

# World's first bullet train, made in Japan, turns 50

By Emily Wang and Ken Moritsugu  
The Associated Press

**T**OKYO — It was, retired Japanese railway engineer Fumihiro Araki recalls, “like flying in the sky.”

Zippering cross-country in a super-high-speed train has become commonplace in many countries these days, but it was unheard of when Japan launched its bullet train between Tokyo and Osaka 50 years ago.

The *Shinkansen*, as it's called in Japan, gave a boost to train travel in Europe and Asia at a time when the rise of the automobile and the airplane threatened to eclipse it. It also was a symbol of pride for Japan, less than two decades after the end of World War II, and a precursor of the economic “miracle” to come.

The October 1, 1964 inauguration ceremony was re-enacted at Tokyo Station last month, complete with a ribbon cutting. The first bullet train, with its almost cute bulbous round nose, travelled from Tokyo to Osaka in four hours, shaving two-and-a-half hours off the 513-kilometer (319-mile) journey. The latest model, with a space-age-like elongated nose, takes just two hours and 25 minutes.

Araki, now 73, drove the *Shinkansen* briefly in the summer of 1967 as part of his training as a railway operations engineer. In advance of the anniversary, he slipped back in time as he sat in the driver's seat of one of the early model bullet trains at a railway museum outside of Tokyo. He pulled a lever on the control panel, looking straight ahead as he was trained, though all he could see were other museum exhibits.

“It was like flying in the sky, it was that kind of feeling,” said Araki, the acting director of the museum. “On a clear day, you could see Mount Fuji, and riding atop the railway bridge at Hamanako lake was very pleasant. It felt like you were sailing above the sea.”

## A controversial project

Japan started building a high-speed line during World War II, but construction was halted in 1943 as funds ran out. The idea was revived in the 1950s, but many questioned undertaking such a costly project, particularly with the expansion of air travel and highways. Criticism turned to pride when construction, financed partly by an \$80 million World Bank loan, was completed in time for the Tokyo Olympics in October 1964. The government subsidizes the construction of *Shinkansen* lines, but operations are the responsibility of the private companies that run the trains, said Christopher Hood, the author of *Shinkansen: From Bullet Train to Symbol of Modern Japan*. They are generally profitable, though the companies don't break out the *Shinkansen* operations in their financial results.

## How fast?

The first *Shinkansen* had a maximum speed of 210 kilometers per hour (kph), or 130 miles per hour (mph). The fastest trains previously, in Europe, could reach 160 kph (99 mph). Today's bullet trains, in Japan and elsewhere, have reached and in some cases exceeded 300

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## Four cookbooks I didn't want to like, but do anyway

Continued from page 13

Oxmoor House, 2014

Recall what I said about single-ingredient books? Two-ingredient books aren't much better. Unless those two ingredients happen to be bourbon and bacon. They do, after all, make everything better.

There are no mysteries about this book. The first half is dedicated to a primer on bourbon, followed by numerous recipes, most of them for cocktails, but also some sweet treats. The second half of the book is dedicated to America's favorite meat, also with numerous recipes. This isn't a book you'll cook from every day, but it sure will get you thinking about some lovely pairings.

### How to Eataly

By Oscar Farinetti (and a host of big-wig chefs)  
Rizzoli, 2014

A cookbook inspired by a

chain of Italian food halls? Doesn't exactly scream out to me. But my assumption that it would be either a glorified advertisement for Eataly or an ode to all things Batali (as in Mario) and Bastianich (as in Joe and Lidia) — the guiding forces behind the halls — was wrong. It's actually a quite nice guide to how to buy and cook Italian food, with a heft of respectable recipes tossed in.

Again, not a book you'll cook from regularly. But a lovely book for lovers of Italian food to salivate over.

J.M. Hirsch is *The AP's* food editor.

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**SPEEDY SHINKANSEN.** A Shinkansen bullet train travels by Yurakucho Station after leaving Tokyo Station on the Tokaido Main Line in Tokyo. Japan launched its bullet train between Tokyo and Osaka 50 years ago. (AP Photo/Shizuo Kambayashi)

## Europe, Asia, but not the U.S.

The *Shinkansen* renewed interest in high-speed rail elsewhere, notably in Europe. France and Spain are among the leaders in Europe, and Turkey last year became the ninth country to operate a train at an average speed of 200 kph (124 mph), according to the *Railway Gazette*. South Korea and Taiwan also operate high-speed systems in Asia. The United States is an exception, though there are proposals to build lines in California and Texas. The fastest train in the U.S., Amtrak's Acela Express, averages 169 kph (105 mph) on a short stretch between Baltimore and Wilmington, Delaware, the speed survey says.

## What's next

What's next? Magnetic levitation. Shanghai launched a German-built maglev train in 2004 on a 30-kilometer route between the city and the airport. It can hit 430 kph (267 mph). A Japanese maglev train in development has topped 500 kph (310 mph) in tests. If built, it could reduce the travel time between Tokyo and Osaka to just over one hour. With speed, though, some of the romance is lost. A faster *Shinkansen* has eliminated its dining car. “The problem is that Japan is such a small country,” said Araki, the retired engineer. “If you go too fast, you'll get there in no time. No time to enjoy an onboard meal.”

Associated Press writer Noriko Kitano contributed to this report.

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