



## Rail Rodeo Competition Uninterrupted, Despite Cool Weather

- **Phan, Rodriguez, Sardinha Top Operators**
- **Czintos, Burt, Abraham, Rodriguez Top EMSs**
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By ADRIENNE FIGUEROA

(May 6, 2003) Despite cool weather and periodic rainfall, this year's Rail Rodeo competition at the Metro Blue Line, Saturday, continued uninterrupted.

A visit from Mother Nature slightly disrupted initial plans to hold the event outside, but coordinators were resilient and decided on a second course of action.

"We had to go to Plan B and move everything inside the facility," said George Kennedy, maintenance manager for the Metro Blue Line Division 11.

Metro Red Line Operator Tu Phan placed first, scoring 923 points. Metro Red Line Operator Robert Rodriguez was a hair's breadth behind with 915 points, while Metro Blue Line Operator Linda Sardinha placed third with 885 points.

Phan and Rodriguez are no strangers to either the MTA Rail Rodeo or to the international competition sponsored by APTA. In 2002, they won both events – the first time an MTA team had won at the international level.

See metro.net report > [Family Spirits High at Saturday's MTA Rail Rodeo](#)



### Attended three internationals

Phan, who has represented MTA at three internationals, won the MTA competition in 2001 and 2000 and placed second in 2002. Rodriguez, who also has qualified for three internationals, won the MTA competition in 2002, 1998 and 1997.

This year, they'll travel to San Jose for the international competition in June. Sardinha will serve as an alternate.

Phan, who joined the MTA 17 years ago and became a rail operator in 1996, has never worked as a Metro Blue Line operator. Honing in on the skills he acquired from the Metro Red Line, he was able to master the competition once again.

"I like what I do and I am proud of it," Phan said of his accomplishments.

Sardinha, a first year competitor in the Rail Rodeo, also was the only female competitor in the train operator event.

### 'Just trying to get through it'

"I didn't even think about being the only woman," the 15-year MTA veteran said, shrugging her shoulders. "I just thought about trying to get through it."



Rail Transit Transportation Supervisor Arnold Johnson tracks Rail Operator Robert Markham in rail competition.



Blue Line Maint. Specialist Joselito Suarez and Red Line Maintenance Specialist Leader Phiet Pham take the written test.



Train operator Jesus Valdez competes at the console.

A wave of obstacles including door and friction brake problems as well as position stopping were a few of the trials that train operators had to face in their competition.

Operators were given 20 to 25 minutes to complete the pre-departure portion of the test, depending on the train.

During this time, operators needed to determine what was wrong with the train. Part of this process consisted of a thorough check of the fire extension, the brakes, the horn, the headlights and taillights.

"The event establishes a certain curriculum for the operators – a standard," said Will Johnson, rail supervisor and instructor for the Metro Blue and Green Lines. "It shows their proficiency and efficiency in their operation. It's a testing of their skills."

### **The maintenance competition**

Located in a quiet area of the Division 11 maintenance facility, the equipment maintenance specialists completed their tests to the clanking sound of tools and muffled voices.

Weather was not the only reason for moving this portion of the event indoors. Last year's



Metro Blue Line Maintenance Specialist Ronnie Burt dons a safety harness in near-record time.



Maintenance Specialist David Bonzell zips through the 'Defective Component' competition.

competitors encountered diversions that hindered their concentration.

"What we learned last year was that the maintenance contestants were too close to the music which was distracting and that is why I moved them," Kennedy said.

In an environment that was more conducive to test taking, competitors were required to measure mechanical devices, identify various parts and components, and take a written test on their knowledge of policies and procedures. Competitors were given 12 to 30 minutes to complete each test.

Nicholas Alexander, Metro Green Line maintenance specialist and first-time competitor, sat in silence as he measured a train wheel – a part of the event that he found to be the most challenging.

"I haven't had much experience in that area," he said.

Although last year's rail rodeo winners Ronnie Burt and Eric Czintos sat just a few tables away, Alexander said that he felt optimistic about his performance in the competition.

### **'Something to look forward to'**

"It's exciting," he said. "It gives me something to look forward to because when I have as much experience as they have, I will do as good as they have done."

Eric Czintos placed first with 810 points, Metro Blue Line Maintenance Specialist Ronnie Burt came in second with 789 points, Glenn Abraham placed third with 670 points and Jose Rodriguez came in fourth with 642 points.

Unlike the operator event, the top three winners will go to the international competition and the fourth place winner will serve as an alternate.

Burt, a participant in last year's international competition, is looking forward to returning this year.

"It was nice to see that other properties were having the same problems, that we weren't alone in the problems that we were facing," he said. "It was good to see a lot of the people in the same industry."

As a contender in the international competition last year, Burt expects to face testing that is more difficult than that of the rail rodeo.

"The events are a lot more challenging," Burt said. "It was an eye-opener and a learning experience."

### **Friendly competition**



Maintenance Specialist Ronnie Burt works at the 'Parts' competition, while judge Eric Peterson evaluates.

The rail rodeo is an event that signifies friendly competition among fellow operators and mechanics, as well as an opportunity for families of MTA employees to gather and participate in a variety of activities.

"I think it's good that they have a friendly competition among themselves and at the same time, they're working hard to represent the MTA for the international rail rodeo," said Metro Rail General Manager Gerald Francis. "I also enjoy meeting the family members because I always say that the family is the backbone. Family support means a lot."

Duane Martin, division transportation manager for the Metro Blue Line, believes that although the event places an emphasis on having a good time, contenders still have their sights set on placing in the event.

"The spirit of the competition is friendly, but they're serious about it," he said. "They want to win. They want to be the best rail operators and represent their division and have bragging rights for a year."

Burt views the rail rodeo as a chance to inspire himself to work harder.

"It brings up the morale a bit and brings all of the rail divisions together," he said. "It's an event that institutes a little pride in the career as well as the motivation to push yourself."

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