

VIA Rail's Heritage & Fleet for the 90s



Canada is restoring one of the great railways of the world. VIA Rail has begun a \$200 million refurbishment programme to recreate the glory of transcontinental travel to set beside the romance and intrigue of the *Trans-Siberian* and the *Orient Express*.

In a phoenix operation, VIA Rail is modernising its famous stainless steel rail cars that set a world standard for engineering and comfort when they were introduced in 1955.

Blending stunning 50s glitz with 1990 technology, the first of the 190 cars will come into service on the northern transcontinental route between Vancouver and Toronto, via Edmonton, in the spring. They will delight tourists, railway enthusiasts and Canadian travellers alike.

Electric heating, air conditioning, showers, artistic interiors, viewing dome improvements, and noise and vibration suppressors are incorporated with new standards of service to reproduce yesteryear's elegance for the discerning traveller of the future, crossing some of the world's most awe-inspiring scenery.

Built by the Budd Company of Philadelphia, the VIA Rail fleet caused a sensation when introduced 35 years ago. In continual service ever since, the streamlined, light-weight cars – which include sleepers, day coaches, dining cars, and the now legendary Vista-Dome observation cars – were considered 'avant garde' in 1955, representing the finest in luxury, first class train travel.

The renewal programme will restore original standards of elegance, and define new standards of passenger comfort, reliability, and operating efficiency. It will also yield significant financial returns for the company.

VIA President Ron Lawless said the programme will give VIA a fully modern yet classic fleet, perfectly suited to the increasingly sophisticated demands of the travel market. 'These cars were state-of-the-art in 1955 – offering the best in long-distance train travel available at that time. Now they represent the best in long-distance train travel today. They have been completely refitted from top to bottom, so that mechanically they are better than new. While we have retained the traditional design elements characteristic of the interiors, we



Up the stairs the dome awaits. From there the most dazzling scenes: dawn, daylight, dusk. The receding rail behind and the approach of the new. When the train rounds a curve, a flash of shimmering steel...

Sleeping car colours echo the softness of dusk, while accents of steel convey strength and safety. In each car, a shower is available – a first on a Canadian train.

In the dining car, lit partitions of etched glass, curved steward's bar, elegant chairs and lighting are part of every meal's ambiance. On the white linen of the tables, porcelain, glass, and silverware shine. As a touch of whimsy the hand painted ceiling evokes the breadth of the sky.

BELOW: ONE OF THE 16 NEW MURALS COMMISSIONED FOR THE PARK CARS
Rundle from Vermilion
David Thauberger
Born in Holdfast,
Saskatchewan in 1948,
Thauberger is fascinated by work in velvet, and often uses it along with glitter dust and acrylics.



have upgraded on board facilities to meet the expectations of travellers in the 1990's.'

Technology modifications

Virtually all components of the cars have been either overhauled, renovated, or replaced. Antiquated steam heating has been replaced with more reliable and efficient electric heat for the winter, and new air conditioning will provide greater comfort in the summer. Showers have been installed in all sleeping cars. Interiors have been completely renewed from stem to stern including on-board service areas. Beneath the surface, mechanical components have also been renewed. New bogies, for example, provide passengers with a smoother ride, with less noise and vibration. Modifications to the braking system will improve passenger comfort and safety.

Interior design

In addition, new murals for the Park cars have been painted by 16 of Canada's leading artists such as Tony Hunt, Jean-Paul Riopelle, Michael Snow and Marcel Barbeau. These contemporary paintings, reflecting the changing scenery through

which the trains will pass, replace the original murals, which were commissioned in the 1950s from artists such as Lawren Harris and A Y Jackson. The original murals, which had slowly deteriorated over the last 35 years, have been restored and placed in the Museum of Science and Technology in Ottawa. In addition to the murals, 35 smaller paintings were purchased to become VIA's 'Transcontinental Collection'. Fine prints of these paintings are to be displayed throughout the refurbished trains.

The renewal program is the largest undertaking in VIA's history, and perhaps the largest of its kind in passenger rail. VIA designers and engineers produced some 1200 technical drawings and plans for the project. Interior design was provided by Madeline Arbour and Associates in Montreal. All renovations are being carried out by Canadian National in their Montreal shops.

A labour of love that's good business

Mr. Lawless said the work has been a labour of love for everyone involved. 'But it is also good business. The cost of modernizing each car is about 60 per cent less than the cost of buying a new one,

and some of these cars could not be replaced at any cost. When the fleet is finished, VIA will save about \$24 million each year through lower maintenance and operating costs.

'More importantly, we are now in a position to develop a new level of the transcontinental service, and take full advantage of the growing tourism market in Canada.'

New service levels will be phased in over the next three years as all 190 cars are completed. Both *Eastern* and *Western Transcontinental* trains will have a higher level of basic on-board service, to meet the needs of budget-conscious travellers in style. On the *Western Transcontinental*, where tourist demand is high, a superior level of service will be available.

Mr. Lawless does not hesitate to compare that travel experience to world-class standards, set by trains such as Europe's *Orient Express*. 'Canada's *Western Transcontinental* has earned its reputation as one of the six or seven truly great long distance services in the world ranking on a par with the *Trans-Siberian* and the *Empire Builder*. We're making sure we can maintain the reputation in an increasingly competitive market.'