

## High-Scoring Operators in MTA Rail Rodeo to Go for the APTA Gold in National Contest

By GAYLE ANDERSON

(May 17) National championship fever is in the air at Division 11, where Saturday 10 top qualifying operators took 98,000-pound, 90-foot cars to the tracks for a grueling competition of metal against metal.



Top Operator Tu Phan

It was a spectacle worthy of the Colosseum in Rome, but, for these gladiators, the reward was scoring points high enough to set hopes soaring for the APTA-sponsored national championship in St. Louis on June 7.

Division 20 Red Line Operator Tu Phan, a heavy rail operator for four years of his 14-year career with the MTA, emerged victorious with 965 points out of a possible 1,000.

Division 11 Operator Ken Wilkerson came in a close second with 950 points, followed by contenders Luis Castillo of Division 11 with 945 points and Robert Rodriguez of Division 20 with 940 points.



Division 11 operator Ken Wilkerson, right, is congratulated by Duane Martin, Rail Transportation Division Manager. Wilkerson will compete in national contest.

"Mr. Phan negotiated the course with confidence and accuracy," said Duane Martin, Rail Transportation Division Manager. "He avoided switches set against him, stopping with precision at the mock-up passenger stations, adhered to all rules and procedures for slow zones, as well as expeditiously rescuing a disabled vehicle and performed customer service requirements.

Phan also took a Light Rail rules test and passed the uniform inspection with flying colors. One of the most challenging obstacles for Phan, a Red Line operator, was to troubleshoot faults in a Light Rail vehicle. His dedication to detail and practice paid off and his efforts were well rewarded by his success, said Martin.

Rail Rodeo coordinator Hector Gutierrez, Rail Transportation Operations Instruction Supervisor, will accompany Phan and Wilkerson to the national competition, where Wilkerson will take on pre-departure testing and Phan will ride the rails.



The local rail competition involved three events: uniform inspection, pre-departure train inspection and track operation.

Contestants raced the clock to troubleshoot, respond to implanted



Duane Martin illustrates Division 11 course.

obstacles and apply perfect operating procedures. Unlike the more familiar bus rodeo, where contestants maneuver slalom courses stocked with cones and barrels, the rail course was confined to

the tracks in the Division 11 yard.

Gutierrez explained: Rail-certified judges test competitors in pre-departure and operation procedures. Each operator is inspected army-style for proper and spotless uniforms, clean hands and shiny shoes. Next comes a safety quiz and you better know your SOPs (standard operating procedures).

It gets trickier in the yard where tracks pose an obstacle course of flag signals, work and slow zones, service delays and track hazards. Operators must make perfect stops, trouble-shoot problems, spot problems ahead, react to speed switches not properly aligned, and queue announcements with controllers.

One test involves spotting a sponge on the tracks and stopping in time, no easy feat even if the train is only going 10 miles an hour.

It doesn't get easier in St. Louis. There operators have only one day to practice on systems that have largely different operations and rules. "It's like driving on the wrong side of the road," said Gutierrez. For example, the competition will use cars operated with foot controls rather than with hand controls used to operate Blue Line and Green Line cars.

The top four operators each won a savings bond, an official travel bag, hat and pin, and a prized dedicated parking space.

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