

# ALL ABOARD THE NOVICE TRAIN

*By Barry Johnson ©*

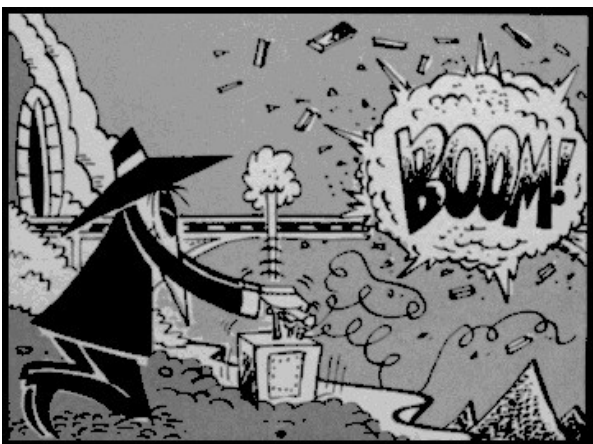
## The Journey Begins

Like many of us, you went along to your first camellia show or, as your garden evolved your passion-fuse was lit by the camellia. Finally, you were either invited, cajoled, persuasively bludgeoned or happenstanced upon the camellia society. Upon arrival and after being ceremonially introduced to all and sundry, you noticed the meeting venue had show benches festooned with camellia blooms adorning domestic spray caps. Again your 'Wow' receptors kick in and you decided there's about 100 blooms there you've got to have. First call is the monthly trading table which is the member's bargain basement for sought after cultivars. What about those huge 'boofy' reticulatas that you've never seen before but are now salivating all over?



As most of these are not commercially available, you soon learn that by being a member of a camellia society you can quite often get your hands on many of them or, can collect scions (cuttings for cleft grafting) from members which, can be grafted onto suitable rootstock, especially when grafting days are conducted. Alternatively, you may just be observing the show benches and saying to yourself (hopefully); I grow better ones than that at home.

## Tickets Please!



*The Opposition*

You're either talking into showing or, being of a competitive nature, you decide at the next meeting I'm going to teach these people a thing or two or. Many new members just slip in quietly and sneak a couple of blooms onto the bench while no-one is looking and hope they don't embarrass themselves. Either way you've just climbed aboard the one-way express train of the camellia exhibitor, next stop Jessep Medal Station (if you're lucky). Now this train ride doesn't always run smoothly. There's always the chance of being derailed along the way, particularly when there are other trains on the same line vying for the same

destination. Before you plunge headlong toward the Jessep Holy Grail of camellia showing consider some precursory short excursions along the way.

Firstly, staging your blooms at the monthly meetings and gaining a good grounding on the blooms descriptive and size classifications is essential.

### **Check Your Bags**

Before checking in your bags, make sure your knickers are clean and you've pack you luggage properly. Metaphorically speaking, this means, bringing along cleanly grown and worthy blooms for appraisal and get them to the destination without being damaged in transit. There have been occasions in the past (no names, no pack drill), when even experienced members failed in this regard. I can recall a time when one of our members thought it would be a good idea to strap all his polystyrene boxes of show blooms to the roof rack of his car. I can also distinctly remember driving over a trail of broken polystyrene intermingled with flat flowers as I followed him to the State Camellia Festival. 'Lesson in the Learning' - Carrying them in polystyrene boxes is a great idea but, put them inside the caboose before leaving the station.

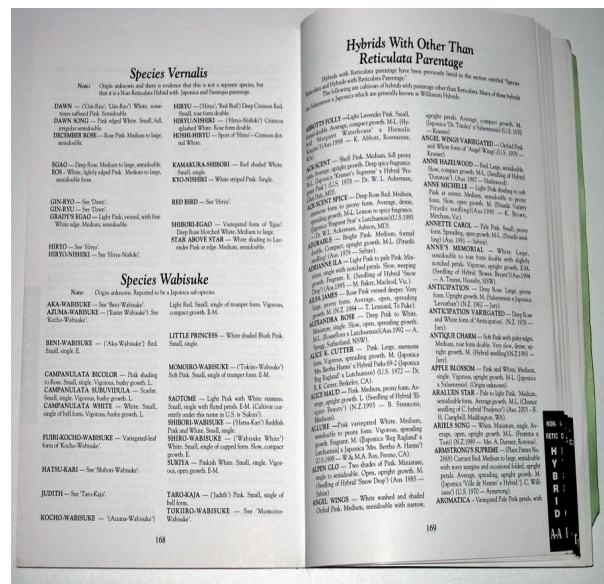
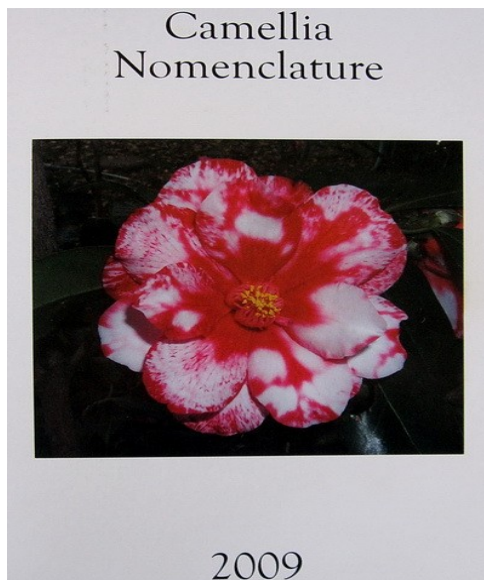
### **Conductor!**

Once you get to the monthly meeting there are always supportive members who will assist you in benching them in the correct classes. There is nothing more disappointing than going to the trouble of taking them on the train ride only to find them crash and burn because you didn't put them on the right track and end up in the N.A.S (Not According to Schedule) siding. Another tip is not to arrive at the station too late, there is nothing worse than running late for a train so, give yourself plenty of time to check in your luggage and find your seat. Don't over commit yourself, better to put up a comfortable quality than rushed rubbish.



### **The Good Book & Good Oil**

Well, maybe the second Good Book is the Camellia Nomenclature Book. Everybody knows you should always take a good book on a long journey and likewise every camellia exhibitor should have a copy of the Nomenclature book as, this will tell you whether your blooms should be in first, economy or saloon class. Wouldn't you like to know if your bloom is a japonica or a hybrid before you stow it? Another worthwhile source of information is the Camellias Australia website ([www.camellia.org.au](http://www.camellia.org.au)) which also provides a wealth of information on the classification classes of blooms e.g. definitions of Single; Semi-double; informal double etc.



## Think Like a Judge

Having also been a rose exhibitor and knowing only too well what it's like to start picking blooms the day before and then sitting up all night preparing them, camellia showing should be a breeze. What with just bringing them along, sitting them on an aerosol cap, slipping a couple of leaves under them, what could be easier? Well may I ask, and as a judge, I'm constantly surprised by the lack of presentation skills of many competitors. Bad enough that some exhibitors bench flowers that look like they have been scraped up of the aforesaid road but, others seem to lack the 'skills', time or care to present their blooms in the best possible light. This means, actually having the bloom facing the judge would be a good start. Slipping a couple of clean, evenly arranged leaves from the same cultivar under the flower comes a close second, especially the right way up. Notice I said a couple. Although my lips are still sealed, I remember one novice competitor who benched a huge, slightly past it and floppy bloom of R. John Hunt. In order to raise its stocks (or so he thought), he stuck half a dozen large leaves under the petals masquerading as hydraulic jacks. The judges applauded his engineering skills but not his exhibiting ones. A light, tasteful misting of water over the bloom can enhance its sheen and colour, (presuming it's clean and fresh enough to have some) but, a thorough drowning looks like just that. Spraying quick-acting herbicide onto other competitor's blooms is definitely frowned upon. I would also suggest any wildlife such as ants, aphids etc. be carefully removed before staging as, no extra points can be garnered from the judges for their freshness. A bit like who ate the pickled onions, many competitors have been known to blame the exhibit next door.



*Drowning, not waving*

## What Train

As with trains, we like to know which one we're on before getting aboard so, naming of the staged blooms is essential. If you are not sure, write 'name unknown' and with any sort of luck some passing judge or camelliaphile will whip a name on it for you for future reference.



## **Look Here Sonny Jim!**

Learn from your mistakes. By way of a rosy analogy, I once encountered a lady who, for about 5 years, staged gorgeous blooms of Cecile Brunner roses with sprigs of maidenhair fern and every year I N.A.S-ed (Not According to Schedule) her leaving notes explaining why. On the fifth year I finally caught up to her and informed her that she would probably always win the section if she included foliage from the same plant. She informed me in no uncertain manner that's the way she likes to stage her Cecile Brunners and that's that. And the winner is? She stopped exhibiting after 6 years and I'm still judging them.



## **You've Arrived**

The intended destination can be one thing but there is much joy to be had in the journey. Staging my blooms at my first camellia show filled me with a great sense of pride in that, I was a contributor to something special for the general public to admire. I will always remember my initial first prize, blue ribbon and Jessep Medal which all take equal status as highlights of my trip thus far. My basic showing philosophy is 'enjoy yourself'. If you're starting to get a bit frazzled, over-committed and stressed pull back a bit and to enjoy the view from the camellia window.

