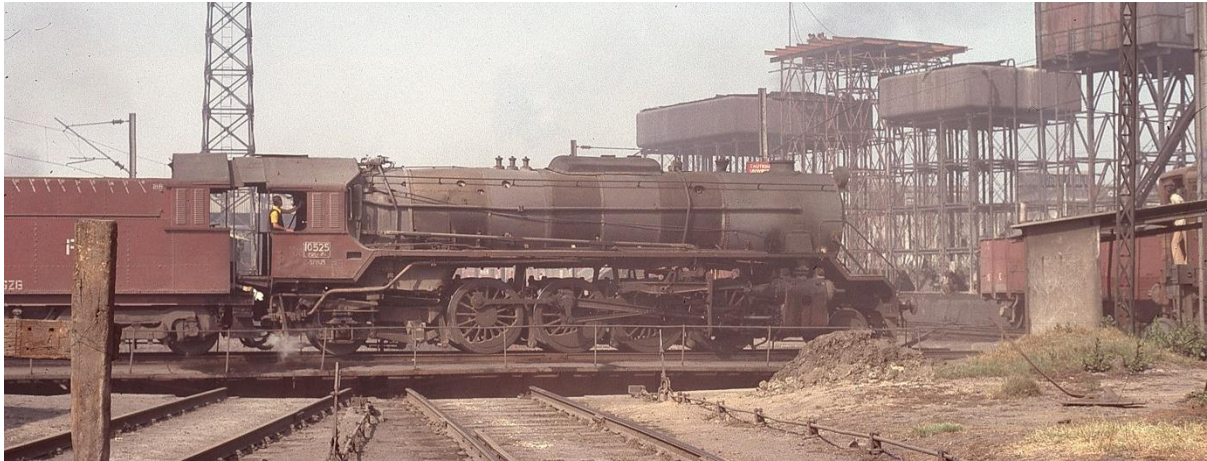


Commuting on the Fart Express

Shôn Ellerton, October 28, 2020

I find commuting by train to be free of stress so long as I avoid having to share a carriage with any of three other specific commuters.



The disposition of having a very sensitive nose is a serious one, especially if one is a regular user of public transport, such as I am.

I enjoy my daily forty-minute commute by train into central Adelaide. The train meanders high up on the hillside following the beautiful shoreline of St Vincent's Gulf to then descend through the leafy suburbs of Brighton, Marion and Clarence Park before passing through the parklands surrounding the central business district to then arrive at the terminus.

The walk to the station early in the morning is always pleasant apart from the occasional hot dry dusty north wind which can happen during the height of the summer. The air is fresh. The smell of garden roses, pine and eucalypt trees mingles with the coastal breeze. The dawn chorus of the many early birds native to Australia wake up waiting to catch that early worm, especially that of the boisterous Australian Magpie, a bird that sounds remarkably like a mobile phone ringtone when ringtones were all the fashion more than a decade ago. Honeyeaters and other birds of whose name I cannot remember are aggressively defending their trees feeding on flowers and picking off insects whilst hanging off the high-voltage wire that feeds the electric trains. The magpies, having little fear of proximity from us humans, stare belligerently at us while we pass possibly expecting us to respond back with an answer to their musical question. "Yes, you're a noisy little critter, aren't you?", "Yes, yes, I'm minding my own business. Can I pass please, or do I need to give you a toll?", all the sort of

questions some people may ask their Siamese cats in an all-out human-to-cat conversation.

However, there is a bit of a minefield to watch out for if you've got the nose of a bloodhound. Actually, there are three 'mines' in the guise of three other regular commuters who take the same train journey to the city. Being fortunate of having a train service which is frequent, I have the choice of around three to four trains, some of which are express and others stopping at different stations. Each train has three carriages, so that gives me a total choice, theoretically, of nine to twelve carriages.

Now the trick here is to avoid having to share a carriage with *any* of these three people. The tricky thing is this. All three have the same random propensity to choose a train or carriage at will, which discounts the tactic of making sure the right train or carriage is chosen. The worst-case scenario is the situation where all three share the same train and having one occupying each carriage. This has not happened to me yet.

Once I get to my platform waiting for the train, I keep my eyes peeled on the overhead bridge from the carpark to the platform. I keep a lookout in case any of these three people are coming my way so I can formulate a plan to move to a part of the train in which, in no way, would I be able to smell them.

Now let me explain in more detail about these three commuters; our walking 'mines' if you will. There is a man, usually in a light-blue shirt, who possesses the strongest smell of soap you can possibly imagine. Now there's nothing particularly wrong with soap--unless you're a Glaswegian (joke)—but the smell is so strong, it almost burns the back of your nose within tens of metres from him. There is a woman of a stumpy sort of build whose perfume is so pervasively strong that any birdlife nearby flies immediately away for fear of asphyxiation, leaving the place eerily silent where once birdsong was gay and merry. I am not exaggerating either, because anyone standing near this woman starts to move slyly away. Not too fast, because that would be seen as suspicious and what most people do not want to be accused of is being suspicious. I planned well ahead of my advanced placement on the platform thereby removing any suspicion on my part.

There is a third person which I have not mentioned, of whose emanating odours are decidedly organic. This guy is a little bit sneaky, not unlike the little emissions that arise from his person on the journey to the city, insofar that he

can spring from a variety of locations. He obviously drives to the train because he chooses a mix of stations depending on his mood if I was to predetermine a guess. If I don't see him trundling down my platform, there is a possibility that he might already be sitting in the carriage waiting with gleeful intent for me to enter unawares of being subjected to the torture of a well-planned gas attack. A man of diminutive size and of non-remarkable appearance, it is quite easy to make the error of deeming it safe to be in the carriage. Should he have released an odious cloud *beforehand*, it would be sufficiently easy to assume that he is already there thus making the plan of moving down to the next carriage an easy decision to make. However, I suspect that he conceals a sense of achievement when he refrains from releasing gas until *after* I settle down comfortably in my seat. And believe me, when the odour hits. It hits hard as if, to quote a friend of mine, '*as if something crawled in there and died*'. It is only when I turn around and spot the little man directly two seats behind who deliberately lifts his book he is reading just a little higher so that I can only spot his eyes. Guilty eyes at that!

Having sat down comfortably, I now perform the art of stealthily moving to another part of the train. I get up and approach the man releasing these putrid farts and explain to him in a firm and authoritarian voice, "Dude! You really need to change your diet because those silent and deadly little numbers you're letting out is really nasty!". In reality, I didn't say that, although I really wanted to. Therefore, I had to escape. I am quite certain that nobody is noticing my escape plan nor really cares, but out of deference, I make my way to the next carriage hoping that none of the other two are occupying them.

To finish off this bit of light-heartedness, I enjoy my train trips so long as I pay close attention to these 'stench mines'. As for ranking them from bad to worse, I place the soap man at number three, the fart man at number two (an appropriate number I dare say), and the perfume woman at number one, which I consider a health hazard because of the lack of oxygen being displaced by ethanol fumes. In all honesty, cigarette smoke is preferable which may explain why one never had to worry about the smell of stale beer and farts in pubs or bars in the olden days. Perhaps, if all three were to sit together in the same carriage, they would cancel each other out!

*Note. The photo at the header is from one of my father's travels to India during 1978. Steam locomotives were certainly smelly, especially those that used low-grade sulphurous coal.