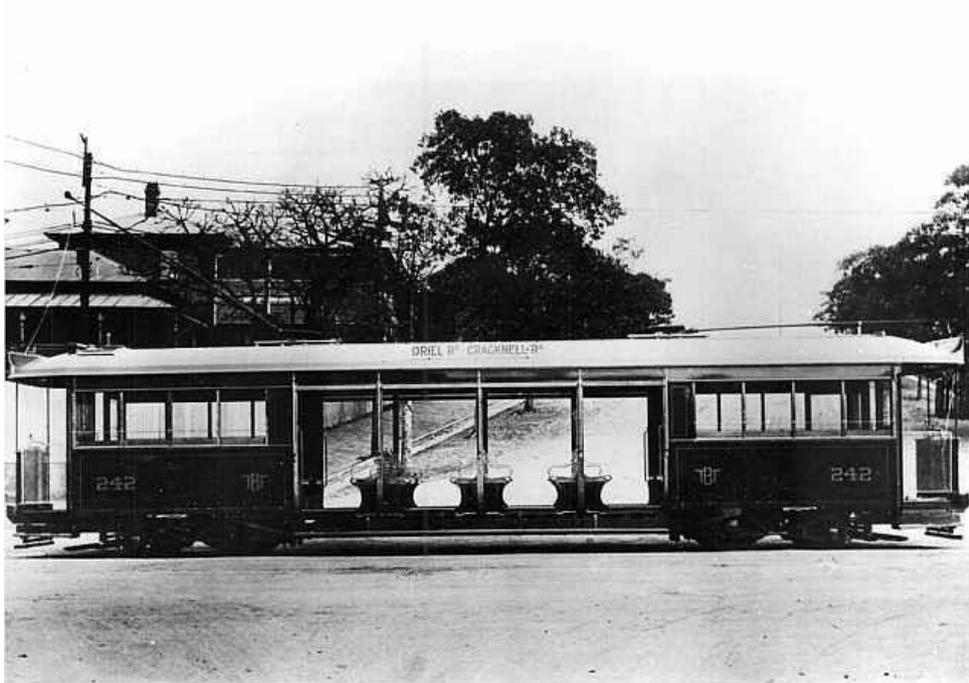


# TRAM LINES OF DESCENT

## By Noel West

With a sub-title of ? Brisbane's Transport Looks back Across a Century? a full page article appeared on page 19 of the 12th March, 1933 edition of The Sunday Mail. It was illustrated with pictures of trams from Manchester, Melbourne, Sydney, Hobart, Adelaide and a fine picture of a new looking Drop Centre 249. The text of the article is quite lengthy so a number of interesting extracts pertaining to Brisbane, some with a touch of humour, are presented for this article.? Trams are strange monsters; they have character and even - witness their breakdowns - temperament. Thus we can well imagine those latest 120 h.p. aluminium limousines leaving their physical forms in the depot some night and careering adventurously along an untraveled track - their own line of descent.



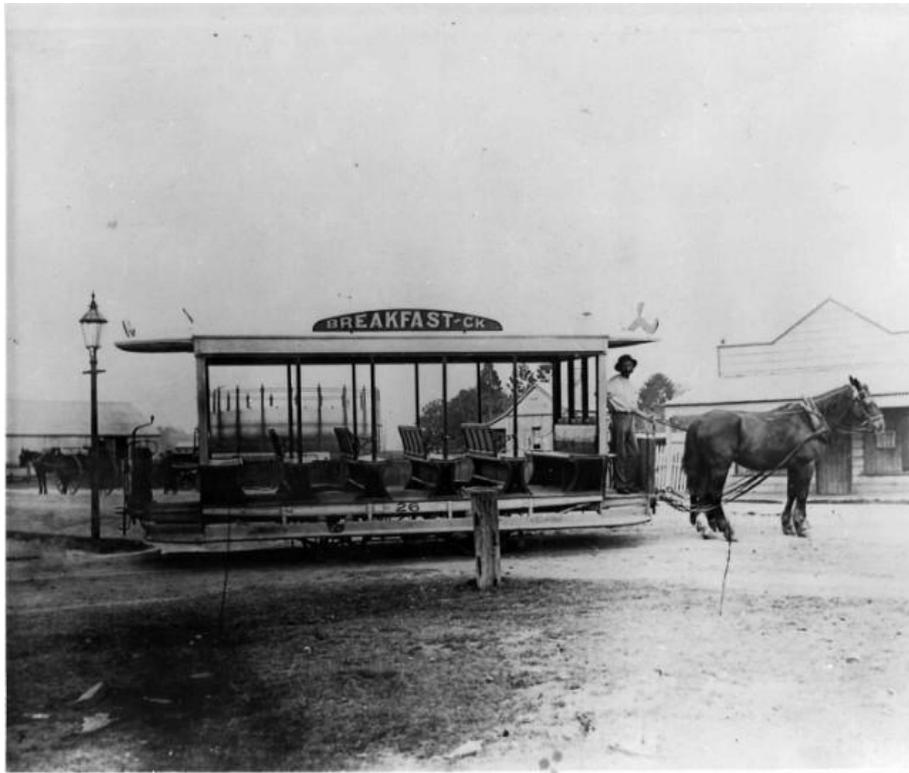
Car 242  
Countess Street  
1925 - BTMS  
Archive

Touring the torturous branches of their family tree, those spectral trams would encounter an astounding variety of rattling and rumbling relations. Even in contemporary Brisbane they would rub noses with a heterogeneous array of rolling stock devised for the transport and torment of man. Brisbane has had many different sorts of trams; and, then, although it may surprise you, Brisbane's tramway system is just about the best in the Common-wealth.

While the mileages may not compare with some of the other cities, Brisbane can sneer at some of the heterogeneous types of tram cars Sydney still uses, and at the cable comedy which is only now ending in Melbourne, as well as the occasional horse and steam services still meandering along here and there.

But Brisbane can still improve; the old combination type of car , with centre saloon and open seats at each end, is still in use on short-line sections - Edward-street - Gregory-terrace, for instance - while Sydney is putting on long corridor cars and Adelaide is experimenting with trackless trolleys.

But the Brisbane people had to wait until 1884 for the first spike to be driven into Brisbane soil for a tramway that was to run from Woolloongabba to the Valley, and eventually oust the horse buses from the road. Hard-toiling horses provided the motive power for these early trams until 1897, in which year the electrical system was adopted.



Horse Car 26 Light Street Depot 1886 - BTMS Archive

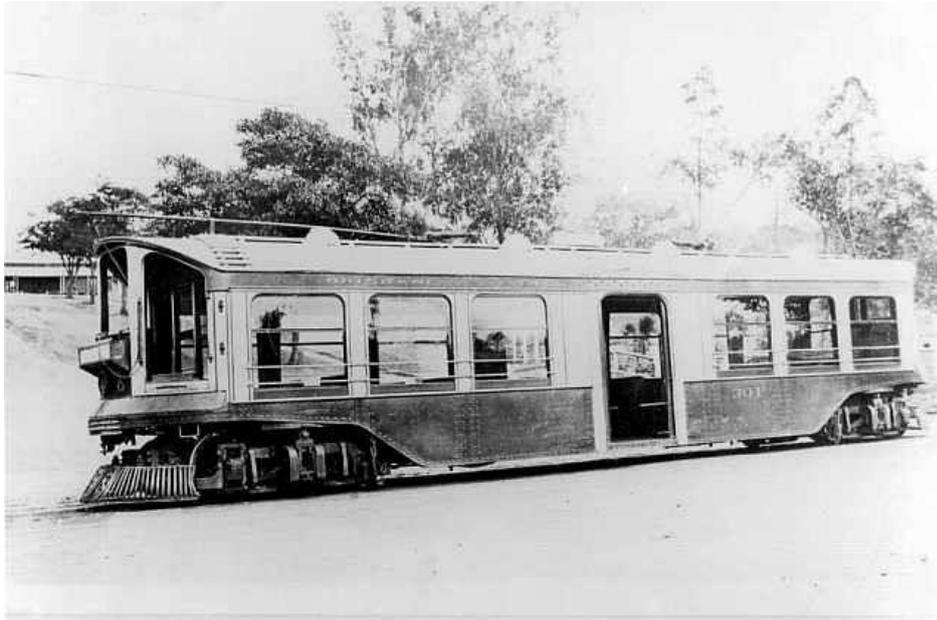
Of Brisbane's first trams one was a single-decker and had a length of 16 feet and seated 16, but at a pinch could accommodate 28; the other was 19 feet long and a double-decker and was the pride of the town. It had an open top storey, and well nigh drowned its passengers when it rained. It seated 40, and boasted stumbling, standing, sardine-packed room for 15 more unfortunate travellers. It galloped along attached to two horses, shook up many a meal, but broke no bones; its speed varied according to the temperament of the horses. And some of them were very, very temperamental!

But even in the electric era the Brisbane trams have changed in appearance almost as much as the people who ride in them. Before the war most of the trams running up Queen-street were those dear old musical boxes with seats down the sides and an aisle down the centre for you to fall in when the car started. They had coloured lights as destination marks, and they swayed like galloping camels. They were REAL TRAMS. (The reference is probably to Dreadnought cars but musical?)

Then came the combination car with centre saloon and open seats at each end - a la Edward-street. (The state-ment is incorrect as these were the first type of electric cars. Perhaps the sentence should have commenced with, Before them came ....) They had glass doors that opened sympathetically and jammed diabolically. But the old Tramway Co. was progressive, and again went to America for a model. It was then known as the ? Brill? or 13 (sic) bench type, with cross seats, but nobody was superstitious. (They actually had 12 benches.) The people who rode in them called them ? toastracks?.

We have seen trams with all compartments, trams which are nearly all open, trams with compartments in the middle, trams with curves, trams with corners, trams with huge iron poles to hang onto, and trams with scarcely any holds at all. Trams painted dark brown, light brown, a dirty brown, khaki, with a dash of red, and now aluminium with blue facings.

We have had single-deckers, double-deckers, saloons, 16 and 13 (sic) benches, toastracks, dreadnoughts, drop-centres and one man trams. And who does not remember Big Bertha, that model deluxe from the land of the Stars and Stripes. (While stepless car 301 may have been known by some as Big Bertha many folk recalled it as Big Lizzie.) What a car! It was too heavy to be electrically driven up hill, travelled along about three inches above the street with a motorman perched up in a special front compartment, and one huge door into which belated passengers hurled themselves; if they missed the centre pole they sprawled on the door.



Car 301 Big Lizzie  
- BTMS Archive

Anyway, it should be a comfort to the city's tram travellers to know that the system extends over 57 route miles, equal to 99 miles of single track, carries 70,000,000 passengers annually, employs 1,350 men, pays out £6,000 per week in wages, and has 298 cars in use.?