

Australian locomotive and rolling stock add-on packs for Microsoft Train Simulator. Available from Team-Alco, c/- 98 Anderson Road, Sunshine 3020, ph: (03) 9364-9252, <http://team-alco.railpage.org.au/index.html> and selected retail outlets. Prices in text.

Some five years ago, Microsoft quietly dropped onto the world market a wonderful little product called 'Microsoft Train Simulator' (commonly known as MSTS). MSTS included six railway lines (routes) from Europe, America and Japan, along with appropriate locomotives, passenger carriages and goods wagons to allow users to run realistic computer-generated trains in authentic settings. From these humble beginnings, train enthusiasts from all over the world embraced MSTS wholeheartedly, and a massive worldwide groundswell has created a vast number of new 'add-on' routes and rolling stock, to cover almost any railway anywhere in the world. While many saw MSTS as simply another game, just like the many driving or battle games, the true railway enthusiast saw it for its real worth – as a simulator capable of representing a visually and audibly rich '3D World of Trains' – or at least as far as a flat 2D computer screen will allow.

MSTS allows the user to simulate driving the locomotive from the driver's cab, including a nice 'head-out' view along the side of the locomotive towards the front, and also several external views, as if you are following the train in a low-flying helicopter, or standing by the lineside watching the train pass by, or even in some cases

as a passenger looking out from the inside of a carriage. In all these views the 'camera' can be rotated to show the train from literally any angle; i.e. a virtual 3D world.

The MSTS add-on market has two main areas – 'freeware' models, where the builder has created the item (of variable quality - from basic 'boxes' to highly detailed items), and allows it to be freely downloaded, without payment, from websites all over the world; and, commercial or 'payware' models, where a group of developers has built more highly detailed items, which can be purchased for relatively modest amounts of money. The principal 'payware' developers in Australia are the group known as 'Team-Alco', producers of the products reviewed here.

Australia is blessed with a rich railway heritage, and local railway enthusiasts generally follow the railways of the state that they live in, but none more so than followers of the railways of NSW. Team-Alco has been around for quite some time, initially providing a range of freeware products, but about a year or so ago moved into the realm of payware packs. So far, Team-Alco has concentrated mainly on NSW stock, mostly for the steam era, but future productions will address the needs of enthusiasts for the other railway systems within Australia. However, for the NSW steam era enthusiast, Team-Alco has provided a rich reward both visually and audibly when running trains of the NSWGR in Microsoft Train Simulator.

All four currently available packs install easily into MSTS with a few mouse clicks, and pre-built consists

comprising representative typical train formations are provided for most locomotives, so that you can start using them in 'explore' mode straight away. However, no consists are provided for the Modern Freight Pack – it does not have any locomotives. The total space required to install all four packs is 220MB of hard disk space. During installation, you are offered the chance to use the 'default' MSTS lighting effects or use the enhanced 'LightFX' lighting which can be freely downloaded from several websites.

Each locomotive type (C36, C38 and AD60) comes with its own custom sound sets, and a series of custom rolling stock sound sets is also installed under 'Common' folders for bogie passenger car sounds, and both four-wheel and bogie goods stock sounds.

There is just so much in these four packs, that it is very hard to contain any descriptions to just a short page or two (the AMRM Editor will kill me).

Modern Freight Pack Volume 1 – RRP \$25.00 + \$2.50 postage to anywhere in Australia.

This pack was Team-Alco's first venture into the world of payware products for MSTS. The pack addresses the needs of enthusiasts of the modern day railway scene, and covers a large number of specialised wagons for container transport, including articulated flat wagons, 'skeleton' flat wagons, well wagons and refrigerated wagons. There are a total of 30 different wagons, making the cost of each wagon \$0.84, a value that modern day enthusiasts would find hard to resist. The present day nature of railway freight forwarding, mostly using international containers, provides a very colourful experience, and Team-Alco have provided a good range of authentic, colourful 20ft and 40ft shipping containers from all around the world, but also including authentic liveries for many well-known Australian companies. Amongst the wagons included in the pack are: MacRail Leasing PQWY container well-wagons, PacNat five-pack articulated container wagons, PacNat skeleton RQWV container flat wagons, Toll Holdings five-pack RRYX container well wagons, and SCT

refrigerator wagons. Several wagons are provided with the flashing red end-of-train device – the modern day 'tail-light'.

The wagon shape files are very highly detailed, and therefore have a relatively high polygon count, which may affect the performance slightly on lower specification PCs. The detail texturing on the wagons uses near-'photo-realistic' imaging, so presenting a very realistic appearance. This pack would appeal mainly to the modern-day user. It's not so useful for those whose main leaning is towards the steam era.

NSWGR 36 Class Steam Locomotive Pack – RRP \$35.00 + \$2.50 postage.

Having satisfied many of the modern day rail enthusiasts, Team-Alco then turned their attention to the NSW steam era, and released the C36 class pack. Whilst the more glamorous C38 class 4-6-2 express passenger locomotives captured the enthusiasts' attention, the C36 class 4-6-0 passenger locomotives were one of the everyday workhorses. A total of 75 were built from 1925, and these hauled all the principal express and mail trains up until the C38 class were introduced in 1943.

Team-Alco have provided a total of nine different C36 class locomotives, some in the normal black livery, but also include several in green livery, and one in the special Royal blue livery for royal train service. Both round-top and Belpaire boiler versions are included, and a few special locomotives, such as the unique Geisl ejector-fitted 3616, and one of the locos fitted with experimental smoke deflectors. Most locomotives are in pristine livery, but a special touch has been added with several locomotives having very nicely implemented weathering.

The detail incorporated in each model is outstanding, and I don't think any enthusiast could find any major omissions of detail in any of the models. The texturing is extremely well done, with near photo-realistic images. The locomotives come complete with a great custom 'cab view', based on the real C36 class cab interiors, and Team-Alco have produced a magnifi-





cent, authentic, soundset to accompany the locomotives, giving a rich audio experience when driving them. Then, to top it all off, Team-Alco have included a 3D locomotive crew in the cab and a random 'leaky steam' effect from under the front of the locomotive when running – a very nice and authentic touch. All locomotives are provided in user-controlled 'driver' versions, but additionally extra locomotives are provided for computer-driven 'helper' and 'AI' use in Activities, where the 'physics' of the engine files need to be different from the 'driver' versions.

To accompany these rather nice locomotives, Team-Alco has also included a good range of complementary passenger carriages and goods wagons. From the 1920s till the mid-50s the standard NSWGR passenger livery was a number of versions of Tuscan red and russet. From the mid-50s until the later 'Candy' livery of the early 80s, the standard livery became Indian red, with buff lining above and below the window line. Initially vehicles were coupled together with chain couplings, but as goods wagons got heavier and carried greater loads, the couplers were progressively changed to the heavier-duty automatic knuckle couplers.

Before the advent of the C38s, the C36s were star performers on the *Melbourne Express* (amongst other express and mail trains), so Team-Alco has included a nice range of mainline passenger cars, on both four-wheel and six-wheel bogies, representing the types of cars used on the Melbourne expresses. These cars, including sleeping cars, sitting cars and a passenger brake van, are in the Indian red livery representative of their later years. The models are nicely complete with 'see-through' windows, with good 3D model detail and texturing – Team-Alco has fitted interior partitions and seats, but unfortunately they are in a very dark colouring, and

not much detail is visible when running in daylight. However, they are set up so that when running at night, the cars have a dull interior glow, typical of the low wattage, low voltage lamps used in that era – very nice at night-time. The only minor omission I can find is that the MHO brake van does not have 3D-modelled guard's duckets; just a flat printed detail on the bodysides.

A second set of passenger carriages is included; the L-type cars of the CUB sets. Once again these are nicely detailed with 'see-through' windows, but suffer from the same dark interior as the previous cars; but for these cars there is no attempt at night-time interior lighting – a pity, as they would look good at night with the large number of windows. However, this time, the CUB sets are provided in two different liveries, a standard set in Indian red, but also included is a set in the Traffic green (BS225) and manilla (BS362) livery that was used on the *South Coast Daylight Express* during the 1930s till the set was repainted into Tuscan and russet livery in mid-1948. The texturing on both car sets is excellent, and really captures the effect of faded, slightly dirty paint-work.

For me, there are only three minor errors with the CUB sets – the centre 'crownlight' in each window group should be 'frosted', as it had mirrors on the inside, and is very prominent in photos; the roof profile is too high in the centre – when you look at photos of the real cars, the models are distinctively 'peaky' and just lack the right character of the prototype, and the HFL brake vans again lack the 3D-modelled guard's duckets, which in the case of the prototype are considerably more prominent than those on the MHO.

Goods vehicles are catered for by the ubiquitous four-wheel open wagons, S and K trucks, and the RU bulk grain hopper wagons. Additionally, an

MLV bogie louvered van is included and an SHG goods brake van. All these wagons are provided in both hook-coupler and auto-coupler versions (a nice touch). The open wagons have a variety of both empty and visible loads (all wagons are provided in both empty and loaded conditions, mainly to ensure that the tonnage weight of the train is realistic when driving – i.e. a fully loaded train is slower and heavier, and therefore more sluggish to drive than an empty train). Again the 3D modelling is very good and the texturing excellent, particularly the effect of worn rusted metal and natural weathering. The SHG brake van does have 3D modelled guard's duckets, but suffers from the dark interior and lacks 'night lighting' like the CUB sets.

If you want C36 class locomotives, there are no freeware versions, so this pack is the only way you are going to get them. A number of the passenger and goods wagons duplicate existing freeware models that have been available for some time, and many of the passenger and goods stock models have some minor detail discrepancies that the true purist might argue as not being right (myself included)! Users will have to judge the different quality for themselves; to decide if the price of this pack is attractive – however, having said that, at a price of \$0.55 each for the 64 included models, they still represent very good value.

If all this was not enough, to top it all off Team-Alco has included a very nice 'boutique' custom MSTs route, by Chris Nelson, representing the famous Tumulla bank west of Bathurst. It is only a short route, from just east of Perthville, through Georges Plains, up Tumulla bank, through Wimbledon to just west of Gresham. However, it will tax your driving skills to get your trains up the bank without stalling, and down the bank without running away. As 36 class were regular runners over Tumulla, it is the perfect complement to the locomotives and rolling stock.

I rate this pack very highly, but not perfect, mainly because the CUB set cars are one of my favourite types, and they are not quite right!

NSWGR 38 Class Steam Locomotive Pack – RRP \$35.00 + \$2.50 postage

When the thirty strong C38 class 4-6-2 express passenger locomotives entered the world from 1943, they captured the rail enthusiasts' imagination like no other locomotive before them, particularly the five unique streamliners, 3801 to 3805. However, no matter if a 38 was in green or black, in streamlined or non-streamlined form, a 38 just looked absolutely magnificent – the pride of the NSWGR.

Team-Alco set a very high standard with their previous C36 class locomotives pack, but this has just got to

be the icing on the cake – Team-Alco has really captured the essence and magnificence of the 38. There are ten locomotives in the pack, five in streamlined form and five in non-streamlined form – some are in the magnificent lined green livery, and some in the lined black livery, and some in a nicely weathered condition similar to the previous C36 class. Once again, all locomotives are provided in 'driver', 'helper' and 'AI' versions. Detail texturing on these locomotives is superb, particularly the panel and seam detail on the streamlined casings.

The 38 class have been available in freeware form for some years now, originally designed by Joseph Spinella, who also designed these new models, but there is absolutely no comparison between them. These new ones are 'light-years' ahead. The new 38 class come with a redesigned custom cab view, and new custom sound set, but more importantly, that characteristic 38 class whistle. In similar fashion to the C36 class pack, a 3D locomotive crew with steam leaks effects is included. The smoke exhaust effects have been enhanced as though the locomotive is working very hard, and a distinct orange glow is apparent around the chimney top – very nice – especially at night. This effect is best viewed from front-on.

Before the introduction of the modern fluted stainless-steel passenger cars of the early 1960s, the last type of conventional passenger cars introduced to the NSWGR were the RUB sets, mainly for the principal daytime expresses. Team-Alco has surpassed their previous carriages with a very nice set of RUB cars in Indian red livery – in fact several, as they have included full train sets labelled for the *Inter-Capital Daylight*, *Central West Express*, *Riverina Express* and the 'Flyer'. These RUB cars are top-notch, with their large picture windows. Team-Alco has modelled the interior detail far better than previous carriages, and at night-time has nicely captured the brighter interiors with fluorescent lighting; even showing the diesel generator set in the power van that supplied the mains voltage lighting, air-conditioning and kitchen equipment throughout the whole train.

Here's hoping that at some stage, they might be re-released in another future Team-Alco pack in the gorgeous 'Peony Red and Old Gold' livery applied in 1955 to one set.

To round out the rolling stock in this pack, Team-Alco has included a duplicate set of MLV vans (as supplied in the 36 class pack) and additional liveries for the *Melbourne Express* and CUB sets previously supplied in the C36 class pack – the cars previously provided in Indian red livery for the *Melbourne Express* are now supplied

in the alternative livery of Tuscan red and russet. However, I find the colour definition between the Tuscan and russet areas very indistinct in some cases – more like a well faded and weathered livery, rather than straight from the paint shop.

The CUB sets, originally supplied in both the Indian red scheme and green and cream livery, are now also in Tuscan red and russet livery and in the blue and cream livery used by the *Caves Express* over the Blue Mountains during the 1930s. This set was repainted into Tuscan red and russet livery in late 1939.

However, it is quite obvious that the builder simply used a graphics program to try to put a blue wash over the original green textures – I don't think it really gels, as the new cars come out with a distinctly turquoise tint, with obvious greenish colour around the windows and ends – nothing like the nice Oxford blue (BS105) and light buff (BS358) of the prototype cars.

Apart from the change of livery, these cars are basically the same as those supplied in the 36 class pack, and my previous comments also apply to these repaints.

There are fifty-two different locomotives and carriages, making the cost \$0.68 each, a value that steam lovers would find hard to resist. Not quite as good value as the 36 class pack, but, hey – the new 38s and the RUB sets alone make it worthwhile.

This one is nearly perfect, even from the purist's point of view.

NSWGR AD60 Class Garratt Steam Locomotive Pack – RRP \$35.00 + \$2.50 postage.

Rail enthusiasts in NSW were astounded when the first of the 42 AD60 class Beyer-Garratts rolled out onto the rails in 1952. The sheer size and power of these beasts quickly captured their attention. The Garratts rapidly took over much of the long-distance and heavy-haulage goods trains on the more congested sections of the NSW system, particularly the Short North, later spreading to other parts of

the system with the onset of dieselisation. While the passenger trains took the glamour role, the goods trains were the real soul of the NSWGR. In fact, my uncle Charlie, a former NSWGR driver from 1947 to 1985, referred to the passenger trains as 'toy trains', and suburban electric trains as 'horizontal lifts' – it was the hard working, fully loaded goods trains that earned his respect. Charlie just loved working the Garratts and he was instrumental in getting some 'creature comfort' modifications put into their cabs.

After they were introduced, thirty of them were improved to increase haulage with slightly enlarged cylinders, and other modifications, including dual cab controls. This resulted in two sub-classes, the original 'light' version and the modified 'heavy' Garratts. Team-Alco has provided a total of ten locomotives in the pack, four 'light' and six 'heavy' Garratts. Many of the different locos are also available in specially 'reversed' format for use with double-headed consists, and helper and AI versions are also included. The attention to detail in these models is incredible, and the texturing again is up to the usual high standard, particularly the depiction of the many riveted seams on the tanks and bunkers. However it does run into a very high polygon count – almost 28,000 polygons for the three parts combined that make up each Garratt.

In a similar way to the 38 class, Joseph Spinella created the original freeware Garratt as well as these new ones, and once again the new ones are a great advance. The locomotives come with a custom cab view and custom sound set. In a word, awesome.

Just two minor quibbles – all locos in the pack have the loco numbers in two places – on the buffer beam and on the tank/bunker ends. I have one specialist book on the Garratts and many dozens of other photos, and all, except for an odd few, show the number only on the buffer beam (usually in original condition) or only on the

tank/bunker end (usually in later condition). Secondly, the crew in the cab shows a fireman shovelling – the Garratts had mechanical stokers.

To complement the Garratts, a further selection of goods rolling stock is provided. The Garratts worked extensively all over the NSW system, but it was the unique 1020-ton W44 ore concentrate train from Broken Hill to Cockle Creek that stirred the imagination. From Molong to Orange, this train was hauled by not just one, but by two Garratts. Until the last days of steam, when the Newstan coalties were regularly double Garratt hauled, this was one of the greatest spectacles to be seen anywhere in NSW. Earlier this year, Chris Nelson released a freeware route, called *Central West*, and this route includes the section of line from just west of Molong to just east of Orange. Now that Team-Alco has created the special CG ore concentrate wagons (in empty and loaded – tarpaulin covered versions), we NSWGR enthusiasts can re-create the spectacle of working W44 over the Molong-Orange line.

Some other new wagons are also provided, in the form of three special twin-tank wagons for Nepean Milk, Manildra Sugars' glucose traffic and for MMM sodium silicate traffic (nicely stained and weathered). Additionally, a nice set of nine petrol and oil tank wagons in various private owner liveries is included – the Caltex and Shell have been seen before as freeware models but the others are new. I feel the Golden Fleece and Ampol tanks are not right – the Golden Fleece tanks had a rich golden yellow livery with large red lettering similar to the Caltex tanks, and the Ampol tanks were a mid-blue with large red lettering edged in white.

Other new goods vehicles are an FHG goods brake van, a couple of UL covered sand hopper wagons (similar to the RU wheat hoppers) and a very nice GSV four-wheel sheep van in empty and loaded versions (I'm sure I saw my brother somewhere in that wagon.)



To round out the pack, further four-wheel S, K, RU hoppers and MLV vans are included. These have different loads and numbers from those previously supplied in the C36 class pack. As usual, wagons are provided in empty and loaded condition, and in hook-coupled and auto-coupled versions. There is a total of 76 different locomotives and wagons, making the cost \$0.46 each, excellent value.

Once more, I rate this pack highly, if perhaps, not quite a high as the C38 pack.

I now have a dilemma. – over the last few years I have built up a really good set of NSWGR locomotives and rolling stock, all based on the many different freeware items that are available, and I have made up several hundred consists of authentic train formations, based on photos and other prototype information. I will now have to spend a lot of extra time working my way through all the consists and replacing the older freeware models with these new advanced payware models, but when it is all done, it will be worth it.

If these four packs of MSTs rolling stock are anything to go by, Australian rail simulation enthusiasts still have a host of exciting and interesting trains to look forward to from Team-Alco in the future.

As an aside, if anyone is interested, my uncle, Charlie Bere-Streeter, wrote some very interesting reminiscences of driving in the days of steam, just the thing for some hints and tips for driving MSTs. They are available for viewing at <http://www.railpage.org.au/coalstonewcastle/footplate/bbs/>.

Brian Bere-Streeter