

All our yesterdays...

A dream has come true in Torino (Turin), with the introduction of Europe's first full-scale daily service operated by dedicated heritage tramcars as an integral part of a city transport network. In the first of a two-part series, Mike Russell looks at the thinking behind the scheme, and the opening ceremonies.



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In autumn 1982, the author visited Torino (Turin) to sample the last of that city's 1930s-built Peter Witt bogie cars, then relegated to extra services for Fiat workers. These venerable trams had already enjoyed an unexpected life extension thanks to the 1973 oil crisis. Had anyone then told us that, almost 30 years on, these cars would be back serving their native city on a daily basis, the suggestion would have been greeted with incredulity. Truth is stranger than fiction, though, and recent events in Torino represent unalloyed joy to those who still revere classic inter-war bogie car designs.

The conjunction of an important event in Italian history with the desire of a city council to reduce car dependency, plus the existence of a strong local tramway support movement, has led to the creation of a new service, which in terms of its ambition and scale is unique in Europe.

The story of the ATTS (Associazione Torinese Tram Storici), the Torino tramway historical movement, was related in *TAUT* March 2007. As with all the best such organisations, ATTS receives a good measure of official support, in this case enthusiastically by Roberto Cambursano, formerly Traffic Operations Director of the Torino tramway; it was with his encouragement that the concept was developed of creating a regular heritage tramcar route in the city.

Mr Cambursano was impressed by the spectacularly successful line F streetcar in San Francisco, USA, (see *TAUT* March 2010) upon which plans for the operation were based. Torino, though a most attractive and historic city, is not Italy's prime tourist destination; however, when the unified state of Italy was created in March 1861, the ancient Piedmontese seat of the Kingdom of Savoy was

chosen as its first capital, even though the honour was shortlived as Roma (Rome) assumed the mantle in 1870. Nonetheless, the city fathers are proud of their position as the foundation capital of modern Italy and intended to mark the 150th anniversary in March 2011, when increased numbers of visitors and tourists might be expected.

Trams every 40 seconds

Traffic in Italian cities is often chaotic, and Torino's problems, though not as extreme as those of the south, are significant. The city council has adopted initiatives to increase public transport ridership and reduce car usage; for example, in the next financial year, the intention is to increase tramcar passenger kilometres by 29%, principally by enhancing off-peak services to peak-hour levels, with a reduction of 7% in bus kilometres. Inducing the travelling public to increase their use of trams within the central city is a prime objective, and this is how all three strands have come together.

The plan was to create a new city centre circular service, operated by historic tramcars seven days a week, to be inaugurated on the occasion of Torino's 150th celebrations of Italian unity. The environmental improvement policy objectives attracted significant Italian government funding, devoted to restoring the historic tramcars, and work has been proceeding steadily over the last three to four years in preparation for the grand opening of Torino tramline 7. It is to the credit of all parties concerned that the stated intention was not only met absolutely, but celebrated with gusto.

Originally, the plan had been to launch the new service on the 150th anniversary itself, 17 March, but probably

1 Articulated car 2847 sets off from Piazza Castello shortly after 11.00 on 27 March to inaugurate the new city centre heritage line 7.

2 The meeting of two cities at Piazza Castello: red Torino two-axle centenary 116 passes STEFER (Roma) bogie car 312 on inauguration day.

3 The tight radius curve from Via Po into Via Accademia Albertina used by new circular route 7 involves a short stretch of interlaced track, on which two-axle car 502 is seen on the inaugural afternoon.



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4 The first of the fleet of former STEFER trams to be returned to service is bogie car 312 of 1935, and the high standard of restoration makes this very much the current pride of the fleet. Resplendent in STEFER livery, 312 here leads a Torino second-series articulated car on line 13 in Via Po on the inaugural afternoon.



5 Two-axle works car T450 is normally based at Sassi for use in shunting rolling-stock used on the Superga rack tramway and is mounted on an original truck dating from 1897. As a special treat it was allowed into the city centre to participate in the inaugural clover-leaf runs for new heritage line 7.

wisely it was decided that with so many other competing celebrations taking place that day, it would be more appropriate to defer it.

Sunday 27 March 2011 was certainly a red letter day for Torino tramways. Shortly after 10.30, restored tramcars started to assemble at Piazza Castello, the nominal terminal point of the circular route. The Mayor cut the ceremonial ribbon at 11.00, to the musical accompaniment of the GTT tramways' band, and thereafter a very enterprising operation took place for about two hours, to display the rolling stock to onlookers within a constricted city centre area.

Trams departed at two-minute intervals on a clover-leaf circuit through Via Bertolo, Piazza Castello and Via Po to Piazza Carlo Emanuele II, returning along Via Po, Piazza Castello and the Giardini Reali to Corso Regina Margherita and back to Piazza Castello. This operation thus involved passing through the triangular junction at Piazza Castello three times within 24 minutes, thereby giving an historic tramcar on average every 40 seconds through this junction – an amazing spectacle.

Services start

After a lunch break, operation of new circular route 7 proper was inaugurated at 14.00, all travel on the route being free of charge for the rest of the day. The numbers of Torinesi who turned out to sample the vintage tramcars on what turned out to be a very wet afternoon was impressive, with elderly passengers reliving past experiences amongst babes in arms, probably enjoying their first real tram ride. The occasion was a tremendous tribute to all those who had worked so hard to bring this ambitious project to fruition. The event was also covered by the national press.

Among the cars that made special guest appearances on inauguration day were two-axle veteran 116, itself this year celebrating its centenary; this car, built by Diatto on a Boeker truck, was restored in the ATM workshops in 1976 and again in 2006 and is often seen around the city on special duties. Another two-axle specimen was 502, whose appearances are much more rare; this was one of six cars ordered by La Spezia from Ansaldo in 1924 but rejected and instead bought by Torino. It is normally stored in the small depot at Sassi, at the foot of the Superga rack tramway, which also acts as a restoration base for other preserved tramcars.

6 A foretaste of a treat to come: bogie car 201 of the former STEFER (Roma) fleet after restoration in Salerno, awaiting final fitting-out in the yard of Torino's Sassi depot on 28 March 2011.

7 A remarkable meeting of cars at Piazza Carlo Emanuele II, with red two-axle car 502 taking layover in the company of Peter Witt bogie car 2592, while sister vehicle 2598 emerges from Via Accademia Albertina on one of the inaugural journeys on heritage line 7. These cars will be described further next issue.



Amongst the beneficiaries of the governmental grant-in-aid are four cars from the former STEFER (Società delle Tramvie e Ferrovie Elettriche di Roma) tramways; it was a great sadness when this forward-thinking tramway closed in 1980. Four cars of different types were saved for private preservation by Giuseppe de Grisantis and all have now been taken under the wing of the ATTS and GTT.

The first to be restored is bogie car 312, built by Carminati e Toselli di Milano in 1935. The work was entrusted to the Carrozzeria Nuova San Leonardo of Salerno and so excellent is the workmanship that several further jobs have been placed with that organisation. The second to be tackled was STEFER 201, a 1938 Stanga bogie car acquired from ATM Bologna. Now in single-ended configuration, this may later be restored to Bologna double-ended layout. Fitting-out had not been completed at the end of March but it was expected that this car would be available for traffic within a few weeks.

Work is proceeding well on restoration of car 401, which holds a unique position in European tramway history. This was the prototype modern articulated car, built in 1938 to the designs of Mario Urbinati (1885-1964), technical engineering director of the STEFER tramways, whose pioneering work paved the way for the widespread post-war adoption of articulation on European tramways. Because government funding was exhausted by earlier restoration work, 401 has been the subject of fundraising by ATTS and the organisation has been well supported by the local population, over EUR53 000 having been raised to date.

Several months' work are still to be completed on this car and attention will then turn to STEFER 447, one of six Stanga bogie cars of 1938 acquired from Trieste after that system's closure and subsequently converted to unidirectional layout. Also in store awaiting longer-term restoration is Napoli bogie car 961 of 1934. Components from withdrawn Torino 3100-series bogie cars will be used in the restoration of these last two trams.

These prized specimens are not expected to appear regularly on line 7 but will be confined to operations on special occasions, perhaps including Sundays and holidays. Basic services will instead normally be worked by a fleet of restored Torino tramcars of various types. This part of the story, together with a description of the route and review of the operation itself, will feature next issue. **TAUT**