

WELLINGTON TRAMWAY MUSEUM

1990 PROJECTS

Presented by Les Stewart, Wellington Tramway Museum

As part of New Zealand's 1990 Celebrations the Wellington Tramway Museum undertook three major projects.

- 1990 Illuminated Tram
- Display of Double Saloon Tram 159 at the Sesqui Carnival
- Conference 1990

I don't need to talk about Conference 1990 at this forum, the fact that you are here speaks for itself. However, I will brief you on the other two to set the scene for the trip to the Museum this afternoon.

1990 Illuminated Tram

Just as was common practice for tramway operators in New Zealand and other parts of the world to celebrate special occasions with decorated and illuminated trams, the Wellington Tramway Museum chose to celebrate 1990 by decorating Wellington Double Saloon Tram 151 with hundreds of coloured lights.

A total of 560 lights were used, 84 on each of the two Kotuku boards, 160 on each of the NEW ZEALAND 1990 roof boards and 18 on each of the four dash boards. In addition to the lights, special 1990 bunting was draped around the tram.

The tram is operated in the evenings approximately once each month. Public response has been limited, although on the days when the tram is promoted over local radio patronage picks up.

In financing the project, the Wellington Tramway Museum acknowledges the assistance of:

- The New Zealand Lottery Board through the New Zealand 1990 Commission
- Fishermans Table Restaurant, Paekakariki
- Beach Road Takeaways, Paekakariki
- Parapine Timber (Paraparaumu) Ltd.
- Horowhenua Electric Power Board



Installing the roof mounted "NEW ZEALAND 1990" lights on tram 151, 1 January 1990.
Photograph: Les Stewart.

Also refer to "1990 Illuminated Tram" page 3 - 18

Double Saloon Tram 159 at the New Zealand Sesqui 1990 Carnival

The New Zealand Sesqui 1990 Carnival was planned to be the major 1990 celebration event in the Wellington region. Its organisers had promoted it as being "a showcase of our own past, our present and our future and a learning experience from others whose nations are older or diverse to ours". Unfortunately, Sesqui did not live up to its promises and closed its doors after only 12 days out of a scheduled 37 day season owing millions of dollars.

However, the Wellington Tramway Museum can look back on the whole sad affair with pride in the professional way it went about putting together a display for Sesqui.

In May 1989 the Sesqui organisers first approached the Museum to enquire whether we would be interested in displaying a tram at the proposed carnival. At this stage they were considering the possibility of organising a "Hall of Transport" in the Overseas Passenger Terminal on the Waterfront and the tram would be one of many old transport exhibits. We were interested and began negotiations with Sesqui.

However, it soon became evident that Sesqui was not really interested in giving away free space and we would be expected to pay the same rental as commercial exhibitors. Rather than give up, we turned our attention to obtaining sponsorship money to cover our costs. I put together an information pack backgrounding our project for Sesqui and sent it out to selected four potential sponsors. Much to our surprise and delight, Mike Flinn and myself secured a deal with Electricorp Marketing within one week of posting out the material.

Meanwhile, Peter Berry was leading a dedicated little team of workers on the renovation of Double Saloon Tram 159. It had sat in the barn untouched since the late 1960's when some restoration work was started but never finished. The roof was recanvassed, side panels replaced, new ceiling panels fitted, interior re-varnished and the exterior sanded down and repainted.

Much of our success in having a professional display ready on time lay in the way we organised ourselves. We deliberately opted for a very small committee of just three - Mike Flinn, Peter Berry and myself. Peter's responsibility was to organise the renovation of 159 and its transport to Sesqui, while I looked after the negotiations with Sesqui and Electricorp Marketing and organised the photographic display to go around the tram. We deliberately left Mike without any special responsibilities. His role was to provide an objective overview to the whole event making sure that Peter and I didn't get lost in the detail.

Naturally, there were many more people involved in the project than just Mike, Peter and myself. Without the entire membership team supporting and assisting the project we would not have made it to Sesqui on time and as planned.



Tram 159 on display at the Sesqui 1990 Carnival, February 1990. *Photograph: Les Stewart.*

Our display received favourable comments from the organisers and members of the public. However, Sesqui failed. Why? There are a number of reasons and many of them will probably never be known. However, our analysis of the situation points to four primary ones.

- **Timing**

To break even people from all over the lower North Island, not just the Wellington Region, would have had to attend. However, Sesqui was not held during school holidays.

- **Cost**

Ticket prices were simply too high given the economic conditions and for what the show offered.

- **It didn't deliver what was promised**

In the lead up to its opening, Sesqui had been promoted as a "mini-expo" but it turned out to be only an up-market Winter Show

- **Lack of Media Backing**

At some time the organisers must have got off side with the media because the media gave Sesqui very poor coverage in the weeks before opening and when it opened, the media tended to concentrate on the negatives rather than the positives. The Museum had sent its own media releases out when the tram went into the city but not one of the major papers covered the story yet we usually get our stories into one of the papers, even if it is only a small paragraph in the "of interest" columns.

All of these are useful lessons to us all here today. Make sure you never make these sort of mistakes when organising any special event.

It is also important to note that the Museum did not suffer any financial loss as a result of the failure of Sesqui.

Since its return from Sesqui, all the mechanical and electrical equipment on 159 has been checked and overhauled. The re-commissioning of 159 this afternoon marks the end of 12 months of hard work by a small dedicated team of workers. A year ago it was only a dream.