

**The Past World of the Streamlined Trains For Your Eyes
Only**





The Past World of the Streamlined Trains

From Robert C. Valentine

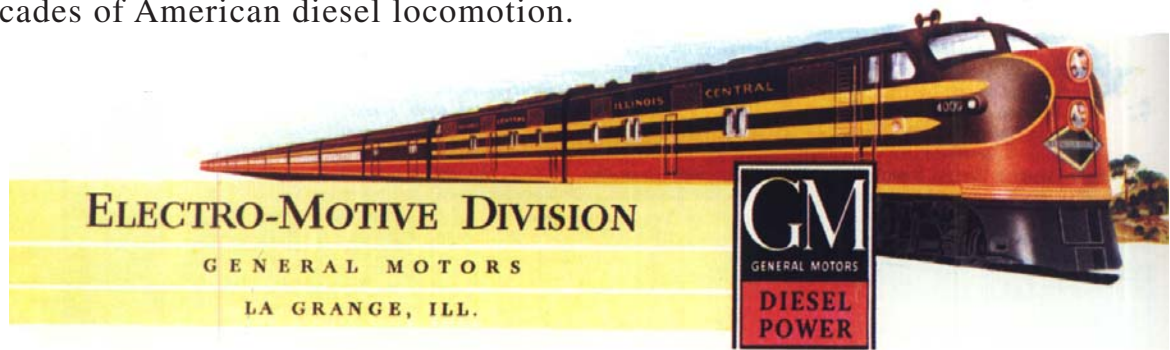
In 1949, there were more than 150 American streamliners with greatly improved train service compared to 30 years earlier in at least the following big cities, Atlanta, Boston, Buffalo, Denver, Des Moines, Detroit, Jacksonville, Omaha, Orlando, Miami, St. Louis, New Orleans, Minneapolis-St Paul, San Francisco, Kansas City, San Antonio, Seattle, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington.

The model in the picture above demonstrates a concept of authentic beauty with its distinctive glass-paneling, designed by the famed industrial American designer Brooks Stevens for The Milwaukee Road Railroad. He is credited for designs of 585 companies including Harley-Davidsons, the Jeep Cherokee and the Oscar-Meyer

Weinermobile. Some passenger trains like the streamliners *City of Los Angeles*, *Broadway Limited* or *Super Chief* offered a shower and a barber shop besides the nice clean comfortable ride and exquisite dining. All streamlined cars had air-conditioned amenities, whether they were for the Milwaukee, Santa Fe or other roads, and were spacious. Super fast trains like the *Hiawathas*, the *400's* and *Zephyrs* sped passengers along Chicago-Twin Cities, a route roughly 400 miles and much traveled. Some streamliners were short, like the sound-proof 3-car *Flying Yankee*, a product of FDR's New Deal aid. Others were really long with 14 or 20 fully loaded cars like *The Chief*. Some like the *Panama Limited* offered telephone linking sleepers to the dining and lounge areas. Some like the *Rocky Mountain Rocket* featured double bedrooms, snazzy cocktail lounges and a built-in radio.

The world of Streamlined trains also had stewardess-nurses and vista-domes, but that came a few years after 1950. Dome cars were a hit and can still be seen on Amtrak. A picture of tires for cars, trucks and buses comes to mind when B.F. Goodrich Tire Company is named. However, in those days they had a huge mechanical rubber goods division that provided a strong chord-reinforced rubber diaphragm, those vestibule things or "girdles" that connected every streamlined passenger RR car.

What comes to mind when you think of GM? General Motors? Automobile engines? General Motor passenger buses? But, the vast majority of energy that ran the streamliners were powered by diesel engines which were mass-produced at La Grange, Illinois, where a huge General Motors plant stood. Anybody, anywhere traveling on a premier first-class train in North America then was 98% of the time pulled by General Motors locomotives. The power plant for the world's first diesel powered streamlined train, in 1934 on the Burlington *Zephyr*, was a General Motors diesel. GM diesels dominated in actuality the first four decades of American diesel locomotion.



By and large, combustion engines which produced power to the Automotive industry worked hand in hand in those days to build and provide generators, traction motors and control parts that made the La Grange plant, technically called an Electro-Motive plant which in the early days were an independent company but, which by WW II was a part of GM, able to keep running America's railroads, and which kept the over 200 named passenger trains functioning. Yessiree, 200 is a lot.

Passenger train service—which before the late 1950s were mainly pro-passenger (streamlined or not)—were both an economical means of travel for the short-haul, like a

commuter, or, for the vacationer and tourist wanting to experience the beautiful country our mammoth continent has to offer.

A passenger would ride the *Western Star* from June 15 to September 10 to see the Glacier National Park. In the recreational areas, which could be the Cascades, the Smoky Mountains, the wildlife of the 60 to 80 million years old mountains of the Rocky Mountains, or the hills/mountaintops in Connecticut, Vermont or New York a connection was always evident. Not all streamliners were initially diesel, like the *Spirit of St Louis*, between NY and St Louis, or the Fleet of Modernism premier trains designed by another American notable designer Raymond Loewy.

The American West is unique to all the world. Passengers, for example, hopped the *Empire Builder* and stopped along any of the 2,211 mile points from Chicago to the Pacific Northwest to see the lakes and glaciers and forests that are the unique drama and part of the United States.



The advertisement features a central illustration of the *City of Miami* train, a streamlined locomotive in orange and black, with the name 'CITY OF MIAMI' on its side, set against a backdrop of palm trees. Below this are two detailed interior views of the train cars. The left view shows a dining car with passengers seated at tables, some reading newspapers, and a waiter in a red uniform. The right view shows a lounge area with passengers seated in comfortable chairs, some looking out the windows. Text boxes provide details about the train's amenities.

Another Great Streamliner for The Illinois Central

CITY OF MIAMI

BUILT BY PULLMAN-STANDARD

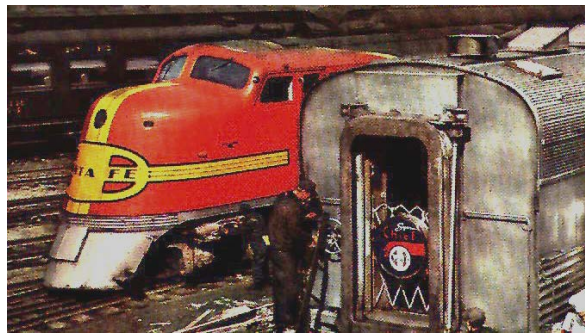
THE WORLD'S LARGEST BUILDERS OF RAILROAD AND TRANSIT EQUIPMENT

1) The Coaches, colorfully decorated with Floridian scenes, provide such special comforts as individual reading lights, a car reserved for women and children, and Stewardess-Registered Nurse service.

2) Bamboo Grove, the beautiful tavern-lounge-observation car, has oversized windows to admit floods of sunlight and scenery; its comfortable easy-chairs are movable so they can be drawn up to the writing desk or radio or turned for conversation.

Americans who had the chance would escape the signs of hectic and sometimes polluted city life by way of the *Sunbeam*, *City of Portland*, *Golden State Limited*, *California Zephyr*, *San Francisco Challenger*, *Empire Builder*, *El Capitan*, the *Cascade* or the *Sunset Limited*. It was a tourist galore whether you were following the route of the old Pony Express or visiting relatives on the other side of the Continental Divide. There existed an extensive system that covered the area of travel in all the country, either as a place to visit or just passing through on the way to the Coasts.

In essence, there are three corridors that traversed the expansive West from the Midwest that formed, what is called in the history books, as the West's Greatest Transportation System. It criss-crossed a gallery of panoramic national parks with the least inconvenience to the landscape and ecology. Sometimes daily, sometimes seasonal and very convenient during the summer (or in winter for fun-loving skiers) they were rarely stopped by the weather. The first corridor is via the north that ended at Seattle, Washington, or Portland, Oregon. This was Northern Pacific and Great Northern territory. A central corridor terminated right at San Francisco through Denver and Salt Lake City. The Union Pacific, the Western Pacific, the Rock Island and the Southern Pacific handled it. Finally the third, was the southern corridor of sorts which reached Los Angeles, California; I say L.A. had fingers from the East via the Southern Pacific, the Rock Island, the Burlington Route, the Atchinson, Topeka and the Santa Fe and the Union Pacific. The speediest and one of the most popular and famous was the *Super Chief*, from Chicago to Los Angeles and was run by the Santa Fe.



It was a premier all-Pullman train that quite often had movie stars on it. The *Super Chief* with its warbonnet cut a path through the canyons and mesas of the Wild West. Without a reservation, you could not ride the *Super Chief*. During WW II, it was always booked, as was virtually every passenger train. Back in the 1940s, you could hear a catchy song on the radio about trains, which were popularly played, such as *Tuxedo Junction*, *Mississippi Flyer*, *Atchinson*, *Topeka and the Santa Fe*, *Blues in the Night*, *Chattanooga Choo Choo* and *Sentimental Journey*.

Passenger trains that sped in the East and Midwest managed metropolises and hamlets.

People rode the *20th Century* line and the *Broadway Limited* between the 716 miles separating NY and Chicago. These two were fierce competitors on parallel tracks. Senators and Congressmen rode the Pennsylvanian's *The Congressional* or Baltimore & Ohio's *Columbian*.

Trains like the *Champion* and the *Silver Meteor* were worthy of their names that connected NY to the sunshine state of Florida,—and this was before there was a Disneyworld and Bush Gardens. Those two trains, owned by Atlantic Coast Line and Seaboard Air Line, in particular had been a rousing success since 1939 and are well known names in train lore. (Yes, Seaboard also ran an airline.) Those two train sets in addition to the streamliners *City of Miami* and the *Orange Blossom Special*, names which go further back in time before the era of streamliners, were speedy, comfortable, and safe during the height of the streamliner era. Practically all the names of streamlined trains found in this article are forgotten by the public.

Of two streamlined transcontinental railroads that covered the northern part of the

United States, the Great Northern and Northern Pacific, the Great Northern's *Empire Builder* touted electrification as a means of energy—usually seen on the Big East.

Most passenger streamlined trains that operated by electricity ran in the East, powered by huge power systems. To this day, unfortunately, there is a huge misinformation about North American railroads that makes people think that as soon as World War II ended, everything turned into a big fat downhill for the American railroads because of the automobile and airline industries. That is hogwash. It is, however, not to say that travel by train did not decline.



To this day, travelling by passenger train is not the same as it was, perhaps except in the corridors in the northeast and L.A.-San Diego. But, as soon as the Second World War ended, many people did continue to ride the streamliners and the roads bought many extras for them that folks today never heard of, as mentioned earlier.

Travelling by train many years ago was not on all-old dirty trains, and polluting black steam engines. There was a beautiful era during the mid-century in the United States that is largely forgotten. It was an era that had the person foremost in mind that rode on passenger trains with all sorts of cool names. Those names, a part of an era that offered modern equipment, a friendly greeting, a sincere desire to be helpful and tons of dependable service, are long gone. How I wish they could be brought back especially in light of rising energy costs.

