Amateur Radios in the Motorcars

by Carl Sorensen, NB7C

This was my first year of being able to operate my motorcar on several different runs. I had an opportunity to meet several operators and see their equipment which included the radios they used on the NARCOA frequency. Many people used the Amateur Radio equipment, Yaesu FT 2500 or the FT 2600. From their explanations, these rigs are easily modifiable to the NARCOA and most Railroad frequencies.

I have been an Amateur (Ham) Radio Operator for over 22 years and surprisingly my introduction to the hobby of motorcars included getting a ride from another ham, Grover Cleveland, K7TP. I have been truly hooked on the idea of speeders ever since. This year's outings included meeting several ham radio operators not only operating motorcars but chasing them as well.

I modified my Yaesu FT8000, which is a dual–band radio, meaning it has VHF and UHF capabilities. This radio is able to receive two frequencies simultaneously, so that I was able to receive the railroad and the NARCOA frequency without setting it to "scan mode'. I was also able to visit with the three ham operators that were "train chasing" our excursion on the Willamette & Pacific Railroad, in Oregon.

Through our conversation, we were able to coordinate photographs taken on some tressels and at railroad crossings. These railfans were also able to meet their subjects of interest—the railcar operators—and most of us took advantage of meeting our "fans" by requesting copies of the photographs they had taken. One young man was able to catch a ride with us into Corvallis through coordination via NARCOA and the Amateur Radio frequencies.

I would like to invite the use of Amateur Radio into our hobby more fully. I have met several Amateur Radio operators who enjoy motorcars, and I believe that many of them would love to visit between cars during many of our trips. By using a single band radio, however, they are limited to listening to the NARCOA or the railroad frequency. By purchasing a dual–band radio and modifying it, they can combine the two hobbies. They can incorporate the safety of monitoring their operating frequency while being able to visit with other operators about the trip, all without disturbing the main channel.

An Amateur Radio License is now easier than ever to achieve. There are only three class of licenses: technician, general, and extra. The technician license no longer has the code requirements, and the other two only require a 5–word per minute code speed. The exams are chosen from a published pool of questions that are available to the general public. Attending the exams are easier than before as well. Twenty years ago we had to go to our local FCC office (most often hundreds of miles away) during select times to take our tests from an FCC official. Today we use our local hams who serve as volunteer examiners (VEs) to test as often as the demand requires.

To find out more about the Amateur Radio exams, contact a local Ham Radio operator or you can use the web: **www.arrl.org** or **www.w5yi.org** for testing in your area.

73 de NB7C (that's ham talk for "see you at the next seton, take care from Carl. Roughly translated of course).

RON ZAMMIT PHOTO

At the Editor's request, a whistle sign photo, from the PRO Camas Prairie Railnet, 2000 run.