



# Safety: Using Railsweeps

By Dick Ray

There seems to be a general feeling that rail sweeps are mostly decorative and serve no useful purpose on a group tour. Clearly the first car or two can sweep any debris off the rails and it will remain clear for the others.

Unfortunately that is not always true, as some owners have found the hard way. Where brush-cutting has occurred a limb can be caught by one car and flipped onto the rail, where it can cause the following car to derail. Another derailment was caused by the car ahead crossing a gravel grade crossing and dislodging a stone that landed on the rail. The following car derailed on that stone. How about kids who see a bunch of motorcars go by and run out and place stones, spikes, etc. on the railhead. Kids seem to get pleasure in doing this but fail to think of the consequences of a serious derailment.

Running with the rail sweeps down would have prevented those derailments. Of course that does not replace being vigilant and slowing for all grade crossings. Remember that safety is your responsibility. If you feel that you are safe enough at grade crossings, consider that your sweeps will deflect the errant squirrel, rabbit, groundhog, or a small dog. The two larger animals can derail you as easily as a rock.

Two types of sweeps are found on motorcars. One is the blade type which uses a flat piece of heavy rubber belting bolted between two steel plates on the end of an "L" shaped arm which is hinged to an extension bracket on the front frame. The other type uses a short section of air hose in a bracket, which is similarly hinged.

Which one is better? We don't know. Fairmont lists both for the M series cars, but calls the blade type "Heavy Duty", citing the wider design as giving "full protection due to increased blade width". Those who want increased protection can insert a piece of pipe or wood dowel inside the hose style for increased rigidity, or can bolt a longer backing plate behind the blade style.

If your car was not equipped with rail sweeps, consider fabricating some. They aren't hard to make for anyone who is handy. Just take a look at some sweeps on cars at a meet, make some measurements and go to it. A little bit of work could save your neck.

None of the sweeps are useful if they are not lowered, adjusted to be centered over the rail and close to it. If your car is equipped with sweeps and they are mangled, as they sometimes get, straighten and adjust them so they are useful.

Remember: **Safety is your responsibility.**

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