



## Cashmere and velvet

Time travelling into a more elegant era

Ed Boyce is talking to me from Missouri, the “Show-Me” state. It’s apparent that his recent experience of chartering the Royal Canadian Pacific train has shown him plenty.

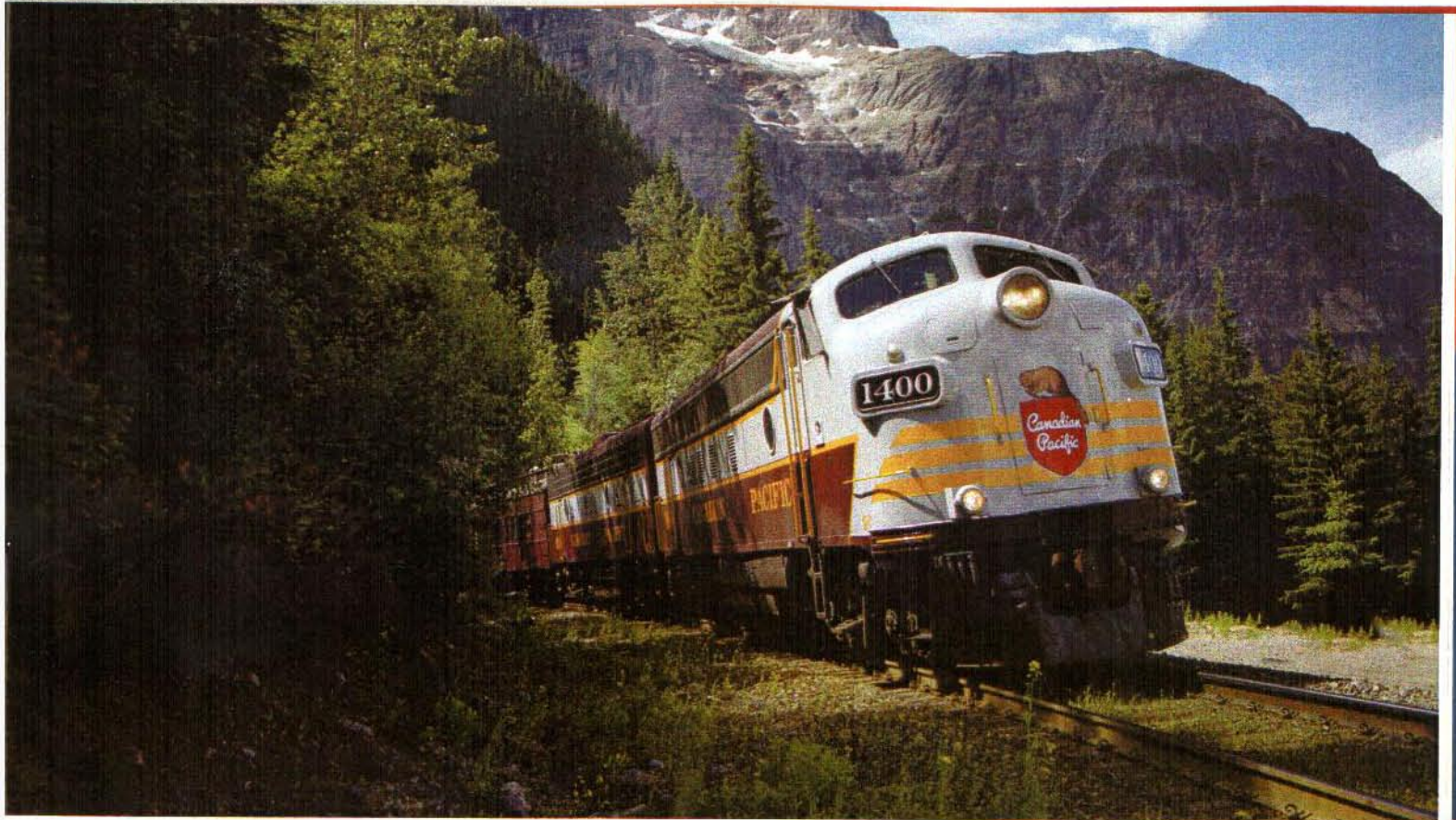
“We’ve had our own private railroad car since 1969 and have been in the railroad business for a long, long time, so I’m pretty familiar with what it takes to pull something like this off. The planning required is intense. And . . . there was not one glitch.”

“I don’t know if I can find enough superlatives to describe the experience.” But he tries anyway. “Look. We all travel—coach, business class, first class, and then luxury class. And then, very rarely, you hit royal class. Royal Canadian Pacific is royal class.”

Apparently, Boyce is not alone in his view. Over 167,000 registered travel agents and travel professionals cast their votes at the World Travel Awards held in September 2006 in Turks & Caicos, where they decided the Royal Canadian Pacific train (based in Calgary) is the world’s best luxury train service.

Stepping onto the train is like stepping into a colorized version of an old black and white film. The wood-paneled dining room is at full lustre. There is the gleam of wineglasses, fresh flowers, solid silverware, and plush, brocade chairs. If you find yourself wishing for a trunk filled with smoking jackets, brandy flasks, and velvet gowns, you’ll know you have succumbed to the sensuous art of travelling well. This is classic luxury. The scenery outside your window is unspoiled by signs of an intrusive world. You have retreated into a different time, where details are taken care of, your needs are anticipated, and your day timer has been rendered irrelevant—think Katherine Hepburn, Cary Grant, and Frank Sinatra. And, like those movie-star lands of grace and refinement, this experience is about elegance. This is not stiff and formal service; this is warmth and charm. Here is where you’ll remember how to laugh and lounge.

Boyce talks about his experience in Africa. “My wife and I rode the Rovos train from Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, to Cape Town,



South Africa. It was a fantastic, upscale trip, and there really is some magnificent scenery but nothing close to what we enjoyed on the Canadian train.”

There is nothing more quintessentially Canadian than the train. It is, after all, the very concept that created and unified this country. And riding in royal class luxury through some of the most spectacular scenery in the world doesn’t hurt either. But as we all know, it is not just the staggering mountain views or wild forest scenes that create the best memories.

Alex Fisher, who lives in Edmonton, Alberta, hauls heavy equipment up north to the oil industry. “I never took a holiday until 1997.” He’s certainly making up for lost time, taking nine trips on the Royal Canadian Pacific. He’s travelled on plenty of other trains throughout the United States and Canada, including a lot of trips on the American Orient Express. But this is the one that keeps him coming back. “The crew are like family to me, and I just love being on such vintage cars and thinking about all that history. What’s amazing about these journeys is not just the great side trips and the beautifully appointed cars but the wonderful people I’ve met.”

This company understands that their passengers are well travelled and want to be engaged in what they’re doing. The resulting packages reflect those interests. These adventures cater to people who want to get out and involve themselves in the incredible outdoors.

The Golf Excursion includes Stewart Creek Golf Club at the mouth-dropping location of the Three Sisters Resort in Canmore and more visual feasting at the Greywolf Golf Course at Panorama in the Purcell Mountain Range. And to top it all off, how about a round at the Fairmont Banff Springs Hotel golf course? Every night you can return to your rolling hotel to your ensuite stateroom where you will be treated like royalty.

and includes interactive cooking demonstrations by the culinary team, on-board classical music, and a visit to a select number of Okanagan Valley wineries. Merlot anyone?

Or how about the Fly Fishing Adventure? Guides take guests to the Lower Bow River, southeast of Calgary. Another day is spent on the Old Man River at the foot of the Porcupine Hills. Wild rainbow, cutthroat, and bull trout thrive in the rivers of the Crowsnest Pass area; so, naturally, it’s another stop on the itinerary. The six-day trip ends with drift boats on a guided float along the Elk River near Fernie, British Columbia.

And then, there’s always the signature Royal Canadian Rockies Experience that includes an interpretive hike with a resident naturalist at Lake Louise. One morning will find you taken up the Kicking Horse Gondola for breakfast at the Eagle Eye’s Restaurant with a 360-degree view of the Rockies. Your trip ends with horseback riding on a ranch that’s been around since 1912. But really, you don’t have to worry too much about what they’ll organize for you—it’s sure to be quite lovely.

Of course, there is always the option to private charter the train, which is exactly what Boyce did. “I’ve been in the train business at many levels and owned my own excursion train, so most of my kids have travelled quite a bit by train . . . they said to me, ‘Dad, why can’t you do something like this?’” Boyce laughs. “I don’t know how they can have such incredible service. It’s warm and friendly yet completely unobtrusive . . . this level of service takes a pretty special company.”

Pack your camera, and throw in a little cashmere. Step on board, and step back in time. You’ll be in good company—Winston Churchill enjoyed his trip, and so will you.

—COLLEEN FRIESEN