America Drags Wheels In Race For Rail Lead

By MURRAY J. BROWN
UPI Travel Editor

The United States long has played a dominant role in developing commercial airliners to speed Americans and other travelers to all corners of the world in this jet age. But it has been dragging its wheels when it comes to rail transportation at home.

A recent announcement in Washington told of plans for a 200-mile-per hour super railroad to link the national capital and Boston within 5 to 20 years. It is something for Americans to look forward to—but the Japanese already are enjoying high-speed rail services.

In Tokyo, they call the bullet nosed super streamliner, which streaks at speeds of up to 125 miles per hour between Tokyo and Osaka, the "Hikari" (light). Actually, it is not one train but several blue and ivory super-expresses operating on the Japanese National Railway's new Tokaido line.

It took five years to build the line and cost more than $1 billion. More than 4 million passengers have ridden the extra-fare superliners since service was inaugurated last October, timed to coincide with the opening of the Olympic games, according to a JNR spokesman.

A Revelation

To American tourists, it is a revelation in what railroading can and should be.

The aerodynamically - designed cars are sleekly functional and comfortable. All coaches are air-conditioned and sufficiently airtight for protection against sudden changes in air pressure when passing through tunnels at high speed. The airline-type seats are adjustable and spaced far enough apart to provide adequate legroom.

Two buffet cars serve both Japanese and Western - type meals. The food is pre-cooked and heated to order in infra-red ovens. The price of meals, ranges from $1.50 to $2, with American-style hot roast beef the top item on the menu. Whiskey, beer and Japanese sake also are available in addition to cold and hot soft drinks.

The 320-mile run between Japan's two biggest cities is smooth and virtually free of clickety-clack noises and vibration, thanks to a new type of roadbed, newly developed car bogies (trucks) and mile-long welded steel rails.

It is the speed and scheduling, however, which generally impresses the American visitor.

Super Speed

The 12-car super-expresses have been clocked at speeds of 150-miles per hour in test runs. The present maximum speeds have been set well below this figure, but as the roadbed settles and stabilizes, running time between the Tokyo and Osaka terminals is scheduled to be cut this October from four to three hours.

Current running time between Tokyo and Nagoya, the first stop for the Hikari on the way to Osaka, is 2 hours and 29 minutes for the 212 miles. It takes about 3 hours and 55 minutes to travel the 226 miles by rail between New York City and Washington, D.C.

In contrast to the four hours it now takes the Hikari between Tokyo and Osaka, U.S. rail time for the 339-mile run between New York and Richmond, Va. is 6 hours and 10 minutes.

Hikari super - expresses depart from Tokyo and Osaka every hour on the hour from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily.

Freight trains operate only at night, leaving the tracks clear during daylight and evening hours for the high-speed passenger services.

Upton Sinclair Shuns 'Socialist' Label Now

PALO ALTO, Calif. (UPI) — Upton Sinclair no longer calls himself a "socialist."

But that is not to say that the man who ran for Congress, the Senate and the governorship of California on the Socialist ticket has mellowed in his old age.

"I am a socialist," he told newsmen here.

"You're a Democrat," interrupted his wife, May, from her seat back against a wall.

Sinclair beamed, obviously pleased with even such a small controversy.

"Actually, I've dropped the term 'socialist' for everything except press conferences," he explained.

Says Term Defamed

"But don't call me a socialist. Why use a term that has been blackened and defamed? Say I'm a progressive. Or a reformer. No, reformer's bad too. Well, any word we use, they will make into a bad word."

But Sinclair's reputation is irrevocably intertwined with his views on social problems.

There is his book, "The Jungle," which focused attention on cruel working conditions in the meat-packing industry.

There are his other works, including "The Brass Check," "The Money Changers," "King Coal," "The Metropolis," "The Profits of Religion," and "The Goose Step," which earned him the title of "Muckraker."

There is his Lanny Budd series, of which "Dragon's Teeth," won the Pulitzer Prize in 1943.

Ran For Governor

There is his Epic campaign for governor of California in 1933 on the slogan — "End poverty in California." In that campaign he ran as a Democrat.

And there are his arrests.

"I claim to have been part of the three comical arrests ever made in the United States," Sinclair says.

"I was arrested for playing tennis on Sunday in Delaware. I was arrested at Los Angeles harbor for making a speech on private property while I had in my possession written permission from the property owner. And I was arrested in New York for walking up and down in front of the office of John D. Rockefeller Jr., wearing a mourning band and not speaking a word."

Had His Say

In the third case, he recalls, the policeman who arrested him testified that Sinclair conducted himself like "a perfect gentleman," the judge fined him $3, Sinclair refused to pay and "I spent a couple of days in the Tombs, New York's jail, where my cellmate was a thief. I learned a lot from him and, of course, all knowledge is helpful to an author."

Sinclair qualifies as an author if anyone does. He has had 90 books published. "And there are some that have not been published," he says.

But he is not working on any more literary ventures.

"I am 86 years old. I think 90 books are enough, possibly too many. I have said my say."

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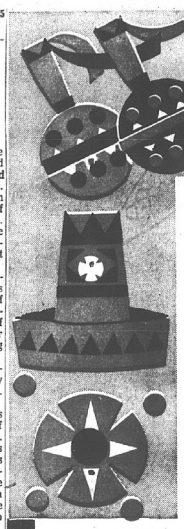

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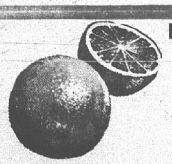

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