Viberti/Seac and given heavily-rebuilt bodies suitable for one-man-operation, with double-width centre doors and lantern windscreens but otherwise broadly in the old style. A campaign substitution of pantographs for trolley-poles was completed in 1991. Withdrawals started in 1992 and the last examples were used in service during winter 2002/03. The two survivors were restored to full working order in 2000 and 1998 respectively and the ATM workshop achieved a reasonable compromise: it was impracticable to restore the old bodywork configuration, but they have been repainted in traditional two-tone green (albeit a livery never carried in rebodied form).

Salvaged parts from the car destroyed in 1943 were used in 1948 to build 3501 in the ATM workshops, with a different frontal profile and layout, but broadly similar in appearance. It was unique in the ATM fleet. An overhead inspection car from 1989, and

used for commercial filming in 1996, it was the last to keep two-tone green, and its unaltered body made it ideal for preservation; it was restored in 1998.

ATTS has plans to restore two further trams besides Peter Witt 2592. In store is 2759, one of two survivors of 72 two-rooms-and-a-bath four-axle articulated cars with SNOS bodywork built between 1950 and 1959 on MAN trucks from withdrawn two-axle cars. Their appalling riding qualities resulted in their service life being curtailed. Most were scrapped in 1984/85, but 2758 survived as a restaurant tram and owing to its poor condition is to be cannibalised to provide parts for restoration of 2759.

Another car, already basically restored, is Ansaldo-built two-axle motor car 502 of 1924, currently at Sassi in the attractive red-and-cream early ATM livery. 502 was one of six cars built by Ansaldo for La Spezia but rejected by them and bought by Torino. After withdrawal from passenger service during the 1960s, it survived as works car T433 together with 503 (T432) and was restored by ATM in 2000. It is currently immobile awaiting mechanical and electrical repairs.

## Future plans

The lower station Sassi terminus also contains a display of images and memorabilia of Torino tramways together with horse car 197 of 1890, built for the Belgian-owned company. After use as a works trailer until the end of World War Two, it quite remarkably continued to survive and was restored in 1977 to original



The elegant, sleek lines of the classic Peter Witt bogie car are shown off by restored car 2595, built in 1932, soon to be joined by sister vehicle 2592. It is seen setting down passengers from the circular tour in Viale Primo Maggio.



Car 3501 was unique in the ATM fleet, having been reconstructed in the undertaking's own workshops from war-damaged Fiat bogie car 3001. It was not heavily rebuilt in 1976/77 in the manner of the main batch of post-war cars and retained a single centre doorway. Now preserved, it enters Piazza Castello on 2 December.

condition, so far as can be ascertained from contemporary records and photographs.

ATTS made an impressive start in December with its exhibition and operation of historic cars, complemented by current GTT passenger and works rolling-stock on the reserved track of Viale Primo Maggio alongside Giardini Reali. It is hoped to turn the festival into an annual pre-Christmas event. The day's special circular vintage tram route was short but imaginative, starting from Giardini Reali and travelling Via Rossini, Piazza Carlo Emanuele II, Via Po, Piazza Castello and Via Bertola, allowing cars to cover the best city-centre metals.

Perhaps the greatest accolade, however, was that bestowed in its immediate aftermath. So great was the interest by the general public that the three restored Fiat bogie cars (3203, 3279 and 3501) were operated as pre-Christmas shopping extras on three December Sundays over the busiest part of trunk line 13, between Gran Madre and Piazza Statuto. With a favourable public reaction and official support on such an enlightened basis, we can expect that the ATTS will go from strength to strength in preserving Torino's tramway heritage and move effortlessly towards achieving its stated ambition and introduction of a regular tourist tram service in 2011, when the city will celebrate the sesquicentenary (150th anniversary) of its elevation to status as the first capital of a united Italy.

*The author gratefully thanks Daniele Quaglia, ATTS publicity officer, for help in preparing this article.*

# France builds tramways in two so why does it take Britain 10?

First we get the good news and then the bad. We have to wait seven years for a tram from Nottingham to Chilwell or Clifton and 10 years for a tram from Camden Town to Brixton or Peckham (T&UT, January).

Why do we have such long gestation periods for new tramways in Britain when France can do it in two years?

Nottingham has to set aside 2007 just for a public inquiry and must wait until 2008 for a decision. When they find a contractor it will take another two years to begin work and then three years to construct. Ridiculous!

British legislation imposes too many time and money wasting preliminary procedures on tramway and light railway schemes and this denies many communities the chance of getting the benefit of a superior form of transport and fighting off

traffic congestion and climate change. We read that Liverpool has spent £31m on design, consultants and a public inquiry and still has no hope of a tramway. Leeds has wasted £39m on preliminaries for its stillborn scheme. Far too many professionals want to get their fingers in the pie.

A century ago, municipal corporations constructed the length of trackage and overhead we are planning in Nottingham, London, Leeds and Liverpool within six months of the Royal Assent.

They did not waste time or public money before and after the Parliamentary procedure with consultants, feasibility studies, cost-benefit analyses, public inquiries, contractors, sub-contractors or plant hire. They did not beg for Government money; they funded them on loans, repaid

from operations, and got on with the job. It was all done by direct labour, muscle, picks and shovels and the only professionals involved were the borough surveyor, electrical engineer, tramways manager and permanent way superintendent - the existing salaried staff of the borough. They knew what they were doing; they did not need to consult anyone about routes or design work.

So what's different today? Why do politicians and civil servants throw so many hurdles in the way of new tramway schemes? Do cost-benefit and environmental impact inquiries rule against trams? Why do we need consultants and designers? Are tramway promoters and town planners not qualified to determine what is required? Why is the Government dragging its feet on funding decisions? Why

don't bus operators have to jump all these hurdles before they start a new bus route? These days they don't even have to go to the Traffic Commissioners. What is the difference between a bus route and a tram route?

The dice are heavily loaded in favour of buses against trams even though trams are environmentally more friendly, attract more passengers and stimulate business, property values and urban regeneration.

What is the Government's response to climate change? Tax it! If we have so many consultants looking for work, why don't they advise this dithering Government to square up to reality and the need for a radical new electric railway network for freight and a light rail network for passengers, which can transcend any form of clean and sustainable energy, to get this

## Tramway will replace buses not trolleys

As a regular visitor to Geneva and being in close contact with the transport operator there, I have an observation to make on the the last issue's mention of trolleybuses.

The new tramway will in fact replace motorbuses on the route out to Avanchet and Meyrin and the route 10 (airport) trolleybuses that currently run along the same roads. The three-axle trolleys were only delivered in 2006 and they will be diverted along a new extended route to reach the city centre.

Geneva is extending both tram and trolleybus operation as part of an extensive modernisation and expansion programme.

Peter Williams By e-mail

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! Please write - but please be brief!



Trams don't need to be new, or even have seats, for people to be queuing up to get on them! The first renovation job by Torino's recently-formed ATTS is of former works car T426, now restored to its 1911 state. The interior has yet to be fitted out and the car lacks electrical equipment. It was displayed on Viale Primo Maggio, where queues formed to inspect the model tramway layout on display inside. Mike Russell