

State Fair train makes historic first run today: Colorado State Fair Express carrying passengers to Pueblo for a day at the Fair.

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Aug. 25--Historic will be the buzzword today when the Colorado State Fair Express rolls into Pueblo's Union Depot, carrying more than 300 passengers to spend a day at the Fair.

Old-fashioned fanfare will greet the Fair-bound contingent, which boarded the special train bright and early this morning at the historic Union Station in Denver for an expected four hour-plus ride on the rails.

It marks the first time a passenger train has operated south of Denver since 1997. The 15-car train is comprised of cars from historic train lines that traveled the U.S. from 1944-59. The train will be powered by Steam Locomotive No. 844, a high-speed passenger engine in its day, and the last steam locomotive built for Union Pacific Railroad.

The pomp at Pueblo's own historic Union Depot will feature music played by the Pride City Band and a host of local dignitaries awaiting the train's arrival.

The train is scheduled to arrive at about noon and will return to Denver at 6 p.m. It will travel the BNSF railway track to Pueblo and return on the Union Pacific Railroad.

"This is so unique and anytime we can get this type of publicity, it is very positive for the community," Pueblo Chamber of Commerce Director Rod Slyhoff said of the Express' inaugural run.

"The steam engine they are using at one time was world's largest steam engine. It is amazing that it's coming into historic Pueblo."

Slyhoff said the Pride City Band, which will march earlier in the State Fair Parade, will be at Union Depot awaiting the train.

"We'll have the red carpet rolled out. Chamber ambassadors will be their to greet them. We'll treat them like VIPs," Slyhoff said.

The train passengers then will be bused to the State Fairgrounds, where they will spend the day.

State Fair Manager Chris Wiseman said the Colorado State Fair Express is a great way for people from the Denver area not only to see the Fair, but experience a scenic trip across Colorado.

"Passengers get to ride on one of the largest steam locomotives in the world on their way to visit everything from a live stingray exhibit to a 4-H Trail Class show," Wiseman said. "The Colorado State Fair is built on a foundation of agriculture and the train is a reminiscent of days gone by. I think that's a symbiotic relationship.

"The Colorado State Fair Express does give the Fair great exposure in the Denver area and this is an exciting new aspect that will hopefully draw more attention and fans to Pueblo."

STATE FAIR EXPRESS

Here is a capsule look at some of the historic cars comprising the Express:

* Steam Locomotive No. 844 is the last steam locomotive built for Union Pacific Railroad. It was delivered in 1944. A high-speed passenger engine, it pulled widely known cars.

The engine has run hundreds of thousands of miles as Union Pacific's ambassador of good will. It has made appearances at Expo '74 in Spokane, Wash., the 1981 opening of the California State Railroad Museum in Sacramento, the 1984 World's Fair in New Orleans and the 50th anniversary celebration of Los Angeles Union Station in 1989.

Hailed as Union Pacific's "Living Legend," the engine is widely known among railroad enthusiasts for its excursion runs, especially over Union Pacific's fabled crossing of Sherman Hill between Cheyenne and Laramie, Wyo.

* The Columbine railcar was built in 1955 as a dome coach. The columbine is the state flower of Colorado. The train's limousine lounge car, the Colorado Club, had a special color scheme. The car featured buffet soda fountain service, as well as standard valet features. The observation platform was enclosed and called a solarium. In the dining car, a special china pattern was in use.

* The Portland Rose was built by American Car & Foundry in 1954 as a 44-seat coach. This car featured a radio, soda fountain, maid service, hairdresser, barber, valet and bath. The rose was the decorative motif for this train.

* The Colorado Eagle was built by American Car & Foundry in 1955 as a dome diner. The first dome coaches actually were acquired by Missouri Pacific in 1948, and assigned to the Colorado

Eagle. The train consisted of a dome coach, three sleepers, a flat coach, grill coach and a diner lounge. It was taken out of service in April 1966.

* The Council Bluffs originally was built as a baggage car for Union Pacific. Details of its early history are not available. It was converted for use as a baggage recreation car for a special train sent to the U.S. political conventions in 2000.

* The Sherman Hill was built in 1961 as a railroad post office. It was converted into a maintenance car in 1968. The car became part of the Heritage Passenger Car Fleet in 1992, and was converted into the concession car, Sherman Hill, that same year.

Sherman Hill stretches from Cheyenne to Laramie, Wyo. The original line was constructed through Sherman, Wyo., in 1868. It was the highest point on the transcontinental railroad at 8,247 feet above sea level. Rail enthusiasts always have considered Sherman Hill a premier location to watch and photograph trains.

* In 1896, the Missouri Kansas & Texas Railroad announced the inauguration of the Katy Flyer, with service between St. Louis and southwest Texas. By 1905, "The Fast Train to St. Louis" raced between Galveston, Texas, and St. Louis in about 37 hours.

The passenger car Katy Flyer was built in 1954 as a 44-seat coach. By then, the rail service was on a downward slide and, by 1961, the train name disappeared.

* The City of Los Angeles was built in 1949 by American Car & Foundry as a 48-seat diner. The car still retains its original configuration.

Many of Hollywood's most widely known stars traveled on the City of Los Angeles. The train remained in service until 1971, when Amtrak took over most of the nation's public passenger train business.

* The Missouri River Eagle was built in 1958 as a dome coach. In 1993, it was named the Missouri River Eagle, after a Missouri Pacific Railroad passenger train.

The car was converted to a dome diner in the mid-1980s by Transico, an excursion train operator. Union Pacific repurchased the car in the early 1990s.

One of the features of these passenger cars was the wide, double-pane picture windows, which provided passengers with a better view, new in railroad coach construction. Air conditioning, indirect fluorescent lighting and carpeting made the Eagle a most attractive symbol of deluxe railroad travel.

* Walter Dean was built in 1955 as a dome lounge.

Walter Dean had begun his service with Union Pacific in 1942 as a dining car waiter on the Challenger. At that time, the dining car crew slept in the dining cars and kept mattresses in a hole under the floor.

When Dean moved into the lounge car on the City of Los Angeles as attendant, he was responsible for stocking and maintaining the bar and providing service to the passengers. His clientele included such stars as Mickey Rooney, Judy Garland and Frank Sinatra, who traveled on the City of Los Angeles. Dean also served President Harry Truman during his Whistle Stop campaign of 1948.

When passenger service ended in 1971, Dean remained with Union Pacific, serving special guests and staff on business car trips that Union Pacific continues to operate for railroad, corporate and community relations events. He died in Omaha, Neb., in 1999.

ON THE NET

Steam Locomotive No. 844: <http://www.uprr.com/aboutup/excurs/up844.shtml>

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