



Photograph: N.Z. Railways Publicity

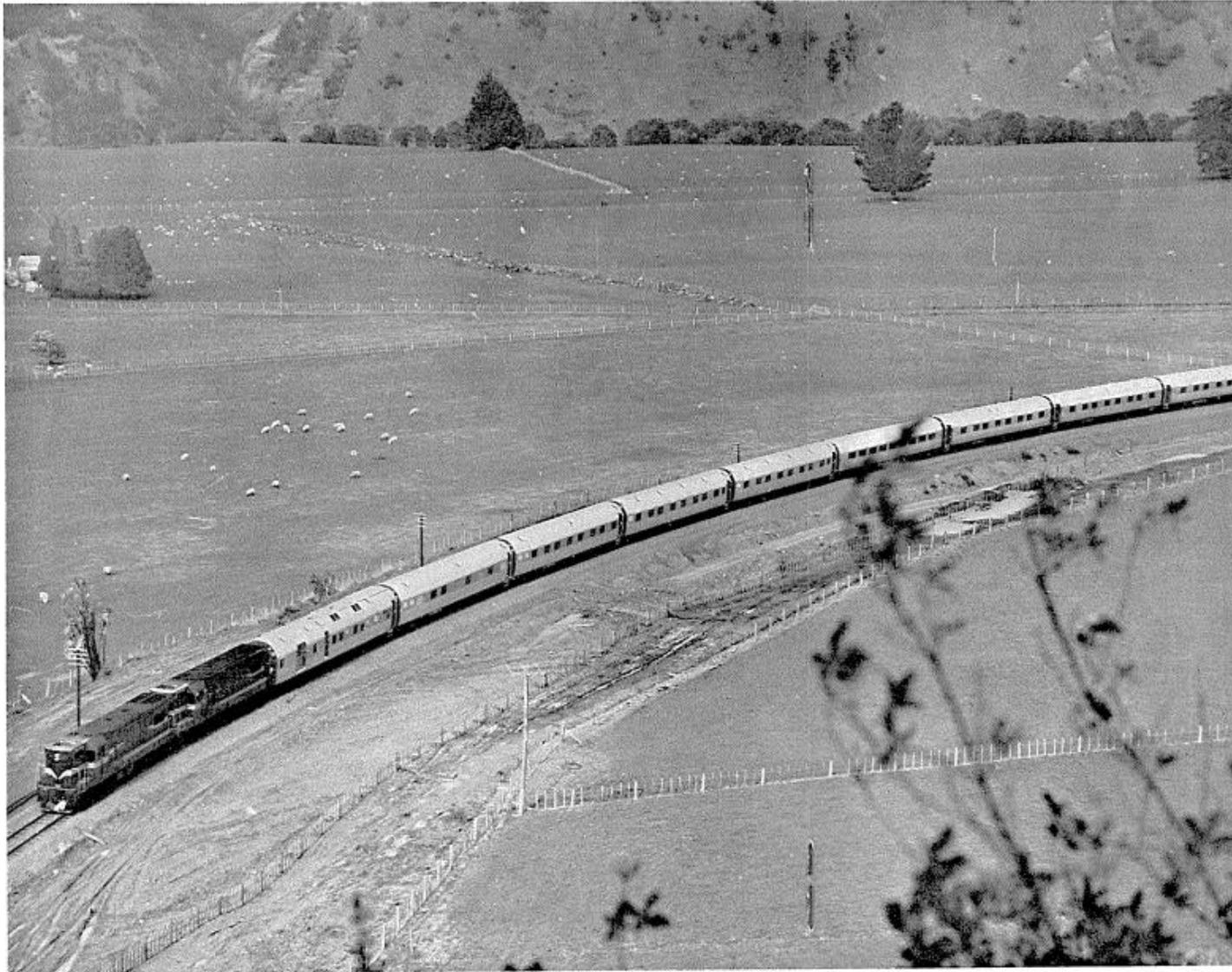
"SILVER STAR", BY NEW ZEALAND RAILWAYS

A Review of the First Night

BY R. J. MEYER

WITH an overture suggested by the atmosphere of carnival on the platform at Auckland railway station shortly before 8 p.m. on Sunday 5 September 1971, the curtain rose on Act 1, Scene 1, of the

NZR's latest masterpiece, the "Silver Star" express. People of all ages, as well as passengers, promenaded up and down, viewing through the double-glazed windows the delightful décor of the ten sleeping



On a trial daytime run to Auckland in August 1971, the two 1,425 h.p. "Da" class diesel-electric locomotives lead the new "Silver Star" sleeping-car express around the wide curve approaching the Mangaweka Tunnel from the south. In this illustration, the coaches in order from the locomotives comprise an "Fg" class power-van, two "Ar" class roomettes, two "At" twinettes, an "Ab" buffet car, and three more "At" class twinette cars. Out of the picture were three roomette cars and a spare buffet car, the latter being transferred back to Auckland.

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At the entrance to car 10 this writer was greeted, not by a steward in the uniform that he had been led to expect from the publicity about the train, but by a very helpful man in a lounge suit. This same gentleman showed the traveller to roomette 9 and departed to attend to other customers. A quick look around to appraise the traveller's quarters for the next 12½ hours revealed a delightful compartment tastefully decorated and furnished with many fittings for his comfort.

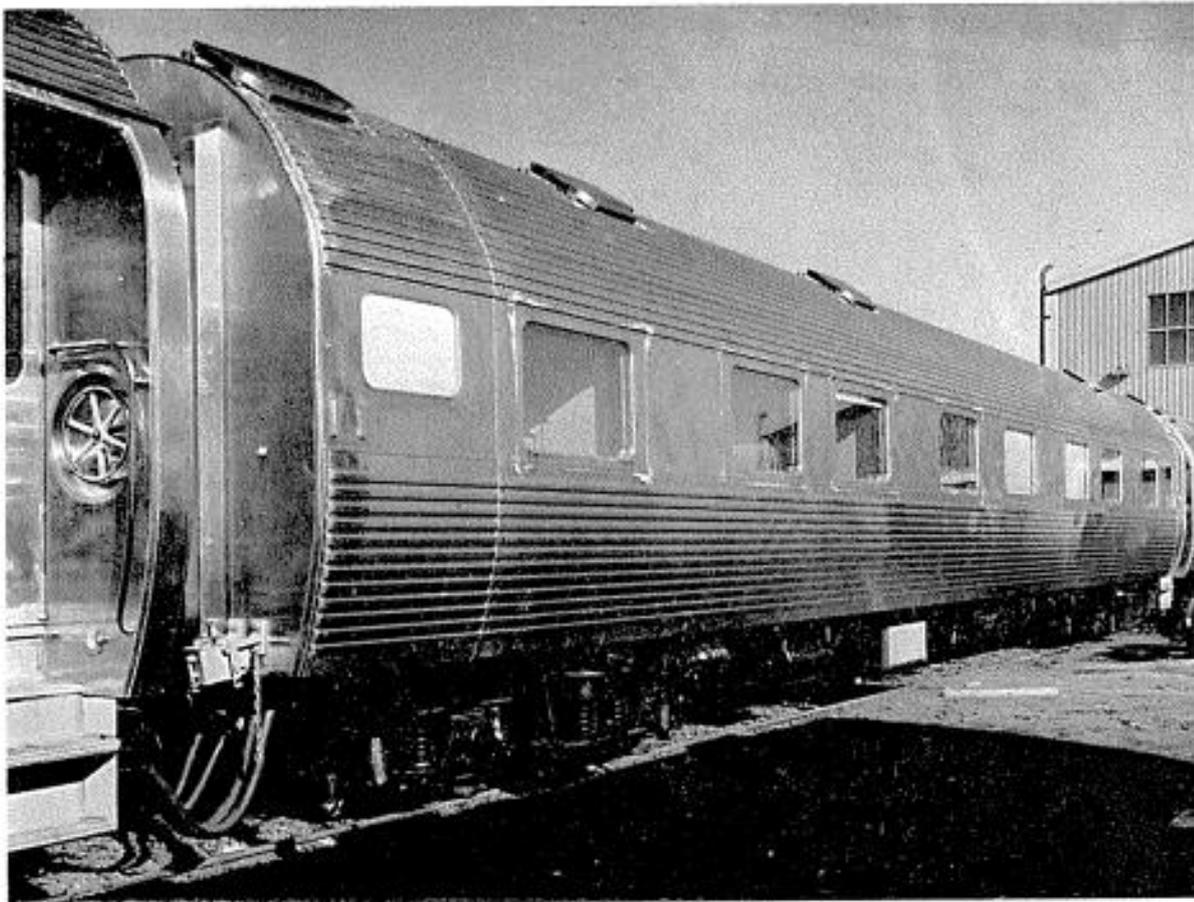
On the front end of the train two "Da" locomotives Nos. 1521 and 1527 were in charge. They had been washed, but were not as resplendent as the coaches. The start was hardly noticeable, and the absence of most noises save for the clicking of rail joints and the not unpleasant hum of the air-conditioning made this often rail-borne traveller wonder whether he was on the NZR or had lost his bearings.

Twenty minutes after departure the writer joined three friends for dinner in the buffet car, which at this stage had few patrons. Orders were placed with a most attentive steward for fruit juice, a sparkling wine, an omelette, and a "Silver Star Delight" for dessert, with coffee to follow. However, each course took some time to be served, and only one course could be ordered at a time. The meal was delightful, and as the evening progressed the car filled up and some people had to go away to come back later. The only complaints about the meal were the length of time it took to be served and the charge of 15 cents for a cup of really cold coffee. The amount of food served was really adequate, and ample for anyone travelling.

All told, from the time we sat down to the time the bill arrived, one hour and forty minutes had elapsed, and the frequency with which some passengers had to come to the buffet car to seek accommodation made this traveller wonder whether a ticket system for sittings in the buffet car could be put to good effect, and whether the long delays in being served could be overcome by a better kitchen service. The buffet car tended to be noisy, and it swayed quite a bit over the rougher sections of track between Auckland and Frankton.

Car 10's riding qualities were put to the test by some letter-writing, but once one got his "rail pen", or "sea legs" to use a

cars and the buffet car, and the works of the combined power coach, guard's van, baggage compartment, etc. One passenger was intrigued by two elderly gentlemen who, peering in through a roomette window, were overheard to observe that the toilet cabinet must be an airing cupboard!



Photograph: N.Z. Railways Publicity

One of the 61ft. "At" class twinette sleeping cars for the "Silver Star" Auckland-Wellington service. Sheathed with stainless steel on a corrosion-resistant steel frame, each of these 16-berth cars is fully air-conditioned.

nautical term, it was not too inconvenient. The letter-writer was somewhat dismayed to find that the vaunted late-fee posting boxes at both ends of the buffet car were closed, not only that evening, but also next morning. Inquiries from the steward who kindly and most obligingly brought tea to the writer's roomette very near to closing time were unable to elicit any information about those mail boxes.

And so to bed, but apart from the breakfast-cum-taxi-ordering card, and the one telling us what not to put down the toilet, there was no information, either from a "welcome aboard" leaflet or from the steward, on how the bed came down or how the heating system worked.¹ Native

1) It was regrettable that, owing to a printing production problem, supplies of a colourful "Welcome Aboard" booklet were not available for the inaugural commercial runs. They were available, however, a few days later.

ingenuity came to the rescue, fortunately, and in no time this first-night passenger was tucked up in bed, adding to his comfort with that second pillow so thoughtfully stored in the wardrobe. But he woke after Taihape feeling cold, so turned down a switch marked "heater" and there was no explosion, a consequence feared by many who are reluctant to touch a switch they know nothing about.

To beat the rush, a 6.30 a.m. shower was most enjoyable, and the steward offered a breakfast at this unearthly hour only to have it respectfully declined. A most relaxing and satisfactory breakfast of fruit juice, preserves, cornflakes, toast and tea, however, was had in bed as the Manawatu countryside slipped by towards the final act, which was climaxed by our arrival in Wellington four minutes ahead of time.

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"SILVER STAR"

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The absence of a leaflet on the train's services and facilities was regrettable, and left the customer disappointed. But all in all, there is just no comparison between the sleeper service on this premier train and that offered in the sleeping cars of its predecessor the "Night Limited" or other Main Trunk express trains; and it cost only two dollars more. New Zealand Railways are to be commended most highly for the bold and imaginative move they have made in putting this service on. Let's have more of these trains.