

'Hello Everyone. My Name is Jim Cameron, and I Am a ... Rail Fan.' — Cameron on Transportation

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True confession (as if you didn't know): I am a rail fan. But don't call me a "foamer!" People who love trains come in all shapes and sizes, but "foamer" is a term they universally hate.

"Foamers" is how railroad employees refer to rail fans because they think we "foam" at the mouth anytime we see a train. To them, railroading is just a job. To us, it's a passion. Not that I'd want to work for a railroad, mind you.

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Some rail fans are obsessed with locomotives, logging every make, model and number they see. Others specialize in freight cars, cataloged by cargo and class.

In the United Kingdom, rail fans are known as “anoraks,” named after their warm parkas worn while spending hours in the rain and cold waiting to spot trains, adding their car numbers to log books they cherish for life.

Some railroad lovers build or collect model trains, but I personally don’t consider them rail fans. Toy trains, however accurate, are just that: toys. I’m only interested in the real thing.

A lot of rail fans are great photographers, preserving their hobby in pictures. They gather for meetings and “ooh” and “ahh” at each others’ slides, like ornithologists admiring photos of rare birds. Not any old photo will do. Ideally you want a crisp, clean photo on a beautiful blue-sky day.

Some of those visualists have converted to video and there are actually videotapes and DVDs you can buy all about trains — from the sidelines as they run past or from the engineer’s perspective in the locomotive.

But none of that interests me. I’m only interested in passenger trains viewed from the inside, from the rider’s perspective. I want to see the club cars with their over-stuffed, swivel chairs, occupied by cigar-chomping scions of business. Or the pictures of dressed-up passengers in the dining car eating fresh-cooked meals on real railroad china.

Or my holy-grail: Passengers sitting in air-conditioned comfort in the dome car of a streamlined 1950’s train like “The Canadian” gliding through the Rockies. That’s my nostalgic dream, as I was once there.

Born and raised in Toronto, I rode in first-class transcontinental splendor all by myself at age 16. I sat in that dome car and ate fresh-cooked roast beef with real silverware in a dining car that smelled of fresh linen. Maybe my love of trains is just me trying to relive the past.

Still, I find most railroad museums incredibly depressing. Sure, the cars have been painstakingly restored, but if the trains still run, they go nowhere: just a few miles up a track and back again. They are memories of what once was but is no more.

But riding trains into Grand Central for more than 50 years, I still get excited when we plunge into the Park Avenue tunnels. Peering through the dim lights, I look for the signals and switches, trying to figure out where we are: upper or lower level?

And sometimes, faintly in the distance, I imagine I see “The 20th Century Limited” getting ready for its daily departure en route to Chicago, its passengers boarding that iconic train from a red carpet.

No doubt about it: I’m a rail fan.

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- [Other Than DC-to-Boston, Long-Distance Train Travel's Days Are Numbered: Cameron on Transportation](#) (June 11)
- [Train Ticket Scofflaws Avoid Eye Contact With Conductors and Are Seldom Challenged: Cameron on Transportation](#) (June 4)
- [Strategies for Getting the Right Airline Seat, or Any Seat on Metro-North: Cameron on Transportation](#) (April 19)
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