



Vintage Baggage Car Will Supply Trains With Steady and Plentiful Electric Power

Former Santa Fe baggage car No. 1244 arrived in ASTA's Cedar Park Yard in late July as not only an historic relic of the head-end cars that once led America's passenger trains, but as an essential link in ASTA's plan to provide reliable and plentiful electrical power to its excursion trains.

When 1244 goes into active service, it will be carrying a 450-kilowatt Cummins diesel generator easily capable of powering an entire train, most importantly its heating and air-conditioning systems.

Climate control is essential on a train such as ASTA's in which all the cars are closed-window postwar equipment, and the new power car will replace a set of generators that have been stretched to the limit in keeping the train cool in summer, warm in winter and cheerfully lit.

The baggage car and the new generator were largely financed by grants from the Burdine Johnson Foundation and Pedernales Electric Co-op Community Grants, and another \$45,000 required to make the car and generator ready for service was raised in a successful ASTA GoFundMe campaign.

1244 will be a good-looking fit with ASTA's other equipment, having been built for the Santa Fe by Budd in 1953. The car later ran in Amtrak service.

For a long time, each ASTA car had its own generator, until 2011, when a 150-kilowatt unit was installed under the lounge car *Maurice Beckham* capable of powering that car and five others. Additional cars necessarily have their own generators, but the load on the *Beckham's* "head-end-power" unit was almost at full capacity.

The new generator will power the entire train at a much more comfortable 80 per cent of capacity.

The new baggage car is still being overhauled with a reinforced floor, sound baffling, an air-flow system and a muffler, radiator and fuel tank for the generator. General Superintendent Chris Hoff is leading the work with a dedicated team of mechanical volunteers.

The hard-working *Beckham* generator is being repaired and fit for service until the new power car can be put on line, and in the meantime power is being supplied by a rented generator chained to a flatcar that rides along with the train.



ASTA mechanical volunteer Bennie Kirk in a doorway of newly acquired baggage car 1244, being overhauled to carry the new 450-kilowatt generator for train power. (Marc Opperman photo)

Second 'Circus of Wonders' Nov. 20 Will Be a Safe, Fun Way to Support ASTA

ASTA's premier fundraising event, the "Circus of Wonders," will return Nov. 20 after a two-year hiatus dictated by pandemic concerns.

This year's event will be held at the Georgetown Sheraton Hotel, but planners are making every effort to make the fun available to those who are not comfortable with an in-person gathering.

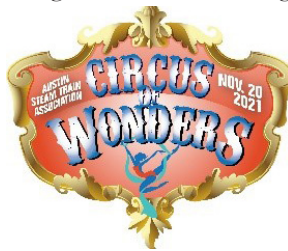
ASTA's initial "Circus of Wonders" in the fall of 2019 netted the organization \$72,000 for its historic-preservation work, and organizers this year are looking to raise \$100,000.

In addition to raising funds

for ASTA's historical rail-preservation work, once again the event will also benefit Leander ISD with scholarships for students in its Culinary Arts and Hospitality programs.

Chairing the event are ASTA Directors Lynda Rife and Nikelle Meade, both with wide experience in non-profit fundraising.

In deference to ongoing pandemic concerns, the Circus will be live-streamed the night of the event, and online bidding will be available on the wide array of items anticipated for the silent auction.



Turn to "Circus," Page 4.

Thanks to our generous friends!

(Donations from February through August, 2021. If we have left anyone off, please accept our apologies and contact us at director@austinsteamin.org so we can make sure we recognize you in our next edition.)

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the City of Cedar Park and Cedar
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Passengers Choosing a Hill Country Train Ride For an Experience That's Fun...and Safe

As Central Texans and visitors have begun to venture out of pandemic-enforced isolation over the spring and summer months, ASTA's ridership has been booming, offering the public a fun and relaxing excursion experience while doing everything possible to keep the train environment safe.

"I would characterize 2021 sales as stellar and record-breaking," said ASTA Marketing Director Zena Vaughn. "We are meeting or exceeding 2019 (pre-pandemic) sales numbers."

"Keys to our success this year," she said, "have been the *Hill Country Flyer*, *Sunset Express* and *Wedding Oak Wine Train*. Overall, we are in a sales surplus, and we expect the rest of the year to follow."

Of course, with the uncertainties of the ongoing pandemic, ASTA's precautions continue in full force, including the federally-required wearing of masks on board the train itself, attention to

physical distancing, frequent sanitizing of touch surfaces in the train, and changes in the packaging of food and beverages.

Zena reported that one two-train weekend in March brought in more than \$16,000 in revenue, including the best-selling single train ride in a year.

April, she said, was another record-breaking month, beating April 2019 by \$10,000, including the biggest passenger load (337) since before Covid restrictions.

May sales, totaling more than \$69,000, made it the highest-earning May in six years. July also broke records, being the best July for sales since 2017.

"Of course, we all hope we are working our way out of the pandemic," said ASTA Chairman Ben Sargent, "but in the meantime, our railroad will be a place where people can still enjoy memorable family-fun recreation in as safe a situation as possible."

New Recruits Turning Out in Healthy Numbers To Join ASTA's Family of Railroaders

As an excursion railroad with the rare distinction of an all-volunteer work force operating its trains, the A&TC depends on having new hands come aboard on a regular basis.

ASTA Volunteer Coordinator Erin Hoff has stepped up those efforts this year, and an impressive number of new faces have been appearing on the trains.

She has been holding vol-

unteer-orientation sessions onboard the trains once a month, and has been averaging five new volunteers per class.

The onboard sessions, in which new recruits hear about the history and operations of the railroad, are the first step toward signing new volunteers up for their first shifts.

The new folks shadow an onboard-service volunteer



Burnet's Wedding Oak Winery Entertaining 'Em by the Trainload

Unique among Central Texas' many wineries, Burnet's Wedding Oak Winery has its own special way of reaching out to its customers, bringing them to town aboard ASTA's *Wedding Oak Wine Trains*.

Passengers ride from Cedar Park to Burnet while enjoying wine tasting and intimate talk with the Wedding Oak staff. On arrival in Burnet, they spend a two-hour layover at the winery, located in the beautifully restored 1888 Badger Building on the courthouse square. There they can purchase food and wine before the relaxing two-hour ride back to Cedar Park in the afternoon.

On days the *Wine Train* runs, it departs Cedar Park at 10 a.m. and returns at 4 p.m. Ticket price includes a tasting flight of five wines and table snacks, and the train is just for those 21 and older.

To date, six wine trains have made the trip, and the next trains are scheduled for September and October. (ASTA plans to run the trains monthly except in the busy Christmas season.)

Wedding Oak owner Mike McHenry first approached ASTA with the idea for the train. The winery opened in September, 2019, and the first *Wine Train* set out for Burnet the following January.

for four runs before being eligible to work on their own as a car attendant.

While many enjoy staying in onboard service, those who have an interest in operating positions can apply for the student-brakeman program, an intensive round of classes, study and student runs that can eventually lead to promotions to brakemen, conductors and engineers.

And while ASTA's new vol-

unteers are from a wide variety of ages and backgrounds, the association is particularly pleased that an encouraging number coming into the program are college-age and younger. (Minimum age for onboard service is 14; for operating positions, 18.)

Anyone interested in starting as a volunteer can find the application online at <https://www.austinsteamtrain.org/about-asta/volunteer/>

Circus... (from Page 1)

Sponsorships for the event are available at these levels:

Big Top... \$10,000.

Magician... \$7,500.

Tightrope... \$5,000.

Aerialist... \$2,000.

Each level of sponsorship includes varying levels of tables at the event, verbal and printed recognition of sponsors and packages of complimentary train tickets.

Individual tickets to the 2021 Circus will be \$100.

Featured at the affair will be circus-themed entertainment provided by Epic Entertainment, and an ample silent auction will be offered with many intriguing items, both railroad-related and otherwise.

Anyone interested in tickets or sponsorships should contact director@austin-steamtrain.org.

History Corner

Head-End Cars an Enduring Fixture on Passenger Trains

Addition of former Santa Fe baggage car 1244 to ASTA's trains will add a note of historic authenticity, as "head-end cars" were always (and still are) an essential element in a passenger train's makeup.

First to appear in American trains were baggage cars, which U.S. railroads began to offer as early as 1833. (European lines, oddly enough, did not offer this amenity until many years later.) As with checked airline luggage, passengers could have anything too bulky to carry with them placed in the baggage car and retrieve it on arrival with a baggage tag or check.

On more lightly traveled lines, combination cars or



Volunteers Bennie Kirk, Mark Staerkel and Lukas Opperman at work on refurbishing baggage car 1244's interior for its new life as a power car for ASTA's trains. (Marc Opperman photo.)

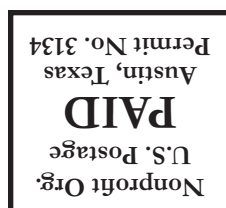
"combines" were used, half the car carrying passengers and the other half being a baggage compartment.

And of course, the aristocracy of head-end cars was the railway post office car, manned by postal clerks who sorted the mail enroute. At its height, the system car-

ried most of the nation's mail in 9,000 trains over 200,000 route miles.

Sometimes other cars were in the mix--emigrant cars, express cars etc.--but American trains have no more enduring tradition than including head-end equipment as represented by our 1244.

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