



BOOKED FOR TRAVEL

Purple Planes for Plain People

FOR A TRAVEL WRITER approaching middle age with supersonic speed, it is probably permissible to look back, after a trip, and see where he has been. It is disastrous, however, to conduct a post-journey critique and see just how he got where he did in the short space of time he allotted himself. All this gratuitous advice I pass along to you after a nineteen-day spell which I spent caroming about the U.S.A. like a cue ball dispatched with speed, determination, and direction by Willie Hoppe.

Journeyming through the states and deviating for a short weekend in Mexico required the services of one riverboat, half a dozen cars, one chartered plane, and no fewer than seven airlines, among them Pan American, Western, American, Braniff, Delta, United, and Aeronaves. If I have any flash opinions, it is that I am tired of seeing Genghis Khan battle his way across the Mongolian wastes, an epic that has faced my eye too many times in transit movies this fall. I admired Western's employment of a Negro hostess, the first I have ever seen in considerably more than a million miles of air travel. I will cast a modest if not an exuberant vote in favor of American and United's fare in flight. And I will confess to being appalled to find that although one can fly east and west in the nation with great ease and dispatch, choosing among a selection of carriers according to one's taste, it is something else again to try moving north and south. The morning I flew the New Orleans-St. Louis route, for example, Delta was using a piston plane. Its service in first class amounted to coffee served in a plastic glass, the hostess letting a bag of sugar and a wooden spoon slip through her fingers into my outstretched hand. It is probably a good thing to slide back to the Pleistocene Age of aeronautics every once in a while to make the traveler realize how really good he has it most of the time. The Civil Aeronautic Board's tolerance of a monopoly situation is no doubt in reality a clever ploy to inspire public appreciation of airline service elsewhere.

In the matter of personal service the seven airlines showed me everything from professional interest to run-of-the-mill boredom, which is about the gamut that has been displayed in domestic aviation circles ever since that early era when the customer was wrapped in cotton batting and preserved in flight like

a precious thing. Despite the long lapse, I see definite signs now that a new age is dawning. Passenger comfort and passenger pleasure may be the newest innovation in aviation since the invention of the aileron. It showed first when the government interceded on the public's behalf in favor of continuing movies in flight. It reared its happy head again when Eastern Airlines decided to overhaul its image and its cuisine, perhaps in preparation for spreading its routes far afield of those it now holds (see SR, Oct 2, 1965).

But no one has tried anything along the lines of wholesale refurbishment essayed by that once pallid carrier that now flashes racing-stable colors and calls itself Braniff International. I was in Dallas the other week when Braniff unveiled its new image with a fly-past at Love Field. Roaring fifty feet off the ground came a blue Boeing 707, then an orange BAC 111, then an ochre 707 and a yellow BAC. Their wings, pods, and tail assemblies were white, their noses black, but all the bodies glowed in solid, brilliant hues. A consultant for Braniff explained that color had never been used on an aircraft. They had decided to make the shape and size of the plane work for them. Out went stripes and zigzags. They brought nothing, the color people said, but "terrific



Braniff beauty in Pucci bloomers—into the wild, multicolored yonder.

monotony and resultant exhaustion." In came turquoise, yellow, pale blue, orange and ochre.

The planes circled and landed, and from the hangars came the rolling army of wagons that feed and supply the giant aircraft. The baggage trucks were hardly monotonous in their beige and orange and robin's-egg blue. The generators, gas trucks, commissary wagons, and portable stairways were similarly bedecked. The food handlers were in red jumpers and white caps, the mechanics in white jumpers and blue caps.

When the doors of the planes opened, the crew appeared. The flight-deck people were dressed in severe black uniforms with gold braid. Nothing was done here to alter the general look of dignified decorum and businesslike professionalism. But then came the hostesses newly coiffed, cosmetically impeccable, and costumed by Emilio Pucci. Gone were the military gabardines, the brass-button look, the tight skirts, the regimental caps. These girls were cloaked in reversible coats, apricot on one side, melon-green on the other. They were shod in many-colored boots, like a Mondrian design executed in multicolored-pastel shades. Under the coats were pink Pucci suits. Their hats are multicolored pillbox prints with flaps that snap under the chin. In bad weather they slip into Buck Rogers plastic dome helmets that protect hat and hairdo. When serving inside the plane, the suit jacket comes off and the wrap-around skirt unwraps. Then the girls are in working clothes of hyacinth-blue culottes and turtleneck blouse that can be covered with a smock that comes in a variety of wild dream colors: turquoise with fuchsia, lilac with flame, fuchsia with sunburst yellow and green.

If the hostesses are not surprise enough, passengers can relieve the monotony of flight by casting eyes on the seats, a wave of checks, stripes, and even solid colors, all told a collection of fifty-six fabric colors in orange, blue, red, brown, yellow, and green. To slip back into the quiescence of neutrality, passengers can look at neutral walls, neutral ceiling, or the neutral outdoors. For a quick visual pickup again there are posters of Latin American folk art photographed from the collection gathered by designer Alexander Girard.

Best known perhaps for his brilliant execution of New York's La Fonda del Sol, and in other, more circumscribed circles for his Ford offices in Dearborn and for Billy Wilder's apartment, Girard has functioned as overall color coordinator for Braniff. It was a brilliant choice for an airline that wanted a colorful and distinctive look and that already had a big stake in Latin American routes.

"My concepts for Braniff International," Girard has explained, "come from



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my two primary and seemingly contradictory design principles: first, design in depth to ensure variety, interest, and lasting excitement. Second, strip beautiful shapes of nonessentials to permit freest appreciation of beautiful form." This pronouncement, which might seem like gobbledygook on the first or even second reading, really meant that Girard felt that appreciation of the inherently beautiful shapes of today's airplanes could be better realized when the zig-zags and stripes were stripped clean and replaced with solid colors. The stripes were originally applied to impart a sleek look to airplanes. Girard dismissed the old design as "camouflage." Says he: "The solid body is revolutionary. It is so simple, no stripes. Automobiles and refrigerators have achieved enormous new interest by the use of color. Why not airplanes? Eliminating the stripes, the camouflage, allows the form to be truly seen and appreciated."

But Girard is at his best, and perhaps at his most familiar, in the series of Braniff lounges now planned for San Antonio, Houston, Kansas City, Denver, Mexico City, Lima, Panama, Chicago, and New York. The one in Dallas, already completed, is a brilliant gem, remindful immediately of La Fonda del Sol. The eye turns to a surprise at every point of the compass—papier-mâché cats resting on bright cushions, gilded madonnas looking benignly from cerise walls, plaster churches in see-through boxes, plaster figures in see-through boxes inserted in partitions, some facing one way, some the other. There are masks, paintings, snippets of *molos* from San Blas, and woven bags used by South American Indians now hanging as wall decorations. "Airline terminal club-rooms," Girard says, "traditionally have shown close kinship to a hotel lobby—one big room with no privacy for anyone." Here he has broken the space into semi-private alcoves using modular floor-to-ceiling screens in nubby, startling textiles. Many of the fabrics, like the furniture, are manufactured by Herman Miller and will become part of that company's permanent line.

All this eyewash is intended by new president Harding L. Lawrence to lift Braniff out of the doldrums of mediocrity. It is also only part of a program that includes new planes, possibly new routes, and a new attention to service. Lawrence, forty-five, came to Braniff last April from Continental, an airline that had already distinguished itself for its crisp, singular style. By June, two months after he took over, Lawrence announced a huge overhaul: a program to strengthen the route structure, one plan to improve on-time performance and another to speed baggage deliveries, and a complete refurbishment.

By this November Lawrence was

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ready to show his stuff. Besides the purple planes and the Pucci playsuits, Lawrence announced the acquisition of \$87,000,000 in new money and refinancing of an old \$32,000,000 debt. This gave him a chance to invest in fourteen BAC one-11s, the speedy little short-haul, British-made mustang jet. A dozen Boeing 727s were announced for May delivery, plus another five Boeing cargo jets. Two delivery positions are reserved for the American SST. By January, passenger capacity will be up 57 per cent and by next July 1 another 20 per cent. Braniff is looking for new gateways to Latin America in Los Angeles, San Francisco, New Orleans, and Washington, hoping to reopen the route case from Dallas and Fort Worth to Miami, working on an interchange with Eastern for nonstop routes to South America from New York, trying for nonstop flights from Miami to Lima, Sao Paulo and Buenos Aires, besides its present flights that stop in Panama. It will fly twelve times a week to Mexico City and another twelve times to Acapulco, seven of those flights nonstop from San Antonio.

But more important for the oft-buffed, oft-journeying traveler, it has pledged an entire new program. While the abolition of weight allowances has cut the in-line time at counters, Braniff is now trying to eliminate all counter stops, at least for its regular customers. Travelers who have previously set up their credit with the airline and who have phoned ahead for reservations may write their own tickets from a book of Fastpack Tickets issued like a check-book. Writing in his name, destination, flight number, choice of class, time and date, the passenger proceeds directly to the gate, hands his do-it-yourself ticket to the agent, and boards the plane.

"All the airlines," Lawrence has said, "have spent vast amounts to cut the air time between cities but not as much as needs to be done to cut the ground time."

Lawrence has also launched a war against delayed baggage, cutting down Braniff's average time of nine minutes for the middle bag to 6.2 minutes for the last bag. He hopes to do better. Baggage deliveries, because of new systems and also, possibly, because the walk from planeside to baggage-distribution areas has become so intolerably long, is now no longer much of a problem in U.S. aviation. But sensitivity to passenger comfort, to passenger pleasure beyond the norms offered by most airlines, and a real attempt to relieve the boredom and the delays is a new or, at least, a newly rejuvenated concept. And that's the hopeful sign that has arrived wrapped in Pucci's silks and Girard's purple planes.

—HORACE SUTTON.



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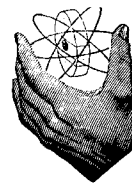




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RESEARCH IN AMERICA

THE NIGHT THEY UNPLUGGED SOCIETY

WHEN the lights in the offices of *Saturday Review* flickered, dimmed, and gradually died out just before the doors were due to close at 5:30 P.M. last November 9th, our first reaction was that electrical circuits powering the place had become overloaded and had blown their protective fuses. Just across Madison Avenue, a vertical shaft of brightness glowed bold reassurance in the Union Carbide Building. But as our eyes jumped over the nineteenth-story terrace railing onto the Manhattan skyline roundabout, we could see other neighboring buildings pallid gray in the deepening twilight. Brave yellow teardrops—breaking from new-struck matches, obviously—began to patter in the windows of the Pan American Building and the Grand Central Tower. Swinging my chair around, I watched shadowy shapes of secretaries and editorial assistants float noiselessly past my office door. Out of the subdued feminine chatter beyond boomed the big bass voice of associate publisher “Pat” Patterson two doors north of me:

“How is SR’s science editor going to explain this one?”

In another moment his secretary, Nancy Gruber, was standing before my chair.

“You heard him,” she said gently. “He wants to know how you explain it.”

Already enough time had passed (though only a matter of minutes) for publisher Jack Cominsky to discover that the TV and radio hookups that normally inform his office of emergencies were as dead as the lights. A small transistor radio was speaking from the desk of Mrs. Ivy Dodd, outside Jack’s door. From it we knew that the blackout enveloping us extended over most of New York State, most of New England, and part of southern Canada. The announcers had also told us that the darkness reached west to Pittsburgh and

south to the edges of Philadelphia, which wasn’t true. They had given us a vague realization that an ultra-high-voltage power channel from Buffalo to Boston was somehow involved in the trouble.

“Stay where you are,” the voices from the loudspeaker advised. “A spokesman for Consolidated Edison has promised us that the restoration of power will begin within an hour.”

So most of us stayed where we were, ate a boxful of crackers Mrs. Dodd kept in a drawer of her desk, ate what was left of a can of macaroons that treasurer Nat Cohn’s hustling sons had sold to someone in the advertising department on the other side of the building, and waited for the hour to pass.

“Seriously, John,” said Patterson, “How do you explain it?”

To explain the situation at that point would have been equivalent to duplicating the magician’s trick of pulling a rabbit out of a hat without opportunity to first duplicate the magician’s preparations and stage props. As an old newsman, Patterson knew that as well as I did. But I thought it might be fun to see how much scientific background could be sketched in without running into misleading extrapolations.

“Well,” I said, “you’ve got to start with the fact that you can’t store very large amounts of electric power. You’ve got to use the power as soon as you generate it. And you’ve got to keep generating enough of it to meet the peak demand for it. If the people in the town where it is being generated are asleep, or out on the highways in their automobiles, or at the movies, their use of power is going to fall, and the economical procedure is to move the power they don’t want into another town where power is wanted. Given the right connections, it is possible to shift power back and forth as the earth turns one part of the country into the sunlight,

other parts into twilight, and still others into darkness. That’s why the ultra-high-voltage power lines run from Buffalo to Boston and down here to New York.”

“Oh, Mr. Lear,” said Roberta Hauke, Cominsky’s secretary, “I was listening to the radio for a minute there. Did you tell us why you can’t store big chunks of electricity?”

“Have another macaroon,” said ad salesman Dick Morton. “Have two,” said Marion Army, our personnel director.

I took a macaroon and glanced into the long corridor between the office of the publisher and the office of SR’s editor. There I could follow the restless pacing of secretary Jane Dozier by the pendulum-like sweep of the dull red burning of a cigar she had found in a box while hunting in vain for a flashlight. “I’m not really smoking it,” she had explained. “I’m just puffing on it to get a sense of direction.”

“That explanation of yours starts awfully slow,” Patterson said. “I don’t think you’re holding your readers.”

I could see my own assistant, Jean Corwith, smiling in the light of the enormous torch Roberta uses to fire her cigarettes. Jean was accustomed to long, complicated explanations. Science is full of them.

Someone turned up the radio to catch Con Ed’s latest apology for not returning the power on the promised schedule. I was being excused, by common understanding. We sat there together in long stretches of silence until almost 9 P.M., watching the full moon rise, and finally decided to brave the cold streets below. Lighting drinking straws from the Coca-Cola machine in the mailroom to show ourselves the way, we trudged in a long queue down nineteen flights of narrow, winding, pitch-dark stairs to the sidewalk, there broke into groups and walked homeward through streets filled with people friendlier than any of us