

Price Rises.

Early January saw us, as usual, trekking to Hong Kong for the annual Toy Fair. We also took this opportunity to have some in depth discussions with our Chinese manufacturers. Readers will be aware from previous newsletters that we were hit last year with factory price rises on product of 20%. This has been made worse by a 17% devaluation of the A\$ against the US\$. (We pay in US\$). Thus we now have to look very carefully at our costings and retail prices for new product. Quotes received for some items since our return have made them uneconomical or marginal to say the least. Quoting a senior factory executive. 'the more etched detail and bits of wire you want on a model the more it is going to cost.' An obvious statement but the extra costs for super detail are substantial. After considering this we have decided that some new rolling stock projects will now be done with minimum 'super detailing' and incorporated into the new Austrains 'Basix' range to be introduced later this year. Other wagons and coaches will continue to be super detailed for the standard Austrains range. This approach has already been adopted by several overseas companies with some success.

New Products:

81 / G / BL: At last, after two years of design work by the factory the 81 / G / BL project has been signed off for tool making. First test shots are expected third quarter 2009 if all goes well. **The 81 / G / BL will be fitted with QSI.** QSI have the sound package for the 81 class. The G / BL package will follow soon. The time is near when we have to commit to the number of sound chips we need for this project. The only guide we have to the quantity required will be the number of advance orders. If you want a loco with sound please book it before 30th March, 2009. After that there will be sound locos available but we cannot guarantee that you will get the number you want. The sound locos will be made available on a **first ordered priority basis.** A two tiered pricing structure will apply.

\$80 deposit will secure your model regardless of when you finalise the payment.

If you pay the balance by then end of March, 2009 the price for a standard model will be \$245.00. For payments finalised after that date the price will be \$295.00 up to the time the models arrive in Australia.

After that time it is anyone's guess what the price will be. As mentioned in other parts of this newsletter the \$300.00 diesel is not far away.

For a sound equipped model add \$100.00 to the above prices.

If you want us to finalise payment of your order please contact us. Phone is OK but email, letter or fax is preferable.

Order forms are now available for the first run of the 81 / G / BL. Our apologies for omitting the BL order form from the last newsletter. That's what happens when you have so much to do and so little time. This error has now been rectified.

The 81 / G / BL has been designed around a state of the art die cast chassis and will be fitted with working head, marker and ditch lights where applicable. Interior cab detail and a crew will also be included. And for those who have been asking YES there will be two different variations to the sides of the early 81 class. The original version with single access door and the rebuilt double door version. As we made an unscheduled trip to the factory in China in January are consequently behind with our paperwork the advance payment cutoff date has been extended by a month to end March.

Our announcement in the last newsletter of the proposed 'correct' livery 8101 and G-220 cause cynicism amongst some and hilarity amongst others. Well you cynics. Guess what the two best selling locos on advance orders are as this is being written. Yep, 8101 and G-220. By a country mile. And for those who don't think that Victorians have a sense of humour G-220 is leading 8101 by about 30 units.

Passenger Coaches: The first drawings for the American End Platform Cars generically known as the FO's were received during November but, when they were analysed, were found to contain some major design flaws. The most obvious of these was that when they were assembled by clipping together they could not be disassembled without the use of a sledgehammer and oxy torch. So, as they say, back to the drawing board, or computer screen as is now the case. Amended drawings were received just before Chinese New Year and are now being checked. If they turn out OK toolmaking will commence

in March with test shots third quarter of 2009. Recent price rises have now put paid to our proposed price of \$360.00 for a six car set. The new price will be closer to \$500.00. We will open a two tiered advance order list when a final price has been established, probably with the next newsletter. Expected delivery of the FO's is early / mid 2010.

New Arrivals: Besides the fourth Austrains grandchild.

NSWGR MLE Flat Wagon & variants

The **NSWGR MLE Flat Wagon** and its variations the **TME Pipe Carrier** and the **FME LCL container wagon** arrived late January and are now available. Order forms are now on the website. The feedback we have had so far on these models has been very positive. The LCL containers on the FME have each been individually numbered and have small accurate brass etched hooks to simulate the real thing. Melbourne – Sydney and Sydney – Adelaide versions of the containers have been made along with insulated versions. Two different packs of three are available. Pack D has all yellow containers as used on the Sydney - Melbourne service. Pack E is an assortment of Silver insulated LCL's, Yellow Sydney – Adelaide and original Green LCL's. Still nobody has yet come up with a photo showing lettering for a Sydney – Brisbane LCL although they definitely operated to Brisbane.

The MLE and its variants are moulded in diecast zinc alloy with plastic detail components. This gives them plenty of rolling weight which makes them sit on the track a lot better than previous all plastic or resin examples. Only 432 packs of the TME pipe Carrier have been made. This is not a lot and these are likely to be the first sellout.

Because of the factory price rises the retail price for a three pack of FME's with a six container load is now \$195.00. A three pack of unloaded will be \$145.00 and a three pack of TME's with a pipe load is \$149.50. For those who have seen the photos, yes that is a real chain holding the pipes down. The LCL containers off the FME, with different numbers, are available in a separate six pack for \$30.00.

However the separate LCL's will only be available with orders for other Austrains product or at exhibitions. It is uneconomic for us to process LCL orders separately. We have given some test shots of the FME to a couple of specialist resin casters who are working on other variations of loads for the FME including liquid containers. These will be available directly from them or retail outlets. Watch the model press for details.

Some explanation is needed for the difference in price between a standard MLE pack and a pack of FME's. Each FME pack contains eighteen LCL's. We sell packs of six LCL's for \$30.00 so each pack of FME's has \$90.00 worth of containers. Thus the price of a 3 pack of FME's should be \$270.00. We have cut the price to make it more affordable. The Austrains ad in a previous addition of AMRM showed a lesser price for the FME packs. This was before we were fully aware of the severity of the factory price rises. The correct price is now \$195.00.

Other MLE variants. The MLE flat wagon was the basis for a seemingly endless variety of other wagons, both new building and rebuilds. Thus the tooling was designed so that an infinite number of variations can be done on and above the deck of the wagon. Work will soon commence on three new variants of the Flat wagons. These will include Milk Tankers, **PMX** Out of Gauge Steel wagons and the original NSWGR ISO container wagons, the **GME** with accurate, ie. original design (1969) ACT & OCL 20' and 40' containers. Most original ISO containers were flat sided as opposed to the almost universal (and stronger) ribbed side containers in use today. For those unfortunates with no interest in shipping a brief history lesson. ACT (Associated Container Transportation), a joint venture of Ellermann Lines, Blue Star Line and Port Line (Cunard) and OCL (Overseas Containers Ltd) a consortium led by P&O, were the first two companies to introduce dedicated container ships on the Europe Australasia run. In Sydney these ships berthed at the White Bay container terminal near Balmain and the containers were off loaded to an unpacking facility at Chullora where they were 'unstuffed' by reluctant wharfies who hated the idea of no longer being able to pilfer the cargo. For the first couple of years the process took up to six weeks from the arrival of the ship with containers banked up into holding yards all over Sydney. Eventually the Chullora facility was closed and the GME wagons were transferred into regular container Service.

Q. How many know that the original dedicated container ships were also designed to carry 10' and 30' containers but except for a few ten footers these never came into service?

DL: The DL class Co-Co Diesel Electric is in stock.

There are four colour variations of the DL. Original Australian National Green, National Rail Light Grey, National Rail Charcoal and the relatively new Pacific National Blue and Yellow. DL 43 in AN

Green with yellow bogies is now close to a sellout. If you want one do not procrastinate. Despite the factory price rises price of the **DL models will be held at \$260.00 + Post & Insurance.**

C35 & NN class: Deliveries of the C35 /NN are now complete. We still have a few people we have not been able to contact. If you have ordered but not received a C35 please contact us. It is likely that we are waiting to hear from you for some reason. The QSI sound versions are most impressive and while we will have good stocks of all C35 / NN variants it is likely that the sound versions will sell out first. Some sound versions are getting very low. The price of the C35 / NN is now \$475.00 for the non sound version and \$575.00 for QSI sound fitted.

The VR – V/Line – Freight Australia – Pacific National JX-VPCX Cement Hoppers:

Demand for the Cement Hoppers exceeded our best expectations and the entire first run **Sold Out.** A rerun arrived late last year and is about half sold already although we still have more than enough to last most of the year. There are three packs of VR and two of V/Line livery (**with new sets of numbers**) and Pac. Nat Blue and Freight Australia Green. One pack is entirely Freight Australia Green with a small logo. The other is a combo pack of 2 x Pacific National Blue and 1 x Freight Australia Green with a larger logo. Not leaving NSW out we have made two packs of the recently repainted cement grey Pacific National versions, mostly numbered 50 or less which are now operating in NSW. Despite recent factory price rises of over 30% on this product **Retail prices will remain at \$149.50 per pack of three, for the moment.** It will be reassessed along with many other prices later in the year.

In the Pipeline:

ELX Open Wagon and Variants.

Test shots have been received for the ELX and its variants. We have signed off on everything except the Ribbed sided version. Unfortunately due to a factory error the ribs on the wagon sides were not deep enough. The error was not noticeable to many but if we are going to do it we want it right so the sides are being remade. This will result in a two part release of the ELX with the original flat sided versions and the ESX Steel Carrier being released first then the Ribbed sided version following some months later. The Austrains ELX will have separate wire handrails, full underbody detail and be fitted with the correct free running bogies as fitted to other Austrains products. They will be fitted with the new metal knuckle couple now fitted to the Trainorama Victorian Brake Vans and the new Austrains Flat Wagons.

The variations we have tooled in the first production run are:

ELX Original version with flat sides.

ELX Heavy Duty version with reinforced flat sides.

ELX Ribbed sides with strengthened underframe.

ESX Steel carrying wagon.

The **SAR / AN** version will also be made.

We cannot yet quote prices for the models in this project. It will depend on the final factory production quotation and the value of the A\$ at the time of shipment. The ELX will be released without fanfare at the first exhibition we attend after they arrive.

Flat Top T / P class: Research has begun on the Flat Top T / P class but being realistic it is unlikely that this project will be delivered before sometime in 2010 but this will probably stretch to 2011. The T / P will happen all in good time.

We asked the factory to requote the **Z19 / Z20 class:** The two quotations received so far for the Z-19 0-6-0 tender loco and the Z-20 class 2-6-4 Tank loco have been ludicrously expensive. There is no way we could break even on what has been quoted. The factory promised to redo the maths on the project but came up with the same figures. In the meantime the A\$ has devalued by 15% making the situation worse. Until we receive a better quote the project is on hold. It has not been cancelled.

A quote from the factory for the **WHX Wheat Hopper** has been accepted and design work has commenced. Delivery of the WHX will be early / mid 2010 at best but probably later.

We are no longer proceeding with the **CH Coal Hopper.**

Planned Product: In recent times the market for Australian ready to run models has become more competitive and the situation is now bound to happen where there is an overlap of product between manufacturers. We try to talk to our competitors to ascertain their plans and avoid any expensive

conflict. In a couple of cases we have pulled out of a project when we have found that another manufacturer was well advanced on the same one. Until recently this has worked well in most cases. Recent events though have changed that situation somewhat. While we will continue to exchange information on new and planned products with those with whom we are on speaking terms we will no longer announce planned releases to the public until we have test shots from the manufacturers or in some cases until we drop the finished product on the table at an exhibition. We have another set of coaches (besides the FO's), a single coach and nine new wagons in the pipeline, 4 x VR, 4 x NSW and 1 x SA. (Not including the ELX and variants). These will now be announced when they are ready. We would prefer not to but if we tread on someone's toes, well they should have talked to us as others do.

Upgrades and Re releases:

Work is now complete on the upgrade of the **NR Class**. This involved retooling the chassis to accommodate sound speakers and the addition of working marker and ditch lights. For those not using DCC separate exterior switches similar to the CLP / CLF, DL, and Y class will enable the marker lights and ditch lights to be switched on and off independently. A further modification has closed the gap in the pilot and a new mounting system for the couplers has been installed. The NR production will now be split into two separate production runs. The modifications are complete and we expect to go into production immediately after the factory returns from Chinese New Year 2009 shutdown. This rerun will consist of the original releases of National Rail grey and orange (4 new numbers), Sea Train Traileraill and Steelink together with the 'Ghan' and 'Indian Pacific' colour schemes. Sea Train, Traileraill and Steelink will be very limited runs and this will definitely be the last time they are run. The new Pacific National colour scheme with the stars will be incorporated into this run. The cost of the modification has been very high but we had hoped to hold the retail price at \$245.00. Unfortunately factory price rises have put the kibosh on that. The new retail price will be \$275.00 and that is cutting our margin substantially.

The NR is due for shipment mid August 2009.

Austrains Basix: Some Austrains models are now well into the 10/12 year age bracket and are starting to show their vintage. While they are still mechanically very sound (the basic chassis and bogie design has not changed much during that time) they lack the panache of most of the more recently released models. The original Austrains releases of the **80 class, C class and 421 class** certainly fit into that category. We also realise that there is still a market for these models and that they can be used as a lead in for those new to the hobby who are put off by the costs of newer Australian models or by the mechanical quality of some lower priced product. No cosmetic upgrades will be made to these models however consideration is being given to retooling the C class and 421 from the ground up as state of the art models in the next few years. Before the newsgroups go crazy this is by no means certain. Much will depend on how much the factory is charging in a few years time and the potential sales. Not everyone wants super detailed models. The first three Austrains **Basix** locos will sell for around \$195.00 per unit and will be fitted with Kadee type couplers only to try to bring new entrants to the hobby into the 21st century. No provision will be made for the antiquated European couple which unfortunately have been retained on the re-released Lima range. As stated previously some of our new rolling stock releases are being made to a different standard of finish and will also be released as part of the Basix range.

Stock Items:

Y Class: After a somewhat slow start sales of the Y class picked up and we now find ourselves running short of VR Blue versions. Y-131 has sold out. We have less than twelve each of Y-164 and Y175. If you really want a VR version procrastinate no longer. Any remaining VR Blue Y class will be offered at the HBMRC Collingwood Exhibition then the Epping in Sydney if any remain. Stocks of all other Y class models are also *very* low but adequate to last through to around June. The price for the Y class remains at \$255.00. No immediate rerun is planned.

C36 class: All listed items are in stock except for two DCC fitted engines which are Sold Out. We have ordered enough C36 models to last some time. A working headlight has been fitted, the rods and valve gear have been upgraded to stainless steel and provision has being made in the tender for a DCC decoder. Kadee #5 clone couplers are fitted to the tender and the fitting of longer couplers, if required, is made simple by having a standard coupler box moulded into the tender. The C36 is available with

the option of a factory fitted decoder for an additional \$45.00. Price for the C36 will be **\$395.00** standard and \$450.00 with decoder. This pricing should ensure that the C36 remains the least expensive high quality Australian steam locomotive available for some time into the future. 750 units of the return have been made with the factory decoder which works quite well.

T class: Stocks of the remaining T class are now running low. The remaining FA and GN versions will be discounted to clear them at HBMRC Collingwood Exhibition until they are all gone. The VR Blue versions will not be discounted.

Exhibitions:

As usual this Easter we will be at the Hobsons Bay MRC exhibition at Collingwood.

**Collingwood College
Campbell St. entrance.
Collingwood, VIC.
Saturday 11th April to Monday 13th April from 10 am.**

Then Sydney at:

**Epping M.R.C.
Epping Boys High School
Vimera Rd, Epping NSW
Saturday 6th, Sunday 7th & Monday 8th June 2009 from 10am.**

POSTAGE AND INSURANCE. All items posted by Austrains have compulsory receipted delivery and optional insurance. **Compulsory** receipted delivery now costs \$4.00 per order. **Optional** insurance is \$5.00 per loco. If you do not nominate **no insurance** and we have your credit card number we charge it automatically. Austrains accepts no responsibility for packages posted uninsured.

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