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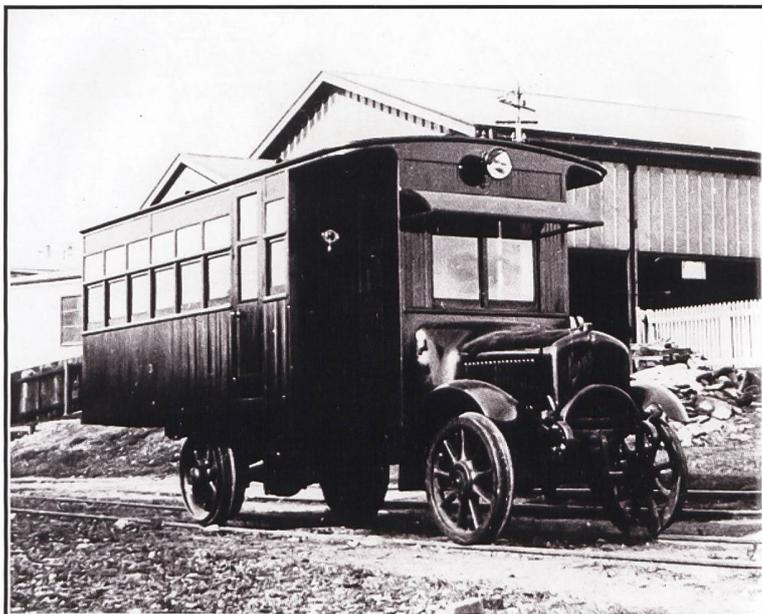
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Saurer A type Railcar, Southern Australian Railways, 1923–1934



The South Australian Railways (SAR) was regarded as a leader in railcar development, beginning in 1885 when it imported three “Rowan” steam powered units from Belgium to work the Strathalbyn and Victor Harbor lines.

Left - Fresh from the body builder, and standing on SAR exhibition siding in 1923, the Saurer railcar looks superb and duly commissioned ready to commence its duties.

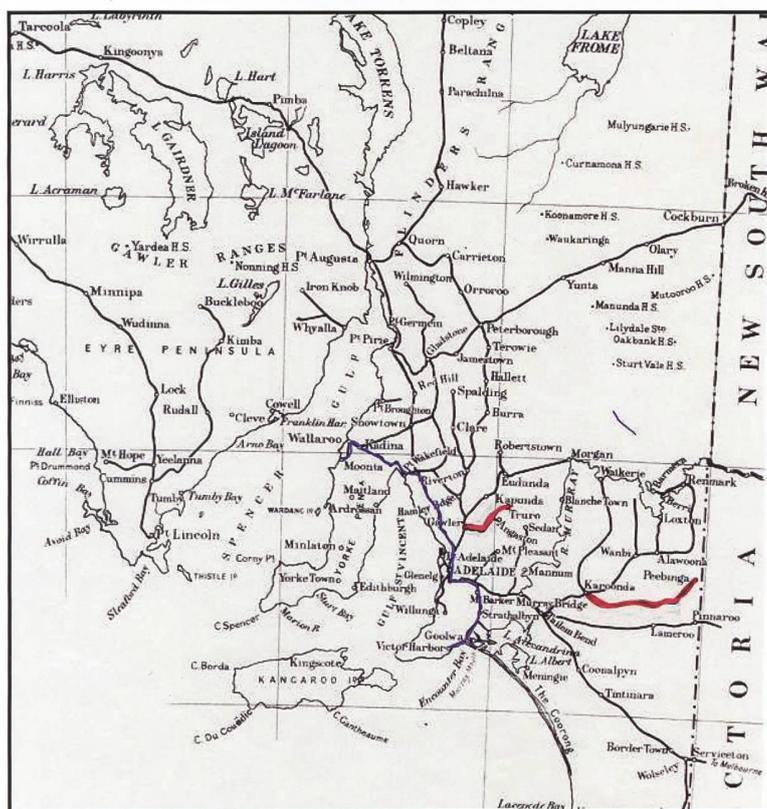
Late H.L. Kingsborough Collection SLSA

In 1911 an order was placed on the ‘Caldwell Vale Motor Construction Co.’ for a petrol driven car to work the Goolwa to Victor Harbor service, then known as the “Cockle” train it continued until 1924 when it was withdrawn from service.

In June 1923 the South Australian Railways (SAR) commissioned a new 35 passenger railcar into it’s motive power fleet, being numbered ‘3’. This was built on a Saurer A type truck chassis that had been converted to operate on the SAR 5’ 3” broad gauge branch line network.

The Saurer in all probability been purchased from the then distributors in Adelaide, H.L. Stephenson of Pirie Street. As best that can be determined

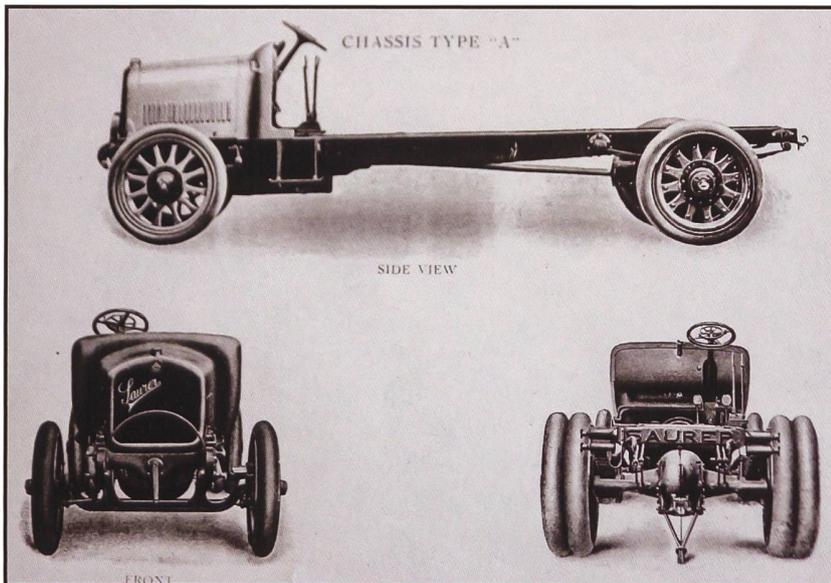
The Saurer ran on the routes marked in red, the shorter to the west is the Gawler to Truro, while the longer is the Karoonda to Peebinga line. The blue line shows the route taken in 1931 to bring two trams from Moonta to Victor Harbor.



the conversion and body work may have been done by either Holden & Frost, Motor Body Builders or the SAR

Workshops at Islington in Adelaide at the time. The Saurer came to Adelaide from the Saurer branch factory in Suresnes, France. As with other motor vehicle makers of the time, it would have arrived in ‘chassis/cowl’ form, that is minus cab and rear body, these being made locally in order to reduce import taxes. Stephenson’s most likely would have purchased the Saurer through the Saurer branch office in London.

In order to operate on railways, the front axle and steering would have to be replaced with a solid axle with flanged wheels. The rear axle would need the dual wheels and tyres removed, these also replaced



The Saurer A type. This is how the chassis may have looked when it arrived into Adelaide prior to being converted into a railcar.

Source: Saurer A type Handbook.

with suitable flanged wheels.

The first route it was operated on was the Barossa Valley Railway line, from Gawler Central Railway Station to Truro, a distance of approximately 28 miles (45kms). The railway reached Truro in 1917, and closed in 1970. In the 2011 census Truro had a population of 395 people.

In 1925 the Saurer was transferred to Karoonda in the Murray-Mallee area to service the Karoonda to Peebinga line, distance of approximately 80 miles (129kms). Peebinga being close to the state border with Victoria, the location being encouraged for cereal farming development by the South Australian Government. The railway reached Peebinga in 1911, the township beginning to be planned and laid out the following year, 1912, in 1990 the line was closed. In 2011 it's population was 32 people. The Karoonda to Peebinga service was operated every second day, sometimes with a small goods van in tow to carry excess passenger baggage and/or goods and supplies for Peebinga.



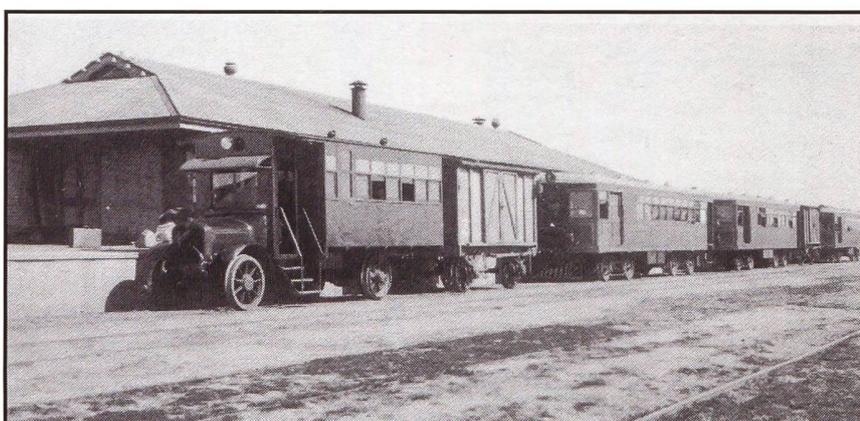
Above, taken before the line closed in 1990. Peebinga railway station on the right (the small shed) with grain silos on the left.

Source: Internet

Railcar services also ran daily between Karoonda, Waikerie, Loxton and Paringa, these using the 55-class railcar.

Mr. Hurtle ('Ike') Allister, 84, the last of the original railcar drivers.....he said, *"in the early days we had to fuel up, change the oil and grease the railcars ourselves. Mechanics were only called in if there was a mechanical breakdown."*

In the publication 'Among Ourselves', May/June edition 1983 on page 9 is an article titled "Recollections of an Old Railcar Driver" written by



1925, the Saurer railcar with van in tow in front of three 55 - class railcars at the Karoonda railway station. Source: "Among Ourselves", May/June edition 1983, page 7

"Railcars from Karoonda provided transportation in an area where roads and motor vehicles were virtually non-existent."

"Soil erosion and dust storms became more of a problem as farmers cleared the country, and blowing sand often built up over the rails, sometimes causing derailments. There was one instance when a driver became derailed when he drove his railcar into a bank of sand in a railway cutting during a dust storm. He



Taken in the late 1960s, a SAR Rx steam locomotive #227 with a Commer QX (R7) railcar #131 in the Karoonda rail yards. The petrol engine Commer railcar operated the Karoonda to Peebinga service. The grain silos in the background were built in the early 1960s employing an eight day continuous concrete pour.

Source: Internet

had no option but to walk to the nearest farmhouse and telephone through for help. By the time he got back to the railcar sand had built up and was flowing through the windows”

The Saurer railcar also has an association with the horse drawn (tourist) trams at Victor Harbor, the trams still taking tourists across the causeway to Granite Island. Kim Bird wrote in the ARHS Bulletin Vol. 37 No. 587 September 1968 an article titled “Victor Harbor Horse Drawn Trams Return” with the following extracted, “Following the cessation of the Moonta - Moonta Bay Service in 1931, Cars No. 5 and 6 built by Duncan and Fraser in 1883, were hauled to Victor Harbor by the elderly “Saurer” Railcar to replace No.7.”

This early attempt at provide alternatives to steam passenger services proved unsuccessful. It was said of the Saurer that it looked very much like a 1920s greengrocer’s van!

In 1934 the Saurer was removed from the Karoonda to Peebinga railway with its fate unknown. It’s replacement was the USA designed Brill railcars known locally as the “Barwell Bulls”, these progressively introduced from 1925.

We do know that the Swiss Saurer was a truck that found a good many operators in South Australia including John Mitchell & Son, Coopers Brewery, Orlando Wines, Penfolds Wines and P.G.F. Klose during the 1920 - 1930s, some still working hard into the late 1940s. Had this reputation for hard work and reliability been a factor in it being chosen to become a railcar, a question we will never know the answer to.

What we do know, this is only A type Saurer worldwide to be made into, and operated as a railcar.

My appreciation to Mel Jones of the Tea Tree Gem & Mineral Club Inc., for his invaluable assistance with this article.

Paul Tol

Eine knappe Übersetzung des Artikels von Ruedi Baer, welcher in engem Kontakt mit unserem «Australien-Korrespondenten» Paul Tol steht:

Die Südaustralischen Eisenbahnen (SAR) waren ein früher Leader im Betrieb von Schienenbussen. Angefangen hat dies bereits 1885, als die SAR drei ROWAN-Dampfbusse in Betrieb nahm. 1911 dann beschaffte man einen Bus mit Petrolmotor, und 1923 wurde ein neuer Schienenbus bestellt. Dieser wurde auf einem Saurer Typ A Chassis aufgebaut, für die damalige australische Breitspur. Die Karte zeigt mit rot, wo der Saurer Railcar eingesetzt war. Die erste Linie führte durch das Barossa Valley. Diese Linie war in Betrieb

bis 1970. Nach diesem ersten Einsatz wurde der Saurer Railcar auf die Linie Karoonda – Peebinga (45 km Distanz) versetzt. Dort fuhr er im Zweitage-Takt. Manchmal zog der Saurer-Bus auch noch einen Güterwagen. Das Bild auf der zweiten Berichtseite unten zeigt den Saurer mit Güterwagen, vor zwei weiteren «55er»-Railcars.

Es wird berichtet, dass aufgrund der intensiven Farmertätigkeit immer mehr Sandstürme aufkamen, mit Sanddünen über den Gleisen mit Entgleisungen als Folge. Einmal fuhr der Saurer weitab von der Zivilisation in eine Sandbank, und der Wagenführer musste zu Fuss zur nächsten Station. In der Zwischenzeit hatte der Sturm den Sand höher als die

Fenster des Railcars aufgetürmt!

Eine letzte grosse Aufgabe hatte der Saurer, als es galt, zwei weitere Railcars nach Victoria Bay zu schleppen, um diese dort für den Touristenverkehr einsetzen zu können. Diese noch älteren Railcars wurden als Touristenattraktion von Pferden gezogen.

1934 wurde der Saurer aus dem Betrieb genommen, ersetzt durch British Railcars mit der Bezeichnung «Barwell Bulls».

Paul Tol schliesst seinen Beitrag mit dem Hinweis, dass der A-Type Saurer wohl das einzige Schienenfahrzeug von Saurer der damaligen Zeit gewesen sei.

Vielen Dank, Paul, für diesen weiteren spannenden Beitrag von «down under».