

Cuba Railway Curios

Until recently Cuba was a Mecca for railway enthusiasts, with a great number of steam locomotives at work in the sugar industry. Sadly this is no longer the case as many of the sugar mills are now closed. Even in their hay day many of these lines were worked on a make do and mend basis in a similar vein to the Colonel Stephens lines so loved by garden railway modelers.



Figure 1

connect your steam engines to it as well.

This is not strictly a Cuban oddity as you could see fireless engines in many industrial locations in the past. Narrow gauge ones are a little more rare, like Unique on the Sittingbourn and Kemsley line.



Figure 2

accommodate placed on a standard chassis with a rudimentary cab at one

end. The whole thing is then set off with a sand dome or two perched incongruously on top. Fig 1 and 2 show Baldwin examples in standard and narrow gauge. The European layout usually had the cylinders and

I was lucky enough to visit many of the lines and thought that pictures of some of the more unusual items encountered might be of interest and possibly provide inspiration for some scratch building.

There are several types of unusual engines covered, this includes home made engines, road vehicles converted to rail and the first type to be dealt with steam engines used in unusual ways.

First we have fireless engines; if you have a factory with a high pressure steam line, as sugar mills do, then it makes sense to



Figure 3

In Europe we are also unused to the standard American

fireless engine. This is composed of the largest boiler the loading gauge will



Figure 4

exhaust at the cab end, like the 1914 Ornstein and Koppel example in fig 3. Needless to say both types were in use in Cuba.

More unusual is the practice of converting standard locomotives to run fireless, as far as I know this is unique to Cuba. At Noel Fernandes mill two otherwise standard 2-8-0 engines have had their tenders removed and run cab first for a couple of miles out into the fields to collect cane for the mill. They were also easily identified from a distance, as the smoke was white instead of the more usual black. Fig 4

Fireless engines may not look correct on a rural line but many industrial lines had them and I do not ever recall seeing one modeled.



Figure 5



Figure 7



Figure 6



Figure 8

The next type of engine is even more unusual, steam engines converted to diesel.

In a country where recycling is the norm a steam engine with an unserviceable boiler can soon be made to work again with a diesel engine and gear box replacing the boiler. These engines are rather odd looking but no doubt served their purpose. The engines shown in fig 5 and 6 show their parentage as they both still have their cylinders, both were out of use at Australia mill. The engine shown in Figure 7 is the shunter at Espartico mill, it gives away its parentage by the 2-4-0 wheel arrangement.

This mill also used the two 2ft 6" gauge fireless engines in Fig 2 and 3.

Number 4153 in Fig 8 is of dubious parentage, the wheels look very steam like to me! One of these conversions proved to be the mortal remains of a Manning Wardel 0-6-0



dating back to the 1870's. Fortunately the historic significance of this engine has now been recognized and it has had the diesel engine removed and its very moth eaten boiler put back in place. So far the cylinders have not been located! It is shown in Figure 9 in diesel mode out of use at Gregorio Arlee Manalich mill in 1999.

Figure 9

Next we look at rail converted road vehicles.

Figure 10 and 11 show the two converted lorries used on the extensive 2ft 3 1/2" gauge



Figure 10



Figure 11

line connecting Simon Bolivar and Obdulio Morales mills.

They both have the original back axle in place with a chain drive on each side to the rear wheels. One has a bogie at the front in true American "Galloping Goose" style while the other has just a single front wheel.

Both boast the original steering wheel in place, presumably for the hand controls. The original petrol engines are now long gone, replaced with a Russian diesel engine probably from a tractor.



Figure 11

Figure 12 is the rail ambulance on the 2 ft 6" gauge Rafael Freyre mill. It stands on a four wheel chassis and is powered by a petrol V8 engine. The engine was being persuaded to life but sounded as sick as the patients it

carried, just as well there were no emergencies that day.

Next we come to the largest group, home made engines.

The only common feature is a chain final drive, they are usually equipped with a tractor diesel engine but one or two are V8 petrol powered. As the pictures show they are usually assembled from what ever comes to hand!



Figure 13



Figure 14

Figure 13 is the yard shunter at Grandma mill, there were two similar tidy looking diesels here. In Figure 14 we see one of three small diesels at Pablo De La Torreinte Brau mill. This scene gives some idea of the action at this mill in the west of Cuba where the main

road crossed right in front of the cane loading area. The little locomotives were used to pull one car at a time over the road and in to the mill.

The next two are slightly larger and use steam engine cabs. The engine in Figure 15 has an odd shaped chassis and the



Figure 15



Figure 16

bogies are also unusual, perhaps an old tender chassis. This is also the only railway locomotive I have ever seen bump started. This was done from the back with a tractor equipped with a pusher plate! Figure 16 shows an engine with a similar layout but on a four wheel chassis, the coupler is a piece of rail welded to the front of the chassis with a hole in it for the chain.



Figure 17



Figure 18

On the line at Rafael Freyre mill we find this delightful rail car, this looks be a direct conversion of a more conventional rail car, like another example on this line.

Both front and back views are shown to help modelers. The engine on this railcar made a most impressive V8 roar, it is to be hoped this is reproduced on any models fitted with a sound system. Figure 17 and 18.

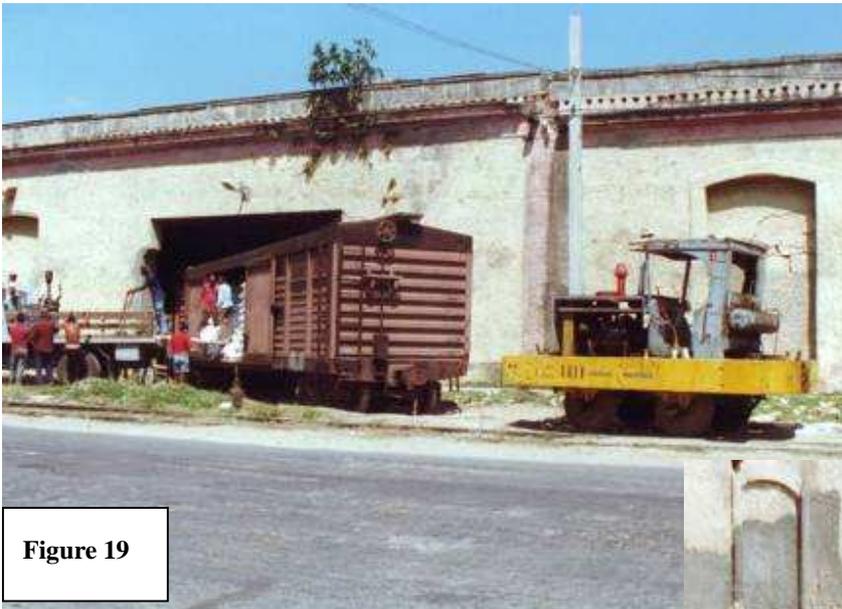


Figure 19

The cab looked as though it had been taken from a lorry of first war vintage. It was pulling a freight car on a very thin looking bit of cable, see figure 19.

The little engine shown in Figure 20 was shunting the freight line at Cardenas. It shows just how lose a chain drive can be, and still work.



Figure 20



Figure 21 is a powered track maintenance car on Hermanos Ameijeiras mill, 3 ft gauge. This is a straight freight car conversion and looked to be out of use though it is sometimes difficult to tell. It is amazing what can be achieved with a battery and a can of fuel.

Figure 21



Figure 22

Speeders are a familiar part of the Cuban railway scene. They are mostly powered by a Russian twin horizontally opposed motorcycle engine. Their main use is for track maintenance gang transport but they are also sometimes found on local passenger trips. They usually live on a short length of track laid at right angles to the main line, and are manhandled on to the track when required.

Figure 22 and 23 show narrow gauge and standard gauge versions, both with trailers.



Figure 23

Passenger railcars come in all shapes and sizes, it is a job to know which are home made and which are commercially produced. Here are some four wheel examples.



Figure 24



Figure 25



Figure 26



Figure 27

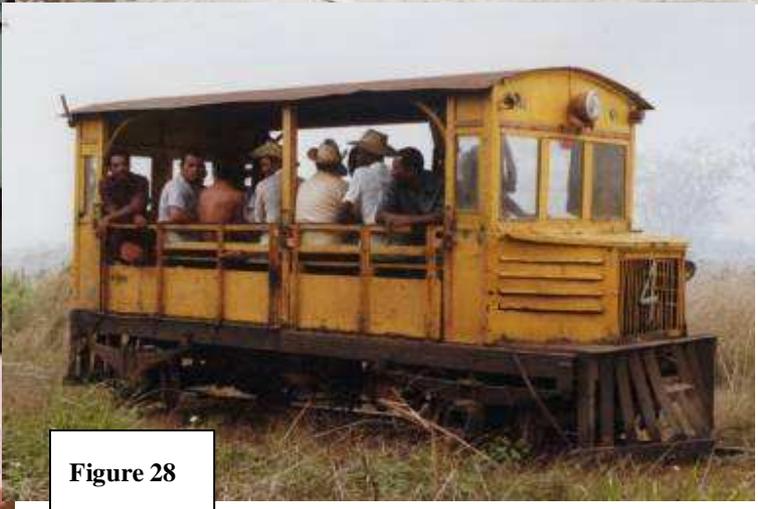


Figure 28

The first railcar seen in figure 24 is typical of many different one off types, most four wheelers have the long overhang at the front as seen on this example. The second railcar

is a standard type found on many lines, also shown in Figure 25,26 and 27. They are single ended and are usually turned on a Y at the end of each trip.

Figure 28 shows an even more basic railcar used to bring cane workers back from the fields.



Figure 31

Figure 30 is an engine less railcar on the 2 ft 6” gauge line at Rafael Freyer. This car subsequently had its metal roof removed exposing the interior to the elements.

Figure 31 is believed to be a Fiat railcar, while Figure 32 shows a Brill electric car on the Hershey Railway, the last American inter urban electric line running in the traditional manner.

Larger bogie railcars also come in considerable varieties, Figure 29 is a Budd car, many more of these cars are used as coaching stock with engines removed.



Figure 32



Figure 33

The last word in rail cars comes from Pepito Tey Mill and runs on 2 ft 6" gauge. It is fitted with a single driven axle at the front and a bogie at the rear, not an object of great beauty but it does the job. Figure 33.

You might not expect to find too many miniature locomotives on a small island like this, there are however a couple in museums and at least one in working order.

Figure 34 shows "Vulcano", a 15" gauge engine made by the Miniature Railway Company in New York, it dates from 1902 and is run on several tracks at different mills on high days and holidays. The engine shown in Figure 35 looks as though it has lost its original chimney and found one several sizes too small. It is to be found in the Havana railway museum at Christina station.



Figure 35

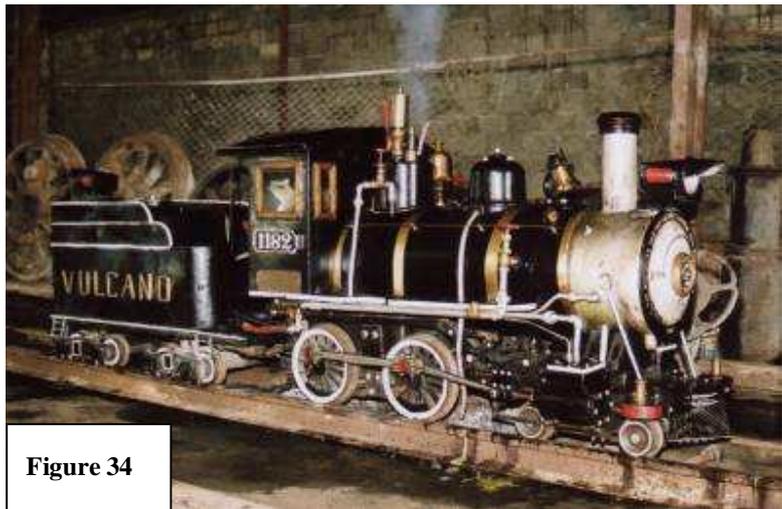


Figure 34

Derelict engines are not every ones idea of a good subject to photograph. As the least likely to survive I feel they are worth recording.





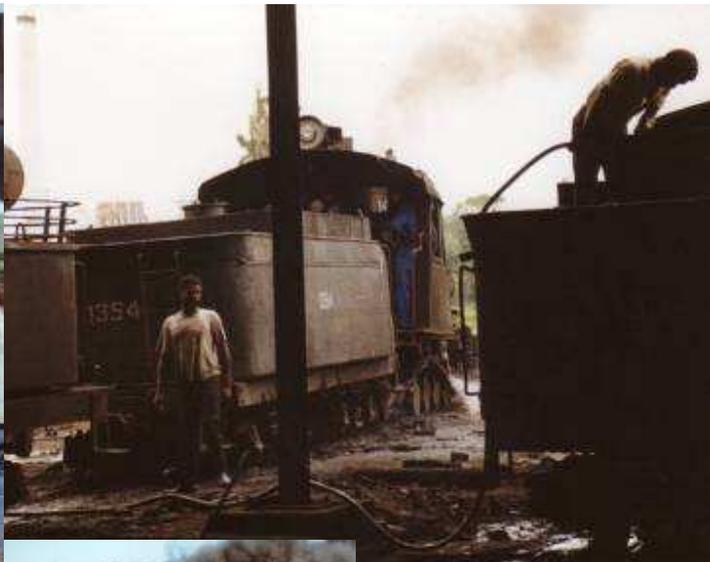
There were quite a number of derelict engines to be seen on my first visit, on the second trip many had gone. There is healthy demand for scrap and any engines looking beyond redemption are fair game. It happens to diesels as well, as seen with this British built Brush locomotive.

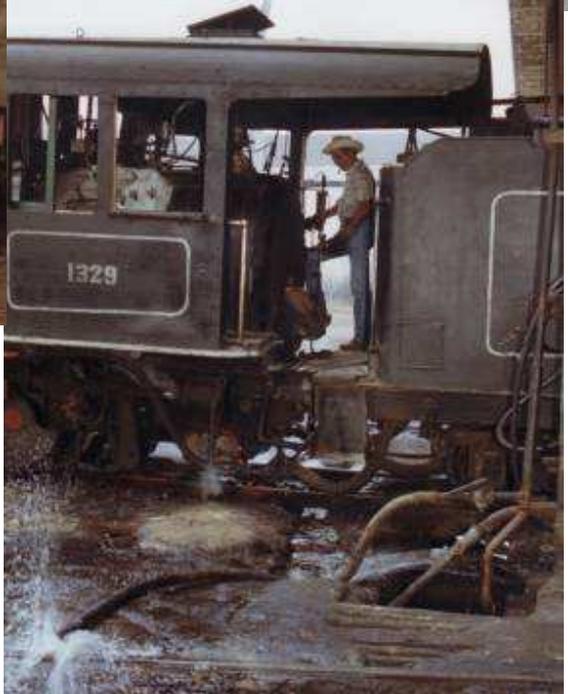


These are definitely next in the pot.



The engines seen above were to be found at the following mills, Grandma, Rene Fraga, Gregorio Arlee Manalich, Hershey, Obdulio Morales and Fructuoso Rodrigues. The odd derelict loco would improve any model railway, no need for track! Before we get too carried away with the romance of steam we should remember that it is very far from an easy or clean job, oil firing does nothing to help clean up the act.





The average steam shed is a lot more grimy than anything found on a model railway. Depots shown include Espartico, Ciro Redondo, Obduloi Morales, Orlando Gonzalez Ramirez, Ecuador and Pepito Tey.





Figure 25



Figure 3

Line side features are also a little different to those we are used to seeing on railways in England.

Figure 35 shows the station at Persiverancia, typical of most small rural stations throughout Cuba. The only unusual item is the double signal protecting the diamond crossing in front of the station. Figure 36 is a view of the unusual water tower at Ruben Martinez Villena mill, watering the only coal-fired engine encountered in Cuba. This is number 1207, a 2-4-0T built by Henschel in Germany in 1912.

Next we have Figure 37, with 4-6-0 number 1342 built by Baldwin in 1911 posing by its portrait, at Marcelo Salado mill, now a steam museum.



Figure 37



Figure 38



Figure 39

In figure 38 we see electric locomotives at the now closed Hershey mill, these engines date back to the 1920's and are as historic as many of the steam locomotives.

Figure 39 shows the signal cabin at Guareiras, this typical American style cabin was blown down in a hurricane a year or two after this photo was taken.



Figure 40

There is always a use for redundant rolling stock, no need to take the wheels off! Figure 40 is the train operations office

at Ecuador Mill while the caboose is serving in a similar capacity at Cuba Libre mill.

Figure 41.

It is hoped that the items shown above will provide a little inspiration for those who like their railways a bit on the unusual side.

Photos by the author,

Andy Probyn



Figure 41