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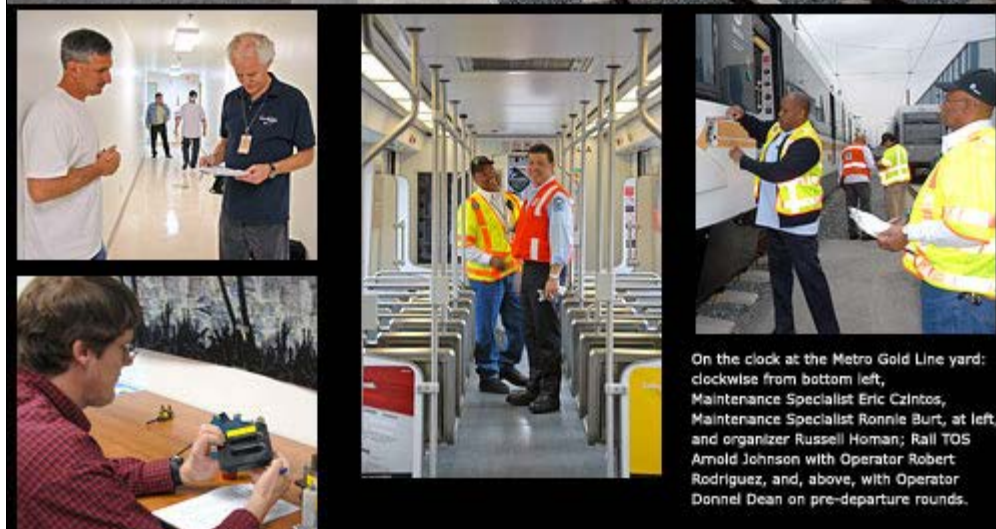
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Photos: Gayle Anderson



On the clock at the Metro Gold Line yard: clockwise from bottom left, Maintenance Specialist Eric Czintos, Maintenance Specialist Ronnie Burt, and organizer Russell Homan; Rail TOS Arnold Johnson with Operator Robert Rodriguez, and, above, with Operator Donnell Dean on pre-departure rounds.

## Motivated Competitors Put the Mettle to the Pedal at 2008 Rail Rodeo

- Veteran competitor Robert Rodriguez and high-scoring first-timer Donnell Dean are top operators.
- 2007 International Championship team -- Maintainers Eric Czintos, Ronnie Burt and Toshi Manaka -- will once again go for International gold in June.
- [Winner's Circle](#): Everybody who made it this far is a winner.

By GAYLE ANDERSON

(April 8, 2008) National championship fever is in the air at the Metro Gold

Line yard, where Saturday 11 top qualifying operators and 12 top qualifying maintenance specialists took their skills to task in a grueling competition of mettle against metal.

The 2008 Metro Rail Rodeo challenge paid off. A team of high-scoring competitors have emerged to represent Metro, May 29, at the APTA International Rail Rodeo in San Francisco.



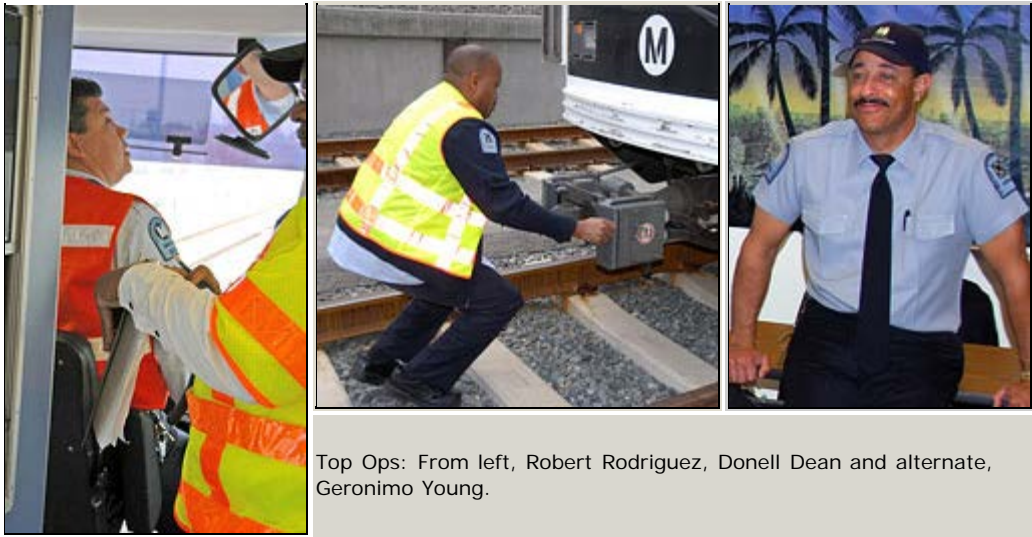
**Championship Form:** Maintenance Specialist Eric Czintos, at left, knocks off the parts identification event. Above, Ronnie Burt and Toshi Manaka solve the logo quiz.

It was the second victory lap for the Maintenance Specialist team, who took first place at the 2007 APTA International Rail Rodeo in Toronto.

Maintenance specialists Eric Czintos, who placed first in last Saturday's event; second place Ronnie Burt, and third place Toshi Manaka will carry Metro's flag in the maintenance competition at the 2008 Internationals.

It was a close call. Rail General Manager Mike Cannell recalls the moment when he heard that last year's International champion Eric Czintos was thinking about sitting this one out. With the cross-country rival WMATA rising in the ratings, the stakes were too high to lose one of the team's top players. "I strongly urged Eric to reconsider," said Cannell.

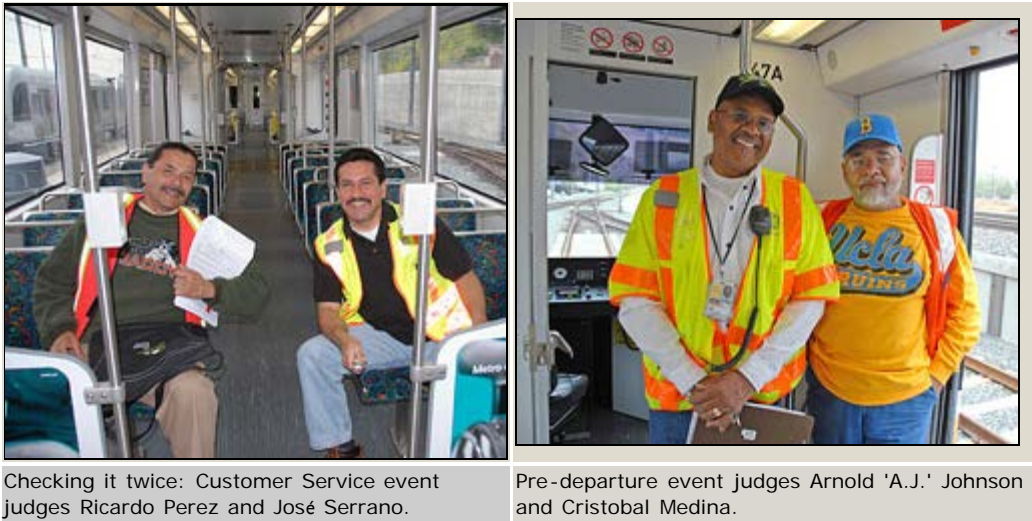
Leading the rail operator team will be Metro Red Line Operator Robert Rodriguez, a past winner and returning champion who topped out Saturday's competition with 557 points. His teammate will be Metro Blue Line Operator Donell Dean, a first-time competitor who scored high marks to take second place in the grueling race. Veteran competitor Rodriguez has been a frequent Metro winner, competing at the Internationals, and scoring wins for Metro in 2000, 2001, 2002, and 2007.



Top Ops: From left, Robert Rodriguez, Donell Dean and alternate, Geronimo Young.

Metro Red Line Maintenance Specialist Glen Abraham, who placed fourth, will be the maintenance team alternate. Metro Blue Line Operator Geronimo Young, another high-scoring first-time competitor who placed third in the operator's event, will be the operator alternate.

The 2008 Rail Rodeo was hosted at the Metro Gold Line yard for the first time. Metro, then called MTA, held the first local event in 1995, sending Red Line Operator Yandell Lister, now retired, to APTA's International finals in New York.

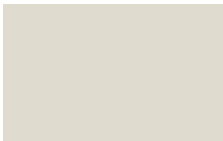


Checking it twice: Customer Service event judges Ricardo Perez and José Serrano.

Pre-departure event judges Arnold 'A.J.' Johnson and Cristobal Medina.

"Then, as now, Rail Transportation Instruction supports the event from start to finish," said Linda Leone, Rail Instruction Manager. The instructors design the events, work as judges and provide back-up where it's needed. This year, Transportation events were designed by Rail TOS Esther Pippins. Equipment Maintenance Instructor Russell Homan designed the Maintenance competition.

Train operators representing every Metro Rail line competed in five events: Uniform Inspection, Safety Quiz, Customer Service, Pre-departure Inspection and the Over-the-Rails Course.







Competitor Alex Bandayan keeps his eyes on the track en route to the Indiana siding in the Over-the-Rails Course.

The 12-mile over-the-rails course, to some the most nerve-racking part of the operation-side events, takes about 20 minutes to complete. It ran from the Sierra Madre Villa Station to the Indiana siding just past the Mission Station and back again.

"It went really well," said Duane Martin, Director of Transportation, "Everybody put forth a great effort. The course had to share the track time with revenue, so it involved the cooperation of Rail Operations Control and the Rail Instruction, and, of course, the patience of the contestants."

Davide Puglisi, Rail Division transportation manager, said the course has many elements meant to test the skills operators would need to excel in their job performance.

"Operators are judged on their procedure – making sure they make their public announcements and routine safety checks," he said. "They're also judged on how they handle emergencies. There are a number of obstacles throughout the course and a variety of things they need to observe and communicate to control."

Spotting suspicious packages and the precision stops proved to be the most challenging parts of the course this year, he said. The precision stop requires particularly quick thinking and smooth moves on the part of the operator. Even though the contestants know where the stop will be, they only get one chance to apply the brakes, with no adjusting as they stop. Meanwhile, an evaluating team of two judges, clipboards in hand, emerges from the sidelines to measure the precision of the operator's stop.



Except for the guy in the orange safety vest with a clipboard and a stop watch tracking an operator's every move, and uncharted emergencies popping up in unexpected places, the Over-the-Rails course is a piece of cake.

Gold Line Operator Alex Bandayan, a train operator for the last four years of his 10-year career at Metro, looked confident in his pressed uniform as he boarded the test train. "I am nervous," he said. "This is my first time as a competitor. It's a different kind of pressure to be tested on things you do automatically every day."

Maintenance specialists also had to cope with new events in their portion of the Rail Rodeo, including identifying electronic semiconductors and using a "growler" to identify defective electrical winding segments on motor armatures.

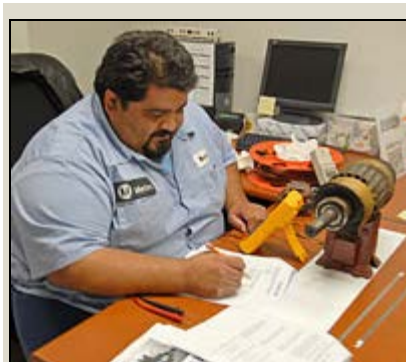
"New events keeps us competitive and gets us in shape for the Internationals, where our team might face a number of unfamiliar challenges," said Russell Homan, senior equipment maintenance instructor, who coordinated the maintenance event. "This year, the HVAC troubleshooting seemed to pose the biggest challenge."



Maintenance Competition Event organizers George Kennedy and Russell Homan keep tabs on the competitors who advance from one event to the next in a tension-filled room.

Maintainers from all four rail divisions were represented within the ranks of the 12 maintenance specialists who competed in the Rail Rodeo.

The 10 events for maintainers consisted of the Written Test, Semiconductors, the Growler, Mystery Box, Wheel Defect, Measuring Devices, Parts Identification, Heating/Ventilation/Air Conditioning (HVAC), Circuit Solver, and a mystery event which turned out to be "Know that Logo," which required participants to identify logos from U.S. and some foreign transit properties.



Metro Blue Line Maintenance Specialist George Moreno tackles the "Growler"



Metro Green Line Maintenance Specialist Charley Houck takes a spin at the "Wheel Defect" station.

Second-place winner Ronnie Burt continued his record of placing high enough to attend the international APTA competition for the sixth year running.

All the competitors are winners, officials noted. Operators and maintenance specialists must maintain a nearly perfect attendance and work record during the past year to be eligible to compete.

"The competitors scored very well," noted Martin. "They were ecstatic over it and definitely motivated."

One obvious motivation is a factor that must not be discounted, said Martin. Beat WMATA.

Go Metro.

2008 Rail Rodeo Winner's Circle	
Operator Competition	Maintenance Specialists Competition
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Robert Rodriguez</li><li>• Donell Dean</li><li>• Geronimo Young</li><li>• Ramon Reilly</li><li>• Sebastian Castaneda</li><li>• Ruben Ramirez</li><li>• Herbert Guillen</li><li>• Alex Bandayan</li><li>• Jorge Solano</li><li>• Rosalva Flores</li><li>• Ramtin Gholizadeh</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Eric Czintos</li><li>• Ronnie Burt</li><li>• Toshi Manaka</li><li>• Glen Abraham</li><li>• Rafaele Mastrangelo, Jr.</li><li>• Jose Padilla</li><li>• Stan Nacon</li><li>• Richard Hernandez</li><li>• Marcos Martinez</li><li>• George Moreno</li><li>• Joselito Suarez</li><li>• Charley Houck</li></ul>