

All fired up for live steam sale

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Money columnist

An upcoming sale of some top-end model trains has boys of all ages all steamed up.



1:30 scale brass replica of the Titfield Thunderbolt

There is a famous photograph of Walt Disney and Salvador Dali having a ride behind a model steam locomotive, supposedly when this unlikely couple were collaborating on the animated movie *Destino*. Shelved for more than 50 years, that film was finally released in 2003.

That photo captures the surreal appeal that many grown men have for what are known as live steam trains. Some build their own Disneylands in their garden so they can enjoy this hobby in privacy.

The sale of about 50 of these trains, most of them from one collector, is extraordinary. The July 19 auction to be run by Trains, Planes and Automobiles is thought to be a first in Australia.

The main vendor, who wishes to remain anonymous, is also selling some steam-powered model boats, traction engines, Gauge-1 electric locos and rolling stock and about 100 HO scale brass trains, mainly of NSWGR locos.

This man is a former schoolteacher who later set up a successful business administration college which funded his collecting in several areas, including art, stamps, coins, watches and classic cars of the full-size variety.

He explains his passion, or obsession, by saying that he grew up in a Housing Commission house in Parramatta where his parents couldn't afford to buy him the train set he always wanted as a child.

He has more than made up for it as an adult, building a large railway complex around his coastal property. It cost about \$30,000 just to lay the tracks. He's now downsizing, and the trains won't fit in the waterfront apartment complex he's building. Nor will the tracks.

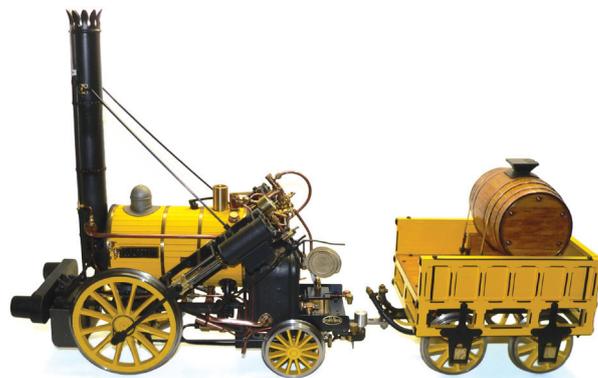
The car collection, including a 1960 Formula One Cooper-Climax – thought to be the only one surviving – will be sold through Shannons in August. He'll keep the stamps, coins and watches.

While he claims he never thought of the trains as an investment, Keith Mentiplay from Trains, Planes and Automobiles says the vendor bought wisely and predicts that he should make a modest profit.

Total estimates are \$150,000 to \$200,000.

"I don't think he'll lose money," says Mentiplay.

One of the highlights of the sale will be one from another vendor. This is a 5-inch gauge model of George Stephenson's Rocket made by the Japanese company OS, complete with scratch-built wooden ride-on trailer. The loco is butane-fired but can also run on coal, and comes with a boiler certificate current to 2018. This is the live steam equivalent to a roadworthy certificate for cars. Not all locos at the auction have these. Estimates are \$8000 to \$10,000, which puts the Rocket in the top category for live steam. Bidding starts at \$6500.



Japanese 5" gauge Stephenson's Rocket

The main vendor bought many limited editions, notably a 1:30 scale brass replica of the Titfield Thunderbolt as featured in the 1953 Ealing Studios comedy. It's by the Japanese company Aster, perhaps the best-known manufacturer of large-scale model trains. They previously made cash registers.

This train was built up from a kit and like several sourced from the main vendor, has never been fired up. Estimates are \$2000 to \$3000.



Passenger coach from the LGB Gauge-1 Orient Express set

Another highlight is not steam-powered but a Gauge 1 electric Orient Express made by LGB, consisting of a Mallet locomotive with three Pullman luxury coaches. Estimates are \$3000 to \$4000.

Typical of the HO section, designed for indoor layouts, is an Australian-made Bergs Brass Models NSWGR C36 Class 4-6-0 Locomotive & Tender, unpainted, still in the original box.

This is the kind of train the vendor may have spotted as a boy growing up in Parramatta. Estimates are \$600 to \$1000. High-quality HO brass can be as expensive as the larger outdoor models.

According to Mentiplay, these prices will not be a barrier to the surprisingly large numbers of live steam and model train enthusiasts around Australia, who tend to spend large on their private passion. Many will already have their own garden railways or be members of clubs with an appropriate facility.

The main vendor says he never joined a club, so his collection may be unknown to the bulk of collectors, or was until he decided to sell it. Word of mouth has spread quickly.

"I think a lot of people are already watching this auction closely," says Mentiplay.

Trains, Planes and Automobiles first Live Steam Action takes place on Sunday, July 19, at the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. Museum entry is \$15 for adults, children free. Auction starts 1pm. Viewing 10am to 4pm on Thursday and Friday at TPA, 276 Johnston Street, Annandale. Catalogue and online bidding on antiquetoys.com.au.