

## How Much Does It Cost To Operate Your Speeder?

by Roger Hoffman

The 2005 speeder season is rapidly drawing to a close and it seems like just a month ago when Tom Norman was assuring us that insurance would indeed be available. I sent in my \$120 check a day after finding out all was in place and I spent the rest of the year getting ready for and participating in 13 runs on 11 different railroads. Four of the runs were in my trusty CN MT-19A "Orange Pumpkin" and the rest were in my "new" CP A-4. Of the nine excursions in the A-4, five were public excursions, introducing over 200 folks to the railroad speeder hobby. Of the 13 runs, only three were NARCOA-sponsored. The rest were "museum-sponsored".

One of the things I did this year was keep a log of each trip, including road miles in the F-150, rail miles in the speeder, cost of gas, lodging, food, and etc. The data is interesting from a statistical point of view and I just wanted to share it with my fellow speederites.

I live 10 miles east of Dayton, Ohio and although there is plenty of rail traffic in and out of Dayton, there are no close railcar excursion locations. Of my 13 trips, the closest was a public ride weekend in Metamora Indiana, on the White Water Valley Railroad, 110 miles from my home. The furthest trip I made was to East Troy, Wisconsin for the Fall Festival public rides at the East Troy Electric Railroad. That trip was 526 miles one way.

All total, I drove my gas-hungry F-150 and speeder trailer a total of 6,195 miles for a mere 1,217 miles on the rail. This computes to a ratio of 5.1 "road" miles for every "rail" mile, a statistic that I find interesting for comparison purposes. For example, the excursion with the best ratio was the Latta Sub with a ratio of 2.1 road miles for every rail mile. The "worst" ratio was 13.6 road miles for every rail mile when I took the A-4 out for its first "formal" run at the Green County Depot Days public runs south of Madison, WI, in late April.

My F-150 averaged a lousy 10.3 mpg in 2005 pulling the A-4 over 4,365 miles of road. It averaged a much more respectable 13.2 mpg pulling the MT-19A over 1,830 miles of road.



Hotel costs for my 13 excursions cost me a total of \$813, and gas cost me a tidy \$1,285. Excursion fees totaled \$720 and miscellaneous and food costs ran a mere \$500. I paid \$433 into a special F-150 maintenance fund (7 cents per mile) bringing the cost of running my speeders in 2005 to \$3,751. Add in the now seemingly insignificant costs of insurance and NARCOA membership and I post a grand total operating fee for 2005 of \$3,891.

This works out to an average cost per rail mile of \$3.20. Compare that to my "most expensive" run on the Toledo, Lake Erie and Western of \$7.83 per rail mile (only 33 rail miles that day with a hotel stay that night - the wife liked the hotel more the rails!). The "least expensive" run was the White Water Valley Railroad public excursion at only \$1.19 per rail mile (75 rail miles and no hotel stay as it is "close" to home).

On a bulk cost basis, my run on the CP Latta Sub was the most expensive at \$539 (\$300 excursion fee, which did however, include one night of lodging). The least expensive was my participation in the North Vernon Railroad Days with Stan Conyer, costing only \$79 (no excursion fee, no hotel, fairly close to home, and early enough in the summer to enjoy relatively cheap gas).

Seeing how the funds are spent helps ascertain how to save some of those funds. The cost of gas was the driving factor in my 2005 season's costs. I could have saved by towing and using the MT-19A in place of the A-4, but that would have hampered the public ride sessions that I find so enjoyable. I could have gone on runs closer to home, but that would have ruled out the West Virginia Central and the two public runs in Wisconsin. The next largest factor is hotel costs. Getting up really early for "local" runs might have helped in two runs, but I don't like getting up that early! Roughing it (in the back of the truck) could have been a reduction factor in at least two runs. And staying in cheaper hotels (i.e., those without pools and continental breakfasts) would also certainly have helped, but to the chagrin of my son, who enjoys both of those amenities. Food costs could have been minimized with picnic food versus fast food joints, but that requires advance planning and dragging coolers and ice around, unless you happen to be within a few cars of the Riccitelli Deli! Excursions fees aren't very negotiable, but since I only ran in three NARCOA-sponsored runs, they didn't amount to much in terms of over-all expense.

None of the dollar figures shown above include railcar purchase and/or maintenance costs, as those costs would probably be incurred even if the cars weren't run.

2005 was my first full year in the speeder hobby and, yes, I may have gotten carried away with 13 runs that took me thru six states and along 4,300 miles of highway. However, it was a very enjoyable year for me as I met some really cool fellow speeder operators and some are becoming fast friends. As a result, the cost incurred has been well worth it. 2006 may shape up a little differently due to different calendar conflicts, different railroad opportunities, and different gas prices. But I'll be out there, somewhere, looking up newly made friends and trying to add more names to my growing list of speeder buddies.

Roger J. Hoffman, Ohio  
CN MT-19A, 134-64  
CP A-4, 4700-84

