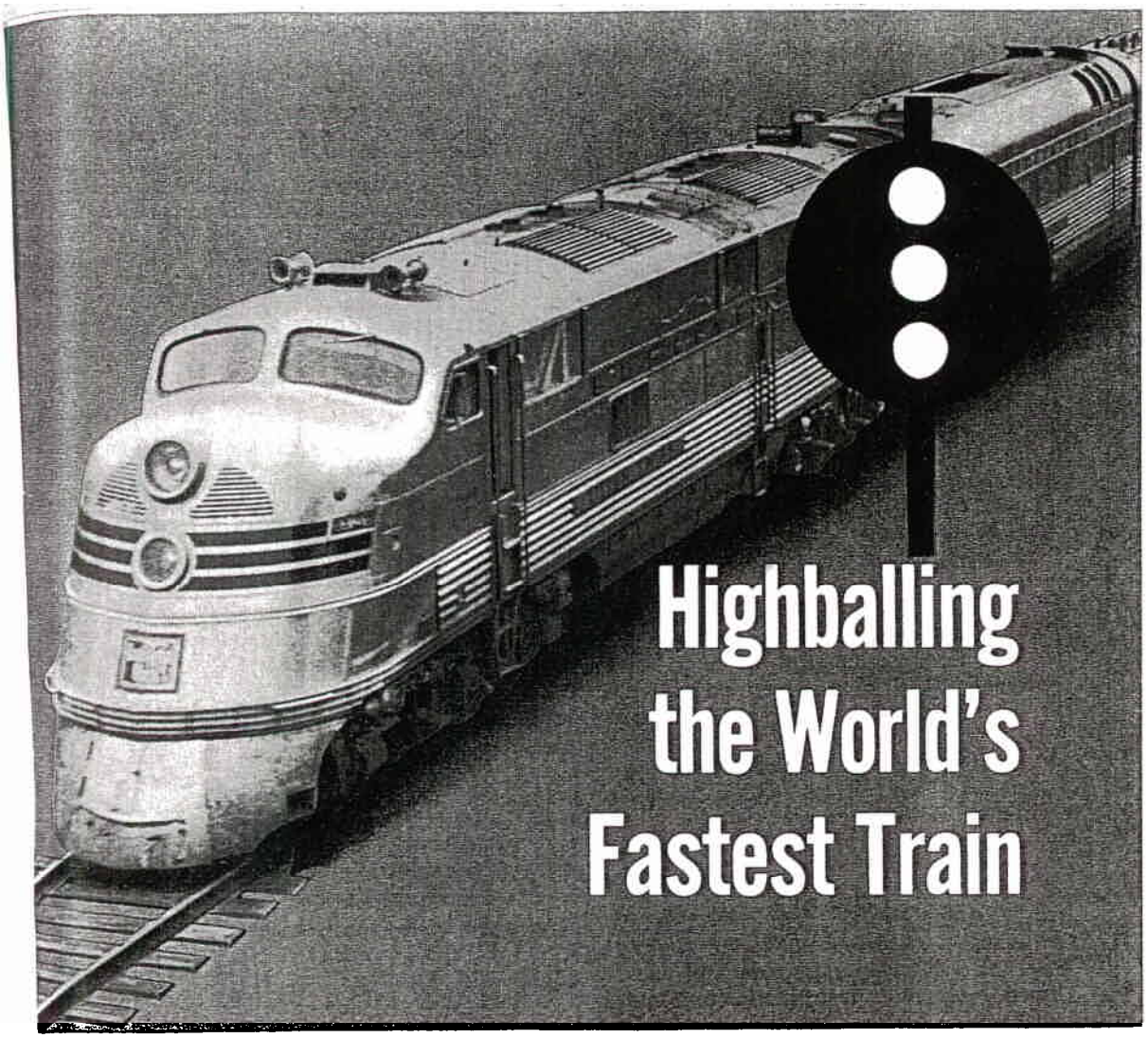


Highballing the World's Fastest Train

Speediest scheduled run hits over 86 m.p.h. on one stretch, averages 70 between Chicago and the Twin Cities.

By Devon Francis

WE WERE exactly one hour and 15 minutes out of Chicago, doing 90 miles an hour, when the shower of feathers whipped up past the double windshields of the locomotive of the Twin Cities Zephyr.

It was startling. I ducked. Bob Glaser, road foreman of engines, who was standing beside me on the swaying floor, grinned.

"Hit a pigeon," he explained, raising his voice to carry above the low thunder of the Diesel engines. "Hit 'em often. Turtle doves are the slowest getting out of the way. We hit pheasants too, but hardly ever a crow. Crows are smart."

I had come along to ride the Zephyr's "head end" for 299 of its 427 miles to St. Paul. I was on the world's fastest train. Of the 686 fast trains in the United States, only 32 of them maintain a speed of 75 miles an hour or more between any two cities on their routes. Only three do better than 80—the Burlington railroad's northbound Zephyrs, departing morning and afternoon, and the Illinois Central's City of New Orleans.

4,000 Horses in a Hurry

The Zephyrs cover the 55 miles between East Dubuque, Ill., and Prairie du Chien, Wis., at a speed of about 85 miles an hour. They average almost 70 miles an hour, including stops, on their two round trips a day between Chicago and St. Paul. No trains in Canada or Europe can compare with their speed.

It had been 8:06 by my watch when I

walked through the gate of Chicago's Union Station and into the perpetual dusk of the train shed. The Zephyr had seven cars. Their ribbed, stainless-steel sides were silver in the twilight.

Cab is Clean and Spacious

The cab of the Diesel-electric locomotive was meticulously clean. It was almost 10 feet wide and perhaps six feet deep at its narrowest point. An upholstered chair was on either side, the left one for the fireman, the right for the engineer.

The locomotive actually consisted of two locomotives linked together. Each unit contained two 1,000-horsepower Diesels driving generators to supply DC power to traction motors that propelled the train.

The engineer was W. J. Reinhard, the fireman P. E. Johnson. Road-foreman Glaser occupied the back of the cab with me.

The engineer hung his watch on his instrument panel. I leaned over and reset mine.

"Pretty close," said Engineer Reinhard of his watch, "10 seconds fast, is all."

Behind us the engines muttered.

It was 8:15. An air whistle in the cab beeped twice—the proceed signal.

"Straight up," called the fireman.

"Straight up," repeated the engineer.

The Zephyr Takes Off

Ahead on the ground beside the track, vertical white lights gave us clearance to move. The fireman's call and the response were regulation, so that each member of the crew will know that the other has observed the signals correctly.

"Clear," called the fireman.

"Clear."

Engineer Reinhard brought his throttle back. The engines whined. The noise was guttural, low-pitched. It filled the cab. Almost 900 tons of train began inching forward.

Slowly we gained speed.

The speedometers read 25 miles an hour, then 35. The cab swayed as the trucks took the crossovers in the complex of tracks in the yard. In another minute we were doing 55.

"High green!" sang Fireman Johnson.

"High green!"

A signal bridge ahead carried a green light above a red one for our track, indicating track clear ahead.

75 Seemed Like 40

At Cicero, seven miles out, the engineer waved at a man in an interlocking plant tower beside the track. We were doing 75 now. It seemed like 40. Sitting high in the cab above the track did that to your judgment of speed.

At 8:36 we whipped by Donners Grove, 21 miles out. We had averaged 60 miles an hour.

"Yellow!"

"Yellow!"

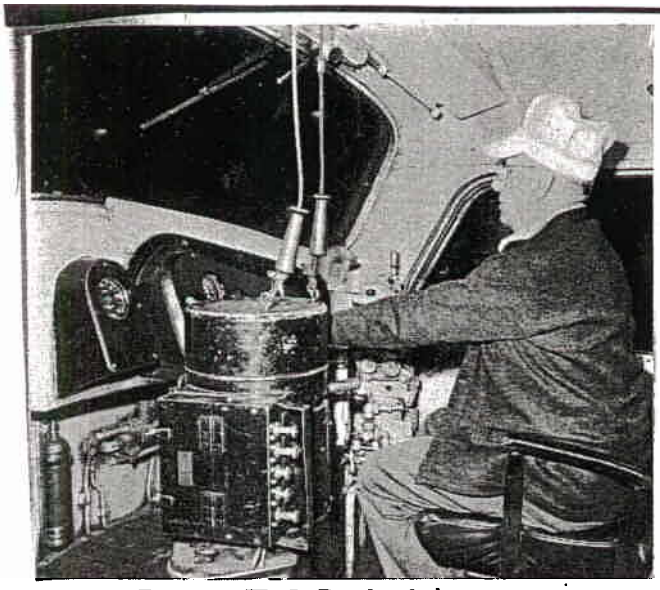
This was a caution light. We were to be governed by the next signal ahead.

"Yellow crossover!"

"Yellow crossover!"

The engineer closed his throttle. The tower at Aurora gave us a flag stop. We coasted in. In less than a minute we were on our way again. The air hissed and sighed

Zephyrs feature Vista Domes atop cars for sightseeing. General Motors 12-cylinder Diesels have 8¼-in. bore, 10-in. stroke, and are capable of driving train 117 m.p.h.



Engineer W. J. Reinhard demonstrates armchair ease of piloting Zephyr. His left hand is on throttle. Engines carry 1,200 gallons of fuel, 330 gallons of oil and 400 gallons of water.

as the brakes were released. The engineer pulled on his throttle.

Now we were on the Aurora-Savanna subdivision, single-tracked, and under Centralized Traffic Control. The dispatcher in Aurora could shunt us off on to any siding under his jurisdiction with remote, power-operated switches.

At 8:58 the speedometer needle stood at 85. Then it touched 90 and clung there. The locomotive wrenched at the track. Reinhard tugged at his horn cord for a grade crossing—two longs, a short and a long.

A zone-speed board with a 4 and a 5 painted below the Z told us to reduce speed to 45 miles an hour. The engineer pulled a lever that set a warning bell ringing. Then we were out of the zone and at 90 again.

Presently a C sign with 60 below it told us to slow to 60 for a curve.

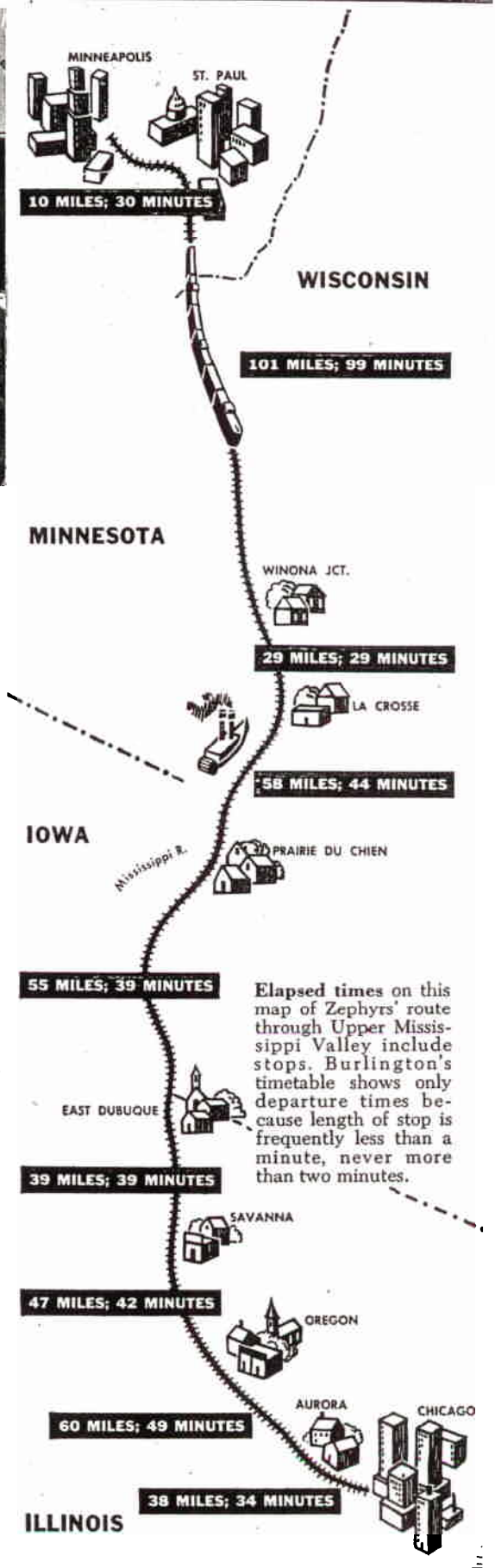
The engineer pulled his cord for one long blast. That was the station signal.

At 9:37½ we braked to a stop at Oregon, Ill. In a half-minute the engines were whining again. I timed the acceleration. It took us nine minutes to reach 90. We were scheduled into Savanna, where we changed crews, at 10:20. We rolled in at 10:19. We had averaged better than 70 miles an hour from Chicago for the 145 miles.

New Crew Takes Over

A big, ruddy-faced man with a booming voice, Jack Kerrigan, settled himself in the cab's righthand seat. The new fireman was

[Continued on page 230]



Elapsed times on this map of Zephyrs' route through Upper Mississippi Valley include stops. Burlington's timetable shows only departure times because length of stop is frequently less than a minute, never more than two minutes.

Highballing World's Fastest Train

[Continued from page 81]

Art Franke. A fresh road foreman of engines, J. C. Kuschel, followed the fireman through the door. It was 10:22. The roadbed would be double-tracked again.

"Clear block!" sang the fireman.

"Clear!"

We gathered speed. On our left the Mississippi swept like a scimitar toward the tracks.

It was 10:55½ when we stopped at East Dubuque, Ill. The fireman disappeared to inspect his Diesels.

The Chant of Signals Goes on

We were out of East Dubuque on the dot at 10:59. Our schedule called for us to roll into Prairie du Chien at 11:38.

"Green board!"

"Green board!"

The locomotive throbbed. The speedometer needle marched up to 90.

"Clear block!"

"Clear block!"

"Boy!" said Fireman Franke in the next breath. "He had a nice mess of fish!"

At our speed, I'd missed a fisherman on the riverbank.

"Yellow board!"

"Yellow board!"

It was 11:23. The engineer closed his throttle. The speedometer needle swung back over the face of its dial.

"Here she comes!" called the fireman.

The southbound Zephyr bore down on us on the companion track and roared by.

"A Little Slow Today!"

It was 11:28 before we were back to 90 miles an hour. As we slowed to pass the Crawford tower outside Prairie du Chien, Engineer Kerrigan looked at his watch and shook his head. It was 11:39 when we rolled to a stop. Our speed from East Dubuque had been 81.6 miles an hour.

At North La Crosse the train changed crews again. I climbed down from the cab.

"Little slow today!" boomed Engineer Kerrigan, knocking out his pipe on the heel of his hand as we walked toward the division superintendent's office. "Little slow!"

The Zephyr's Diesels began barking as the throttle came open. The train gathered speed. In an hour and 59 minutes it would be in St. Paul, 128 miles away. END

Next Month: Building the world's biggest little railroad.