



RAIL CHAMPS - MTA Rail Rodeo winners Tu Phan, left, and Robert Rodriguez, center, with RTOS Chris Medina, right, coach and instructor. In photos below, Bill Smiley, at right, performs a pre-departure inspection before operating the train. Jesse Valdez, center photo, checks to see how close he got to the target with his 10 mph precision stop. At left, Robert Rodriguez activates the switches during the car uncoupling event. PHOTOS BY BILL HEARD



See complete scores: [Rankings](#)

MTA's Phan, Rodriguez to Compete in Rail Roadeo's Boston Finals

(May 7, 2001) The MTA will field its most experienced team in years, June 6-11, at the Rail Roadeo national finals in Boston. Two Metro Red Line operators – veterans of previous national events – emerged the clear victors at the MTA's Rail Roadeo on Saturday.

Both Tu Phan, who scored 881 out of a possible 1,000 points, and Robert Rodriguez, a very close second with 872 points, have previously represented the agency at the national finals. Ramon Alvarez placed third with a score of 783.

For his first place showing, Phan won \$500; Rodriguez took home \$300 and Alvarez, \$200.

Phan, 37, who joined the MTA in 1986, won the local Rail Roadeo in 2000 and went to the national event in St. Louis.

Teams very professional

"At the national finals, the teams are very meticulous, very professional," says

Phan. "We'll have to work closely with each other to have any chance at all."

Rodriguez, 36, a 12-year veteran, won the local event in 1997 and 1999 and competed in the finals in San Diego and Washington, D.C.

"The national finals are very competitive," says Rodriguez. "The other properties send their best."

Rail TOS Chris Medina, 50, will accompany Phan and Rodriguez to Boston as coach and instructor.

"This is an excellent team with all the qualities a team needs," says Medina. "They work together well. They're technically proficient and extremely focused. Their intent is to win!"

15 competed Saturday

Fifteen Metro Rail operators participated in Saturday's local Rail Rodeo at the Metro Red Line yard. Each competitor was required to conduct a pre-departure inspection to spot hidden defects placed by event judges.

They also performed a coupling/uncoupling routine and piloted a train through a difficult yard course and then on a run to Union Station and back. In both events, operators had to bring the moving trains to a precision stop within inches of a saucer-sized target or lose valuable points.

Although he finished out of the money, Operator Bill Smiley found it worthwhile to enter the Rail Rodeo. A second-time competitor, he believes it is a valuable experience for any operator.

"You become aware of how to operate your train more smoothly and of the importance of the pre-departure inspection," he says. "I never operate a train – even an empty one – without a passenger in it, at least in my mind."

MTA Rail Rodeo Rankings May 5, 2001	
1. Tu Phan	881
2. Robert Rodriguez	872
3. Ramon Alvarez	783
4. Jesus Valdez	753
5. William Smiley	750
6. Monica George Tucker (tied)	729
6. Wilfredo De Los Angeles (tied)	729
7. Julio Chavez	728
8. Victor Valenzuela	712
9. Frank DeMascio	683
10. Marc Marcus	655
11. David Resendez	625
12. Kenny Wilkerson	592
13. Manjit Singh	579
14. Ruben Ramirez	564

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