



Gas-powered rail cars, originally designed to transport work crews, are fun to drive on abandoned rail lines, say hobbyists.

Old RR Work Cars Fun To Run

Call them speeders, jiggers, motorcars or put-puts, old railroad work cars spell fun for today's owners. The small gas-powered rail cars for transporting work crews are no longer used by railroads, but are increasingly popular with hobbyists. When Warren Iverson ran across one at a farm auction in Saskatchewan, he grabbed it and got a real deal.

"It cost me about \$500, and I spent another \$50 on a new drive chain," says Iverson. "On the internet, they run about \$3,000."

After buying his Fairmont MT19 he also cleaned and replaced motor oil, cleaned the carburetor and the gas tank, and put in new spark plugs. He attached an extra car battery, and the motor started right up after sitting for 20 years.

"The two-cylinder opposed Onan engine is quite fuel efficient and is rated at 18 to 22 hp," says Iverson. "It has a two-speed transmission."

Iverson's rig started out as a work car for Canadian National Rail. When their use was discontinued, he says local farmers bought them to use the motors on grain augers. When they discovered there were no governors on the motors, they were often abandoned to the wood lot. Occasionally they still show up at auctions.

He and a couple of friends with retired work cars use them on abandoned rail lines in their area. They aren't alone. The North American Railcar Operators Association (NARCOA) started in 1980 and now has 1,800 members in chapters across the U.S. and Canada. They offer members insurance for excursions, and their newsletter and website have listings of cars and equipment



Warren Iverson bought this rail car for \$500 at a farm auction in Saskatchewan.



Iverson uses the car on abandoned rail lines in his area.

for sale by members. Both also carry news on past and future excursions, as well as places where railcars can be used.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, North American Railcar Operators Association, P.O. Box 802, Lock Haven, Penn. 17745 or Warren Iverson, P. O. Box 457, Glaslyn, Sask., Canada S0M 0Y0 (ph 306 342-4508; fax 306 342-4965).

Got Rails? Build Your Own Rail Bike

Sears catalogs used to feature railroad bikes in the early 1900's. Custom-built rail bikes are still available for well over \$1,000, but Richard Bentley offers plans for building your own. He has fine-tuned his design over nearly 50 years of rail riding.

"I've sold plans to people in North America, Asia, Australia, Europe and Africa," he says. "Even throwing in the cost of a bike, you can build one for less than \$100. All you need is some electrical conduit, hardwood blocks and scraps of steel. Hardware stores usually have everything you need."

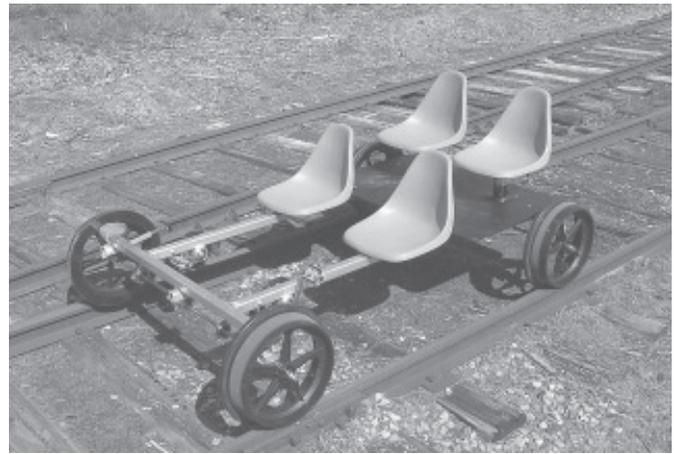
Bentley suggests checking his website. It contains a parts list so you can be sure they are all available locally. The plans are simple and require no welding.

An engineer by training and trade,

Bentley's plans are exact. They include six pages of text with a detailed construction sequence and parts list keyed to the drawing. They also include 10 sheets of drawings with most parts rendered full scale.

Unlike rail equipment with flange wheels, Bentley's bike rides on top of the rail. Skate wheels in a fixture attached to the front wheel run against each side of the rail, steering the bike and keeping it in place. Controlled by a hand lever, the guides can be raised when approaching a crossing or if driving off-rail.

The adjustable height outrigger, running on a third skate wheel or larger wheels on the second rail, provides stability to the bike. Bentley designed his for ground clearance to avoid most weeds growing on abandoned rail lines. It can be disconnected by pulling three



Four-wheel cart lets you take friends on rides along abandoned rail lines.

These 4-Wheelers Ride The Rails

Ron Forster developed his first four-wheel cart for riding abandoned rail lines about 30 years ago. He's been making them ever since. "My first cart had a lawn mower wheel with metal flanges to hold them to the rails," he recalls.

He later changed to plastic wheels. He had a mold made that would accept a BMX bike wheel. Pouring polyurethane around the bike wheel gave him a 17-in. railroad wheel with a flange that weighed only 12 lbs. He has been making and selling them ever since. Wheels go for \$175 each, or you can buy his 2 or 4-passenger carts that start at about \$1,800.

"I use the same material that's used to make roller coaster wheels at Disneyland," says Forster. "I have customers still using wheels I made back in 1976."

He has shipped his four-wheelers and wheels all over the world. A recent order from a refinery in Germany will be used to move workers around the grounds. One customer called from Holland asking about the wheels. A week later he showed up at Forster's door, took a set for a ride and then bought them to take home.

Not all rail four-wheelers are pedal power either. Forster will motorize his rigs upon request. While the price varies depending on the size of the motor, a 5 1/2-hp Honda with keyway in the back axle, sprocket, chain, clutch and mounting will add \$600 to the cost of a Rail Runner.

Most customers use theirs simply to ride abandoned rail lines set aside for recreational use. Others are members of North American Railcar Operators Association (NARCOA) and go on approved tours, often on operating rail lines.

"I have an 84-year-old customer in New Jersey who clears brush from a rail line in exchange for the use of it," says Forster. "A



Forster has shipped 4-wheeled rail cars all over the world.

lot of guys work with tourist railroads and offer to inspect tracks and clear them in exchange for track use."

Forster says blind and disabled people enjoy using the equipment on rails. To help them, he designed a special vehicle called the Railrider. With its low-slung, low center of gravity, high back seats, safety belts and shoulder harnesses, it gives them a sense of freedom with security, he notes. It can be propelled by arm or leg and requires no balancing or steering.

To promote the practice, he has even started the nonprofit Enabling Sport Foundation (ESF). It promotes setting aside rails for public use.

"Our purpose is to convert some tracks into recreational parks where everyone, including the blind and people with disabilities, can come and enjoy the sport of rail riding," says Forster. "New Hampshire has endorsed the concept and given ESF several areas with track to use as our own local project. If you want to save abandoned railroad track to provide recreational opportunities for all in your state, we can guide you."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Railriders or The Enabling Sport Foundation, both are at: 100 Memorial Street, Franklin, N.H. 03235 (ph 603 934-1938; railriders@verizon.net; www.railriders.net).



Skate wheels in a bracket attached to front wheel run against each side of rail, holding the bike in place.