

Hong Kong Tramway Accidents

by Joseph Tse

The topic of tram accidents is rarely mentioned in the enthusiast press despite the coverage in news clippings, such as some shown here. Only two trams have completely overturned in the long history of Hong Kong Tramways. Some other accidents were repetitive, and most feature junction derailments or driver errors. HKT have even regarded some trams as 'unlucky' because of their accident record.

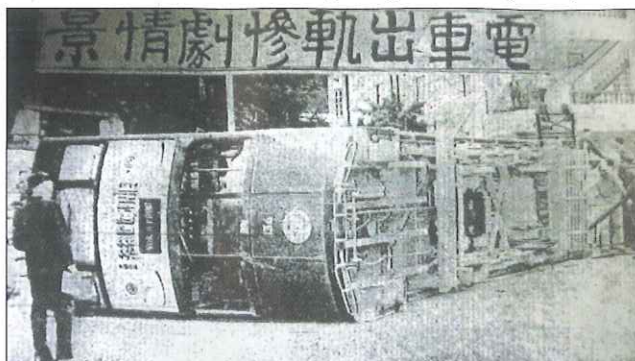
Overtaken trams

On 12th April 1964 eastbound tram 136, heading for North Point and travelling at excessive speed around the double bend on Naval Terrace (since replaced by the alignment on Queensway), derailed and overturned when it hit tram 68 heading in the opposite direction. Fifty-nine passengers were injured, and sadly a passenger on the rear upper deck of tram 68 was killed when he was struck on the head by 136's swinging trolley pole.

The other overturning accident happened on 5th October 1983, when tram 113 tumbled onto its side in Shaukeiwan Road after being rammed by a concrete-mixer lorry which had lost control, apparently after suffering a puncture. Both the tram and the lorry turned over, and twenty-one tram passengers were injured. HKT's maintenance vehicle was unable to lift up the tram and it eventually had to be righted with the help of the Volvo vehicle series N10 from China Motor Bus Company.

Tram 113 was repaired and became the first

car to feature internal fluorescent lighting. At one time, it was earmarked to join the F Line heritage service of the Market Street Railway fleet in San Francisco, USA, but it had to be rejected. With a high floor and high steps, it did not fulfil the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which requires public



Top: Tram 136 overturned at Naval Terrace (today's Queensway) on 12 April 1964 as reported in the Wah Kiu Yat Po newspaper.

Above: Tram 113 severely damaged after it overturned on Shaukeiwan Road on 5 October 1983 as reported by the South China Morning Post.

Author's collection

T.V. Runnacles collection

transport vehicles to be accessible to the disabled. Tram 122 had been considered for the F line as well and also for the Hong Kong Museum of History, but was damaged by a falling crane at Shek Tong Tsui on 15th January 1990.

Controller fire

The electrical fire in the controller of tram 16

in King's Road, North Point on 22nd August 1994 was another challenge to enhance tram safety. Three passengers, including the driver were injured. Unfortunately, and coincidentally at the same location, one HKT motorman died in a similar accident on 1st January 1996 when he fled from a burning controller on eastbound tram 107 and was crushed beneath tram 106 coming in the opposite direction. The driver of tram 106 then rushed towards tram 107 and stopped it. These fires were one of the reasons for the replacement of the original Dick Kerr drum controllers with electronic control in 1997.

HKT afterwards announced staff training improvements. A dummy tram body no. 888 was built on a plinth at Whitty Street Depot for emergency fire drills, which began in late 1996. It was mounted on blocks so the exits were at the normal running height.

To enhance tram safety, the consultants recommended modifications to the controller to provide a deadman's device; a main circuit breaker at (or about) roof level; a 24-volt tripping circuit; a heat barrier between the tram roof and the underside of the resistor; a 24-volt battery to provide a secure supply for the circuit breaker and deadman's handle; and a 'low air pressure' warning alarm. For passenger safety, the rear stairs were widened, gate closing alarms at the rear gates were fitted and CCTV was later installed to monitor passengers boarding.

Derailments

Tram 63 jumped off the track and collided with a bus along Kennedy Town Praya near Sai Cheong Street on 24th April 2001; twenty-one passengers were injured. Soon afterwards, 63 was renumbered as 5. On 2nd June 2007 tram 151 severely jumped the tracks while turning in North Point Road at night, which shocked passers-by. This was caused by driver error as he did not reduce the speed while passing the junction

at North Point Road, knocking down a row of fences and leaving a trail of gouge marks on the road. Five people were injured and the traffic resumed about an hour after when the tram was moved back onto the track with the help of the Leyland vehicle.



Trams 25 and 156 collided severely in Hennessy Road on 26 November 2009
Author's collection.

Head-on collision

Forty-one were injured in a collision between trams 25 and 156 on 26th November 2009 in Hennessy Road at Percival Street. Tram 25 westbound did not reduce speed while tram 156 was on its way to turn into Percival Street from Hennessy Road. This was not the first time either – on 31st December 2005 trams 121 and 129 were in collision at the same place, that time blamed on the failure of HKT's unique 'Overhead Line Contactor' which was used to set points ahead of an approaching tram.

A host of improvements were proposed including the provision of overhead line contactor light boxes, the provision of road markings and enhanced methods of track repairs. Four emergency switches were fitted at various locations on every tram to free-wheel the rear platform turnstiles so the passengers can escape from the tram. Other improvements included additional handrails and intensified lighting near stairs.



Left: The front panel of tram 161 was severely damaged after a collision with a minibus near Sogo Department Store on 25 November 2003

Author's collection

Below: The tram body numbered 888 is seen in Whitty Street depot in December 2000. This body was used for fire evacuation exercises. Around 2002 it was given a truck and entered service as tram 22.

T.V. Runnacles

Replacement by re-bodying

HKT commenced re-bodying of the current fleet with all-metal bodies in November 2011, having the trucks and other equipment transferred from withdrawn trams. On 24th January 2012 tram 108 crashed with a minibus at Queen's Road East near Pacific Place. The front gate was torn off. The tram was withdrawn for scrapping on 18th February 2012 and a new 108 was in place by March 2012. Up until January 2014 trams 66, 58, 11, 49, 146, 101, 64, 158 and 42 are have all been withdrawn for scrapping in the re-bodying programme (in that order) after traffic accidents instead of being repaired as would normally have been the case.



My thanks to John Prentice for his assistance in the creation of this article.

110

That's how many years Hong Kong trams have been running and special events are being held in Hong Kong from July so there is still time to book a trip!

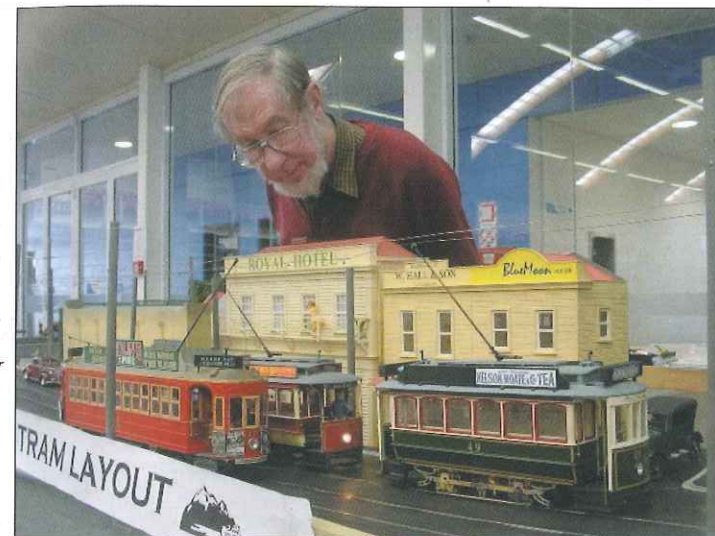
Our correspondent in Hong Kong, Joseph Tse, frequently reports on this much-loved system so we hope to read about some of the events for the 110th anniversary of Hong Kong Tramways later in the year.

Modeller's Workshop

DCC and sound on model trams

Auckland tram 207 on the layout at an exhibition in Taupo, New Zealand, along with two Bachmann Brill LGB models, modified to run on my layout, which has 60mm gauge track for 1:24 scale standard gauge.

Trevor Cheer



Ian Robertson adds bells and other noises

Operation of my 1:24 scale model tram layout changed dramatically when I installed DCC. In early days, with only one and then two trams operating, the live overhead was divided into up and down circuits, which necessitated both trams starting off together from opposite ends. The addition of a third tram made this impossible anyway, so the decision was made to install DCC.

Digitrax system was chosen and Digitrax decoders installed in the six trams at present available to run on my layout. Not only is it possible to run trams prototypically one behind the other, but acceleration and deceleration are much smoother than with straight DC control.

Each tram is assigned a driver and is controlled continually from one end to the other of my end-to-end layout. Speed is varied at curves, points and crossings, and on inclined track, which all makes for very realistic running. The Command Station chosen is the basic Zephyr model, and for most trams the decoder is a DH163D model. Throttles used are Digitrax UT1, UT4 and

DT100. A DS52 stationary decoder is used to operate points with Peco solenoid motors. These have a throw typical of the real thing.

When the decoder in my own tram, Auckland semi-steel number 207, burnt out I decided to replace it with a sound decoder and installed a Loksound XLone. My choice was influenced by the fact that my model railway friends were using this system and one of them has a Loksound computer program for programming decoders. The model railway group had built up a library of sound recordings of genuine New Zealand locomotives, both steam and diesel.

My first task was to source suitable tram sounds. At the time I was living in Auckland and was able to record the sounds of a genuine Auckland tram. Those recorded while the tram was stationary were not difficult; they were the driver's bell, compressor, and air brake release.

Sounds that had to be recorded while the tram was moving were not as easy. I tried recording from on board, and even with the microphone held out a window on a long stick, unwanted