

EDITOR'S NOTE



What is it about a train journey that stirs the senses, that makes it so compelling and such an adventure? There's something primeval about a locomotive wreathed in puffs of smoke pulling into a station like some fire-breathing dragon. It certainly stokes the imagination.

Think of a journey by train, like I do, as a motion picture, with the clickety-clack of the wheels, the soundtrack. It has the ingredients: a huge cast of characters, different locations (landscapes of dark forests, open countryside, anonymous towns), plenty of dialogue and conversations, mysterious strangers getting on at lonely stations. And, like a film, it offers intimate glimpses into lives on either side of the tracks

Of course there is one thing a movie can't offer, though I am sure the geeks in filmdom are close to perfecting the means, and that is the olfactory factor of which a rail trip offers a speckled bouquet. To employ that old chestnut, with trains it is all about the journey rather than the destination.

India with 60,000 kms of rail track and over 11,000 locomotives linking some 7,000 stations, lays claim to the title of oldest and largest rail network in the world, and proved the perfect place for a fecund imagination to fuel an obsession with these iron monsters. I opted to take the train whenever I could. I devoured anything written about train journeys, and began collecting model trains. I still play with my trains.

When the family moved house, its proximity to Mumbai airport afforded not just a view of the entire runway but also allowed me to eavesdrop on conversations between air control and pilots with a small FM radio. Most of which was routine, but there were moments of mirth like when a British Airways pilot reported dogs on the runway, to which came the reply, "Ignore them, they are stray." Another time I was watching a Qantas jet taxi to the terminal when four of its tyres blew out. I spent the better part of an hour observing passengers careening down emergency chutes to safety.

Planes soon became a fixation, and I an avid planespotter. Heard of an airline called Novair? Yes, it actually exists and does go somewhere. Once again a model collection started, and today I still have people adding to my collection. How much do you think 250 scale models would fetch on E-bay?

These obsessions, dare I call them passions, sparked the idea for the theme of this issue, Planes, Trains and Automobiles (and Boats). Did I tell you about my fascination for model automobiles? Another time perhaps!

People's backyards are much more interesting than their front gardens, and houses that back on to railways are public benefactors.
– John Betjeman.

A MODEL OBSESSION

Trains fascinate me, nay they are an obsession with me. Now I am sure there is a fair share of individuals out there that don't share this mania with me. Nor is everyone particularly enamoured by a prolonged trip over two metal strips that could otherwise be accomplished in a few hours.

lifestyle+travel: Never one without the other

Gavin Nazareth
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