

For the Love of a Good Map

By Rich Sampson

At *RAIL Magazine*, we love maps. Few objects or illustrations tell the story of a passenger rail service like a good map. More than just a collection of colored lines and station markers, rail maps help forge the system's identity – where the trains are going and how they get there. As a matter of style, we always try to include a map of any rail network or operation we profile.

We also like books about rail maps. In past editions of *RAIL*, we reviewed Richard C. Carpenter's outstanding *A Railroad Atlas of the United States in 1946* series. And, more recently, we shared our thoughts on Mark Ovenden's trendy *Transit Maps of the World*. Now, Ovenden has returned with his sophomore rail maps effort, *Railway Maps of the World* (Viking/Penguin, 2011).

As the title suggests, Ovenden has focused his second collection on intercity passenger rail maps from across the planet and throughout railroad history. And what Ovenden has assembled is truly fascinating, perhaps even moreso than his lineup of subway maps. What sets intercity rail maps apart from their rail transit counterparts is the wonder of long-distance travel, which is generally beyond the reach of subways, streetcars and commuter trains. Here you'll find illustrations of peasant farmers amid groves of peach trees, a lion surveying the expanse of Uganda and a sailor straddling the shores of the Atlantic.

Sure, you'll find your typical straight-line maps of the American railroad baron networks of the

roaring 20s and the clockwork precision of Switzerland's national rail grid. But what should raise the goosebumps for any rail lover is the two-page spread dedicated to the world's most famous passenger train – *The Orient Express* – with a British Buckingham guard paired with a Turkish sentry on one map, and another highlighting the allure of both a Parisian streetscape and a Constantinople religious edifice. Elsewhere, a colorful mural depicts the rail line linking Japan's Chugoku-Shikoku region in the 1950s, a mountie patrolling the dominion of the western spread of the Canadian Pacific Railway and France's near-giddy anticipation of its *TGV* high-speed system in the late 1970s.

In an era where long-distance travel is rote for many people, the sense of awe that once accompanied great journeys has largely vanished. Can a trans-oceanic trip from San Francisco to Sydney be any less inspiring when dubbed with the bureaucratic-sounding designation of Flight 1088? In this context, Ovenden's great success with *Railway Maps of the World* is recapturing that amazing spirit of expedition first made possible by the world's railroads, when named trains like the *Flying Scotsman*, *Trans-Siberian* and *20th Century Limited* implied fantastic trips to exotic destinations with the finest levels of service. These maps will never recreate those lost hallmarks of another age. But they can remind us what once was possible, and may be again. 

