

## Meet Henk Plaggemars

*By Tim Court and Henk Plaggemars*



*I first met Henk, as so many of our readers have, at a train show. Henk traveled the globe as Auran's ambassador, presenting Trainz and promoting the concept of Virtual Railroading. In the process he made many friends and left a trail of good will. Recently Henk left Auran to follow other pursuits only to resurface at P.I. Engineering, to help that company bring its new TrainMaster Train Simulator to fruition. We're pleased to present this interview with Henk, conducted by PIE's Tim Court by way of introducing Henk to his new teammates. – Ed.*

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**Henk likes his coffee!** In fact on the Auran forums his nickname is Café.

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**TC: Welcome to PI Engineering Henk.**

**HP:** Why thanks, I am looking forward to doing my bit to make *TMTS* a successful product.

**TC: Before we ask you about your work now, tell us about yourself.**

**HP:** I thought you said this would only take a few minutes! OK, here's the quick version. I am a SLAG (Short, Little Aussie Guy) who is in his early forties. I am married to the wonderful (and patient) Heather and I have two pre-teen boys, Henk and Hamish. We currently live in Brisbane, Australia.

My background is science. I worked in scientific or medically related companies at the sales and management levels until a few years ago.

That's when I had my mid-life crisis.

Most blokes get a divorce and buy a red sports car. Me? I got seriously into train simulation and ended up working with Auran on their *Trainz* project! Now look at me, coming over to North America to work with P.I. I must be some sort of train sim junkie!

**TC: Quite a change! What did you do at Auran?**

**HP:** Well initially I helped them set up their Trainz on the Road program, which involved a lot of travelling around the planet. I met a lot of great people as I travelled around, both in the simulation, publishing and advertising industry as well as a lot of the folks who just love to play and create trains.

Then after a year of doing that I got talked into moving in-house to work as a designer. I also kept up the business side of the equation and worked with quite a few content groups as well. The other thing I set up at Auran were the regional websites. They weren't quite finished by the time I left, but they were well on their way.

**TC: OK, so why did you leave Auran?**

**HP:** Gee, is this a Michael Parkinson/Oprah Winfrey show?

Well there were a lot of reasons I resigned, but one of the big ones for me was that Greg Lane, the founder of Auran and the originator of the *Trainz* concept, left the company.

**TC: Did you move straight to P.I. Engineering?**

**HP:** No, that's something that came up after I had announced my intention to leave. I never thought I'd be working on train simulators at the professional level again unless Greg set up another company or something. The P.I. thing came out of the blue for me! If you would have told me I'd be moving to North America in 2006 a few months back I would have laughed and said "right, pull the other one! It plays the Star Spangled Banner".

**TC: What got you involved with Train Simulation?**

**HP:** I have always loved trains. My father had a Hornby-Triang collection in an old suitcase that he used to pull out on occasion and let us play with. The smell of ozone still makes me think of a very dark green Class 08 shunter!

From there I started getting into modelling and this went on for a few years until I ran out of money, discovered girls, computers and had to study hard. It all went by the wayside for quite a few years (the train modelling stuff that is). Oh I would buy the odd MR and indulge in some fantasies of building a Gorre and Daphetid style layout in my non-existent basement, but that was about it.

Then we had our first child, a boy! From the moment of his birth I had it all planned...father and son working together to bend flexitrack into clothoidal spiral transition curves, ballasting track, making trees from old sponges...my model railroading fantasies were re-kindled! Unfortunately my mind was writing cheques my body couldn't cash so the best I could do was to create an 8'x4' HO layout.

Then *MSTS* arrived and miles of track were once again a real possibility. For a while it was great! I had been into flight simulators for a loooooong time and it seemed only natural to have a train sim after all! However, eventually I grew bored of the

included routes and started fiddling with the route editor, without a lot of success. It was around this time that I found out about *Trainz* and when it arrived before Xmas in 2001, I was in route building heaven. Not long after that Auran announced a program to show *Trainz* at your local model railroad show. I signed up, did a show on my own and before I knew it I was doing the same across Australia and the rest of the planet.

**TC: What are you doing at the moment at P.I Engineering?**

**HP:** Well, at the moment my main task is helping along the website and the rest of the marketing for *TMTS* with the help and guidance of Dan Slider, our Director of Marketing. I have also started working with our publishing/distribution partners as well as nailing down the product line; contents, look, feel, that sort of thing. It's only going to get busier from here as the product gets closer to market and when I move to North America in a little while it will be going up a notch or two again.

**TC: You are moving your whole family here (into the cold!!!!)?**

**HP:** That's the plan! Yes, well I know I'll be leaving a sub-tropical paradise, but if Williamston, MI is where the train simming action is, well I'll just have to get used to shovelling snow!

**TC: That's quite a move.**

**HP:** Now there's an understatement! But my family is behind me and that's what counts. I have a passion for train simulation and working on *TMTS* gives me the opportunity to express that passion. The people here are great to work with, they all have a passion for trains and want to make *TMTS* the best that it can be. I'm with them on that one!

**TC: OK, well we look forward to seeing you on this side of the pond.**

**HP:** No worries mate, look out America! Was that one shrimp or two for you Tim?

*Tim*

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