Traveling in Luxury

Speed is not the only attractive feature of the modern streamliner. Inside the trains, the passenger is greeted with the newest and best in travel luxury. Today's traveler, riding in air-conditioned comfort in seats made soft with foam-rubber cushioning, should give a thought to great-grandfather, who rode in a renovated stagecoach; or to grandfather, sitting on a hard, narrow wooden bench in a car hot and dusty in summer, cold and drafty in winter; or even to father, enjoying the comparative luxury of dusty red or green plush seats. The unrelieved mahogany and plush interiors of the Pullman cars of yesterday have given place to the soft-colored and well-lighted sleeping cars of today.

The first innovation in railroad coaches, after the miscellaneous early use of converted stagecoaches or boxcars had proved unsatisfactory, was on the Germantown & Norristown Railroad in Pennsylvania. In 1837 two cars of "startlingly different" design were built and named the *Victoria* and the *President*. With doors at each end, instead of in the middle, these cars had rows of benches lengthwise down each side, and narrow aisles between. At each end a tiny 5-foot-square

room was set off, one for "such feminine passengers as might wish to make changes in their apparel under conditions of privacy"; the other, "an out-and-out barroom where thirsty males, who were greatly in a majority in that day of comparative masculinity, could wet their whistles as the cars rolled along." From such simple beginnings have come the elaborate lounges of today's streamliners, with hot and cold running water, plenty of soap and soft towels, and even with shower baths.

Other innovations in railroad coaches followed. Double seats replaced the long sidewise benches — seats at first "so narrow that two adults could only with great politeness sit side by side." Measuring about 35 to 40 feet in length, 8 feet in width, and a little over 6 feet high, the cars were lighted in the daytime by small windows, "which of course were nailed shut," and by candles or lard-oil lamps during the night. In winter, heat was furnished by small stoves, a definite fire hazard in case of the frequent and disastrous wrecks which soon became more prevalent than steamboat explosions.

Fitted out with such "improved" coaches, the train of the 1840's was ready for its journey. The start of the trip, heralded by a blast from the engineer's steam whistle, was likely to tumble all the passengers out of their seats, and sure to topple every stovepipe hat on the train, unless the occupants were braced for the "take off." Sudden

stops could be just as upsetting, as each car in turn rammed into the next in line. Linked together with about three feet of chain, the cars moved forward with many a jolt and jar when the engineer "opened up fast and took up the slack in the coupling chains with gusto and a bang." The link-and-pin coupling which replaced the chains produced a comparative degree of comfort for the passengers. The modern articulated streamliner, which starts and stops as a unit, would have been a revelation to the travelers of the 1850's.

These early passenger coaches, which seated from fifty to sixty people, cost about $2,000 to build; a modern streamlined coach on the *Midwest Hiawatha* was built at a cost of $75,000. Night travel in these $2,000 coaches with their wooden seats was an ordeal. "The male traveler hung his coat on one of the wall hooks, put his feet up on the seat in front, if there was room, and lay back and went to sleep — if he could." Women, more decorous, could only sit bolt upright and try to doze.

George Pullman added a word to the English language when, in the 1860's, he developed the first practical sleeping car. Others had toyed with the idea before that, however. In 1858 Webster Wagner had built a car with a single tier of berths at one end. Pullman's original contribution was the "upper berth" which could be closed during the daytime. His first "uppers" were attached to

iron bars, and were pulled up to the roof by ropes. In 1864 he patented his next improvement — a hinged upper berth and hinged seat cushions which could be pulled down to form a bed. The first car built on this principle was completed in 1865 at a cost of about $20,000, and named, appropriately, the *Pioneer*. Its first journey was not a happy one: it was in the *Pioneer* that the body of Abraham Lincoln was carried home to Springfield for burial.

Modern Pullmans on the streamliners are still built on the same principle developed in 1864, but the ornate Victorian decoration of the mid-nineteenth century has given way to the simple, streamlined decor of the mid-twentieth.

George Pullman's sleeping cars were a success; but he did not stop there. In 1867 he developed a "Hotel Car" which combined sleeping quarters with the cooking and serving of meals. He built a complete train in 1870 — the *Pullman Hotel Express* — which made the first transcontinental railroad journey in America (from Boston to San Francisco in seven days) just one year after the Union Pacific and the Central Pacific had been united by a golden spike at Promontory Point, Utah.

The *Express* was the marvel of the age, and crowds greeted it at every stop, just as they did the first Diesel streamliners of today. Eight "carriages" made up the train, the first being a bag-

gage car which contained, among other things, five "ice closets" and a refrigerator. Next was a "handsome" smoking car, divided into four rooms. Card tables were available and even a "hair-dressing and shaving saloon" — forerunner of the modern barber shops on today's streamliners. Two "hotel cars," two "Palace Sleeping and Drawing-Room Cars," and two "commissary and dining cars" completed the luxury train of the 1870's, which crossed Iowa on the line of the Chicago & North Western Railroad.

Compare the *Pullman Hotel Express* with a modern streamliner — the *City of Los Angeles,* for instance. The fifteen cars are spacious, colorful, and comfortable. An observation car at the rear provides lounge chairs and davenports, card and writing tables, and dozens of current magazines. Broad windows are fitted with Venetian blinds and drapes, while air conditioning does away with the old-time problem of opening and closing windows, and the resulting drafts and clouds of cinder-laden smoke. The *Los Angeles* has two club cars — one, "The Little Nugget," done in the style of the gay nineties; the other, "The Hollywood Car," decorated with modern plastics and synthetics. Every type of sleeping arrangement, for every type of purse, is provided: upper and lower berths, compartments, drawing rooms, roomettes, single and double bedrooms. Dressing rooms with shower baths are added lux-

uries. In two dining cars the passengers are served meals on canary-yellow tablecloths, a modern note, and the "first call for dinner" is given by chimes sounding throughout the train. As on all modern streamliners, radios provide music and entertainment.

Similar equipment is found on every Diesel passenger train. The Vista Dome, inaugurated by the Burlington and now used on many trains, has added a new feature. Travelers, as they enjoy the expanded view of prairie and mountain from the top of the train, would probably be surprised to know that the idea of the Vista Dome was first conceived by a Canadian, T. J. McBride, in the 1890's, but never built. The General Motors "Train of Tomorrow," first exhibited in Iowa in May, 1948, features an "Astra Dome" on each car, "through which passengers can study sky and clouds in the daytime and the moon and stars at night."

Other roads fit the decor of their trains to the localities through which they pass. On the Rock Island's *Golden State* the "Fiesta Car" lays claim to being "the most beautiful piece of railroad equipment ever built." Its design was "inspired by the brilliant coloring found in the serapes, patios and pottery of Old Mexico. The entire ceiling is formed by a striped red and yellow canopy, with adobe walls adorned with full-color murals. The bar at one end of the car is a duplication of a

quaint Mexican fountain done in adobe also. The chairs and tables in the coffee shop section are done in hand carved oak, with leather upholstery held in place by raw hide lacing, a design distinctive of the Southwest."

Speed and luxury have come to railroad travelers with the streamliners, and prosperity has come to the railroad operators. Year by year, since 1935, the roads operating in Iowa have shown a steady increase in passenger traffic on the Diesels, and, conversely, a steady decrease on the steam trains.

Yet the speed of the Diesels caused apprehension at first. What would happen to an automobile if hit by a streamliner, asked the Des Moines *Register* editorially, a few days after the *Zephyr's* nonstop run in 1934. For that matter, continued the writer, what would happen to a lightweight train, traveling at 90 miles an hour, if it hit that same car? Fortunately, events have not borne out these fears. Improved signaling, allowing for the higher speeds of the streamliners, has helped prevent accidents. Also there is the distinctive whistle of the Diesels, piercingly warning of the train's approach. Persons traveling on the highways by car at night can see, sometimes for miles, the beam from the huge oscillating headlights, first introduced in 1936 by the North Western. Thus, not only speed and luxury have come with the streamliners, but safety as well.

Residents of eastern Iowa can now go to Chicago on shopping or business trips and return on the same day. Even from Council Bluffs a journey to Chicago, a few hours shopping or business, and a return home can be accomplished between early morning and midnight of the same day. The streamliner has accelerated the linking — and the shrinking — of the continent, which began when Peter Cooper's *Tom Thumb* huffed and puffed thirteen miles in one hour and fifteen minutes.