

# Automobiles on Railroad Tracks

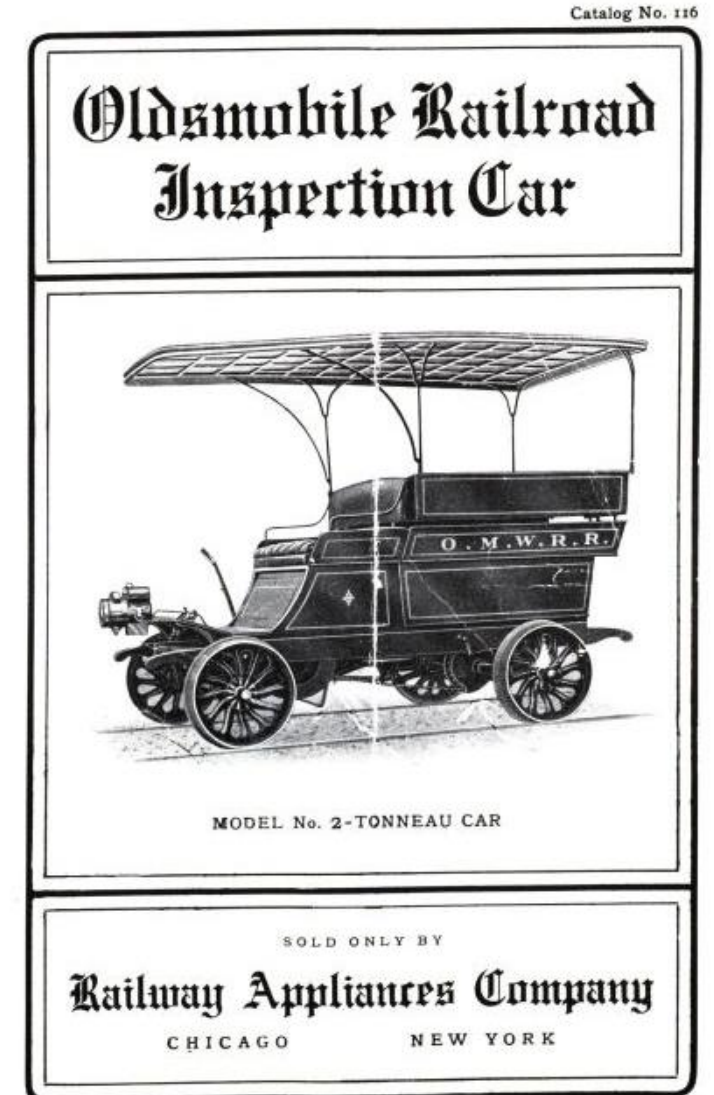
## Potreriillos, Chile Railroad and Others



**By George Gillow**

## Early History: Railroad Vehicle Manufacturers

- Automobiles for use on railroad tracks have been built since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- These rail cars were branded as ***railroad inspection vehicles***. However, "*inspections*" were often really "*tours*" or pleasure drives.
- These cars were built by United States companies such as the **Kalamazoo Railroad Supply Company** and the **Railway Appliances Company**.
- The ad on the right is for a 1904 Oldsmobile railroad Inspection car.
- The picture below is of an early 20<sup>th</sup> century Ford railroad inspection car.



## Early History: Railroad Vehicle Manufacturers



**A replica of an early railroad inspection car in South Africa.**



Kalamazoo No. 65 Inspection Motor Car, equipped  
with Ford V-8 engine.  
65-9 Seating capacity 9 persons.  
65-11 Seating capacity 11 persons.

**KALAMAZOO MANUFACTURING COMPANY**  
KALAMAZOO, MICHIGAN

**A custom rail car advertisement from  
Kalamazoo Manufacturing Company.**



## Early History: Railroad Vehicle Manufacturers



**A Brookville Track Car in Ecuador in 1951**  
**Anne Trask and sons Frank Trask, III, and Alfred Trask are in back.**  
**They later moved to Potrerillos, Chile**



**Brookville Equipment Corporation**  
**Manufacturer of Railroad Equipment.**  
**They built automobile, bus and truck railroad**  
**vehicles.**

<https://www.brookvillecorp.com/about-us/>

## Model Railroad Inspection Cars



Lionel model trains Union Pacific railroad inspection car.



HO gage 1929 Union Pacific inspection car.

**These can be purchased on eBay and other sites.**

# Potreros, Chile Track Cars

Autocarril in Spanish



# The Need for Track Cars

- Potrerillos, Chile is a mining and smelter town located in northern Chile. Until 1970 it was operated by the American Anaconda Mining Company's subsidiary the **Andes Copper Mining Company (ACMC)**.
- The ACMC company had a small seaport called Barquito. It was located about 90 miles to the west of Potrerillos. A railroad connected the two towns. It was the Potrerillos Railroad also called the Ferrocarril de Potrerillos-FCdeP in Spanish.
- The dirt road between Potrerillos and Barquito was in poor shape. There were not enough people traveling between the two towns to justify a standard railroad passenger service.
  - Therefore, the company used automobiles that ran on railroad tracks. They called them "track cars."



**Potrerillos**



**Barquito**



# Northern Chile, Atacama Desert, Andes Mountains



**The Narrow Gauge Railroad in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**



# Potreriillos Track Car Configuration

This Chevrolet was one of the first track cars in the 1920s.

The steering wheel is a railroad type of brake.

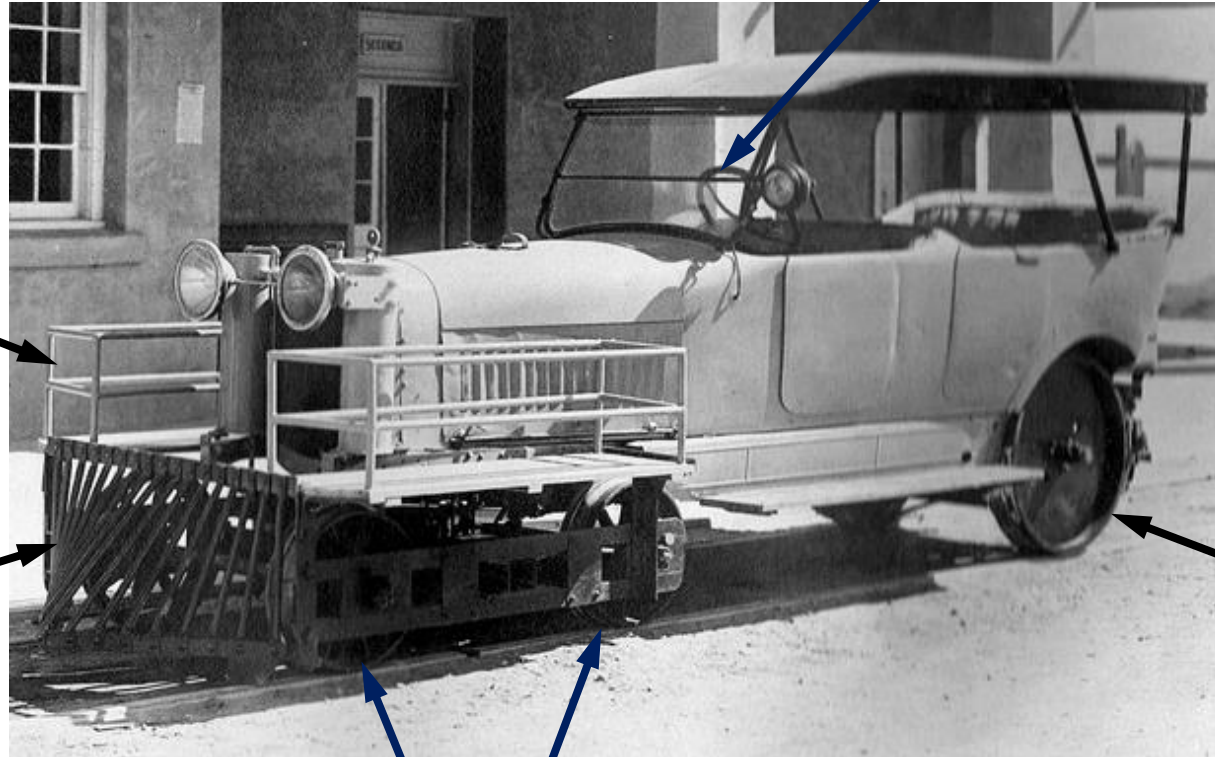
Luggage Carrier

The gearshift, clutch, and accelerator were the same as on a regular car.

Cow Catcher (Like used on railroad locomotives.)

Larger Railroad Wheel

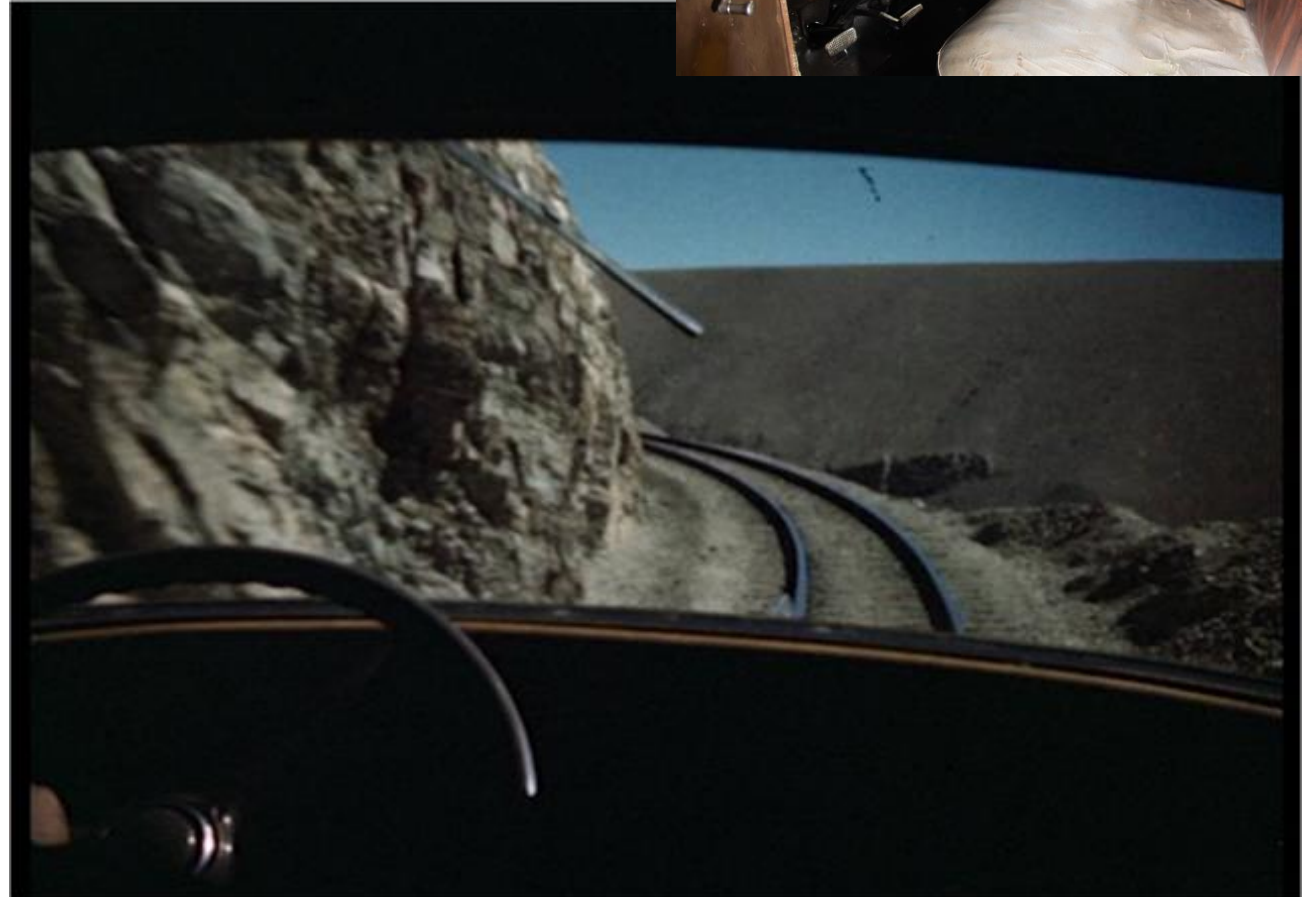
Dual wheel built like a railroad car "truck."



# The steering wheel was a brake.

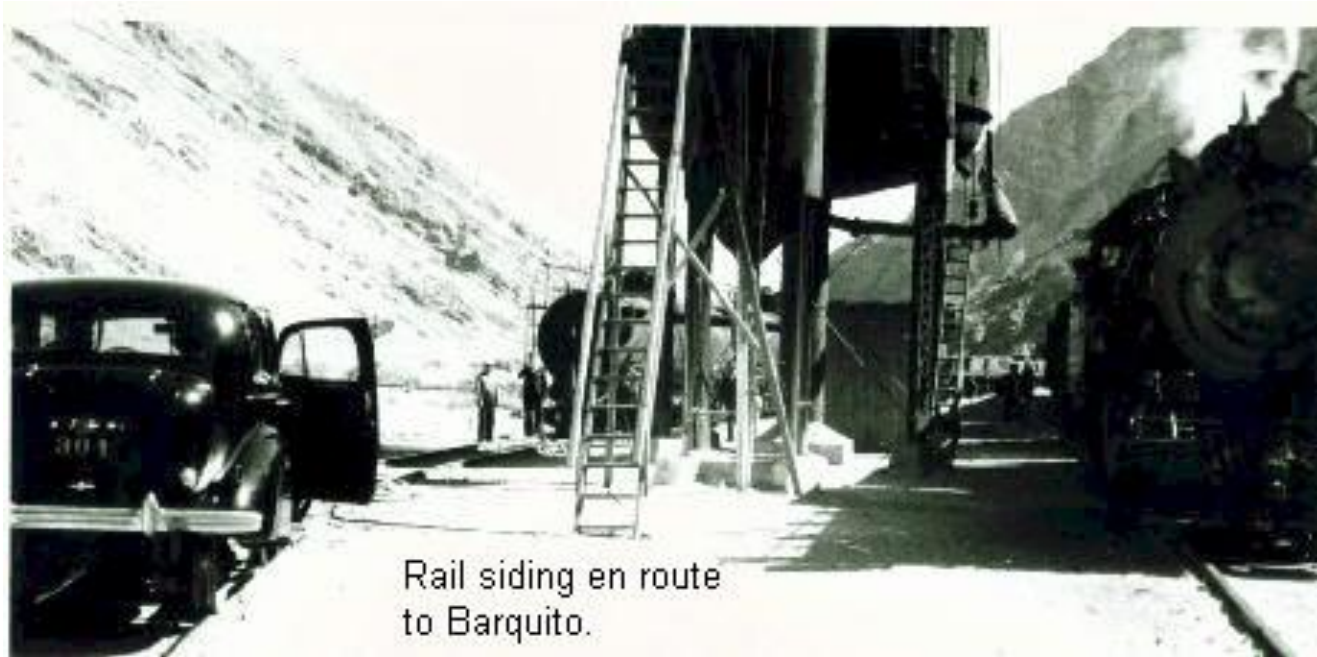
It was fun traveling up the hill on one of the track cars with people who had never ridden in one.

When the car came to a steep left turn, the driver turned the wheel quickly to the right. Passengers would scream, thinking that the driver had lost his mind and was going to drive over the side.





# Sidings



**A couple of sidings had a water tank.**



**Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Switch Lever**

# First Track Cars: 1920s to Mid 1930s



**Early 1920s Chevrolet**



**1923 Chevrolet Sedan**

**\*The Maestranza is where the track cars were stored and repaired.**



# Track Cars: 1937



**1937 Buicks**



**1937 Buick on display in El Salvador, Chile (Near Potrerillos)**



# Track Cars: Late 1930s to 1960s

These cars were the “work horses” of the track cars. They carried most of the passengers for decades. They were also used to deliver the company’s payroll.



I am not sure of the make and model of these cars. See next slide for a possibility.





# Custom Built Track Car?



There is a mystery about the make and model of the track cars shown on the previous slide.

People who rode in these cars and others with knowledge of vintage automobiles have not been able to identify the make and model.



One possibility was that mechanics in Potrerillos modified a **1939 Chevrolet truck**. The track car's grill and headlights are the same as on the 1939 truck. Many agencies in South America would purchase trucks with just the cab and chassis and modify them into buses, vans or other types of vehicles.

Another possibility is that the cars were custom built in the U.S. by a company like the **Railway Appliances Company**.



# Example of trucks converted into track buses.



**Track buses (autobus Carril) in Chile circa 1970.**



# 1948 Chevrolet “Woody” Track Cars



The Woody track cars were used primarily by top level managers. Most cars were burgundy. At least one was white. The pictures on the left are all that I have of the Woody track cars. The picture below is a composite picture.





# 1949 Buick Track Car—General Manager's Car



**The Buick was normally used only by the General Manager of the Potrerillos operation.**



**The Buick has been used as an El Salvador mine rescue car into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.**



# Short YouTube Video of Potrerillos, Chile Track Cars

Click on the YouTube image below to view the video:



Track Cars on Potrerillos Railroad in northern, Chile.

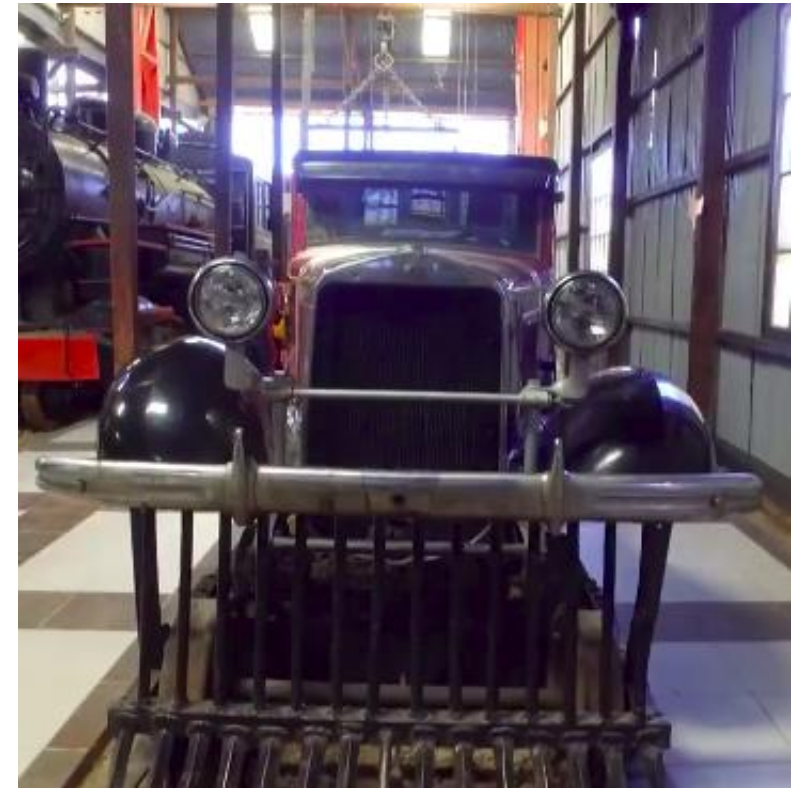
You can also do a YouTube search for “Track Car Potrerillos Railroad George Gillow”  
Also, this is the link: <https://youtu.be/5sLThv7D7jc>

# **Other Railroad Automobiles in South and North America**

**And Elsewhere in the World**



# 1928 Buick Track Car in Bolivia



Bolivian mining magnate, **Simon Patiño** (a.k.a. “The Tin King,” “The Andean Rockefeller” ), purchased this 1928 Buick for his personal use and for American, English and German employees who worked in the tin mining towns. The car was imported from the United States to Machacamarca, Bolivia. It reached a top speed of 50 mph as a track car. The track car was named “Al Capone”, because of the resemblance to the car used by the Chicago gangster. Today the car is in the **Machacamarca Railway Museum in Bolivia**.

# Track Car and Bus in Central Chile



**Track Car at the Braden Copper Company's train station in Rancagua in 1930.\***



**Bus on rails (autobus carril) in 1950 at Sewell.\***

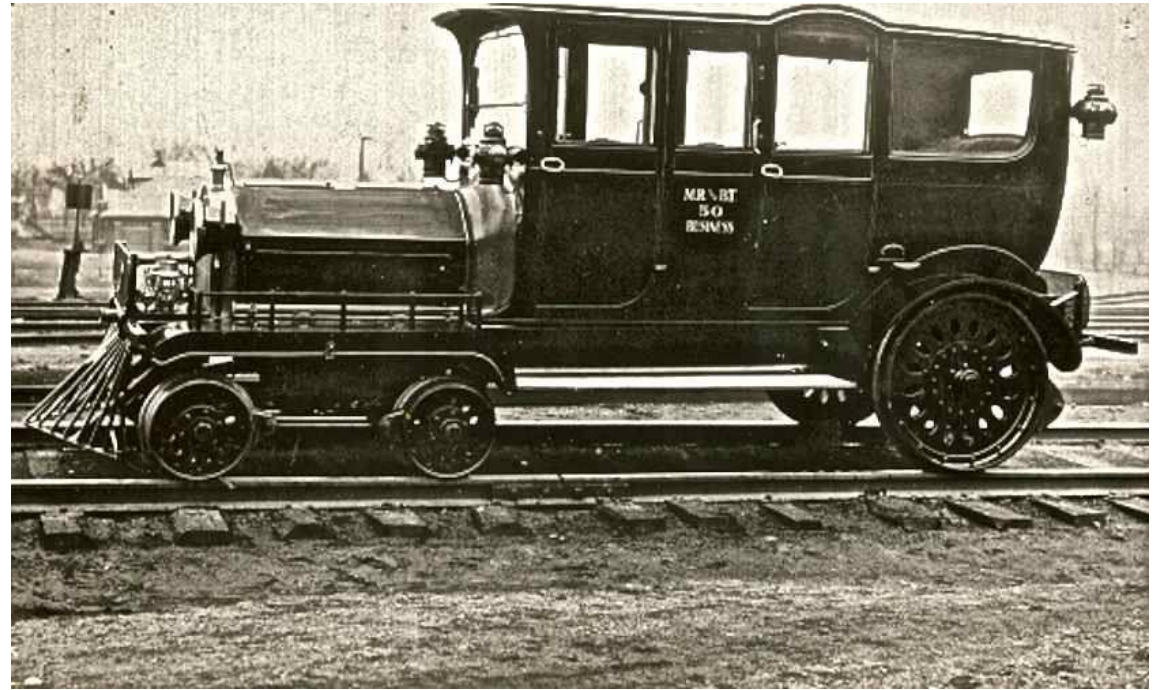
**\*Rancagua and Sewell were a few miles apart in central Chile, south of Santiago.**



# M.R. and B.T. Railroad's Pierce Arrow Car



**President Woodrow Wilson's Pierce Arrow in 1919. Displayed at the Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library. This is similar to the Pierce Arrow "Inspection" car.**



**M.R. & B.T. [Mississippi River & Bonne Terre] Railroad Inspection Car. These were luxury vehicles and most likely used for tours and travel by VIPs.**



# C & G Railroad Buick Track Car



**This 1948 Buick track car was modified by the Columbus and Greenville Railway Company of Columbus Mississippi. It was assigned to C&G President Robert C. Stovall.**

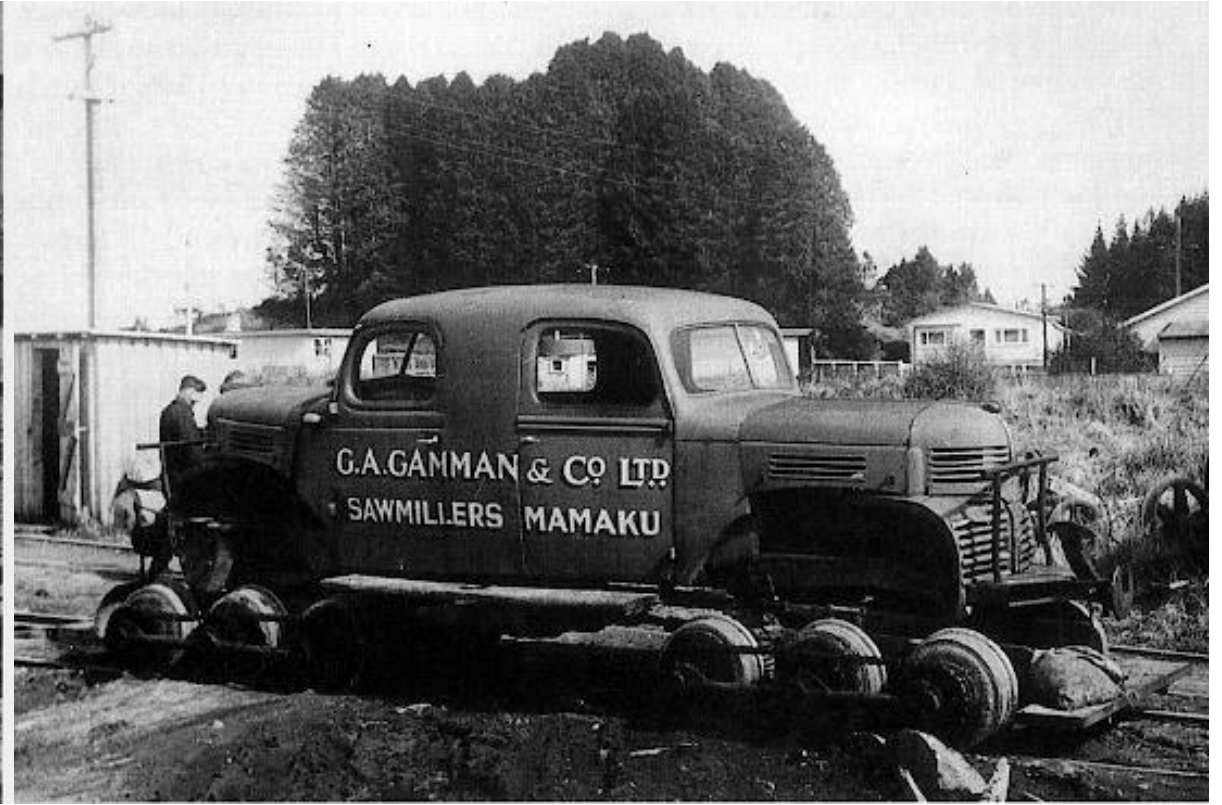
**This Buick is similar to the 1949 Buick track car in Potrerillos.**



# Unusual Track Cars



**Jeep in World War II**  
Railroad wheels on these jeeps could easily be changed into regular rubber road wheels.



**Two Way Railcar in New Zealand**

# A Chilean Track Bus

There is a track bus\* (Gondola Carril) operating in Chile, South America. A trip can be seen on YouTube as follows: <https://youtu.be/biRslc2Ff9c>

Here is a longer video: <https://youtu.be/num2FdlbfMY>

You can also find the videos by searching YouTube for “GONDOLA CARRIL t-1024”



A Lego model of the Gondola Carril\*.



The Gondola Carril was still operating by 2020 but has been temporarily stopped due to Covid. Their website is:

<https://www.efe.cl/nuestros-servicios/turisticos/gondola-carril>

**\*A modified American Yellow Coach Company Z-29 Bus.**



# Turning a Track Car



**Ukrainian track car turntable.**

Track cars/buses were/are turned around by a railroad turntable. These are smaller than the turntables used to turn large locomotives.

These cars are turned by one or more individuals pushing.



**Turntable at a Roundhouse**



**Edge of turntable of Potrerillos Railroad at Barquito.**



**Gondola Carril turntable**



# Road-Rail Vehicles (a.k.a. Hy-Rail)

These vehicles have been used for decades and are in use today. The vehicles have normal road rubber tires when on the tracks. The vehicles are equipped with flanged railroad wheels for running on rails. The steering wheel is locked when the vehicle is on the tracks. This prevents derailling.



**A major use of road-rail trucks is for railroad inspection, repair and maintenance.**

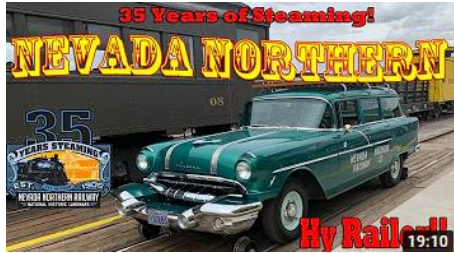


**1956 Hy-Rail Pontiac (Road-Rail) Car**  
**There is a replica of this car at the Northern Nevada Railroad Museum at Ely Nevada. See next slide.**



## Nevada Northern Railway Museum Hy-Rail Pontiac Replica

The museum has a replica of the Pontiac that can be ridden and even driven by visitors: <https://nnry.com/hy-rail-car-experience-hands-on-history/>



Click on the picture above or on this link <https://youtu.be/76tdhBte0TQ> for a ride. The ride starts at time 5.45 minutes.



The first 4.5 minutes of this video shows a lot of views of the Pontiac. Click on the picture or: <https://youtu.be/Ja97nIDOEV4>





## Potreriillos, Chile

Potreriillos is where I was born and lived in the 1950s as a kid.  
The town is at an altitude of 10,000 feet in the Andes Mountains.  
This is part of the Atacama desert. It is the driest desert in the world.

