

Flying coach

I just finished reading a book about stagecoaches and was amazed at how difficult it was to get from one end of the country to the other in one of these contraptions.

Stories of cramped seating, terrible food (when it was available), long delays and being held up for all your money filled every page. Then it dawned on me, doesn't that sound like air travel today?

In many ways traveling by stagecoach seems preferable to flying commercial airlines. At least back then you didn't have to be groped by men in plastic gloves prior to takeoff.

You didn't have to watch bad movies or lose your luggage either. And you got the same kind of service: exactly none! And I'd imagine if you were headed for a crash it was easier to stop a team of horses than a jet headed down faster than Los Angeles real estate prices.

In 1913 the trip from St. Joe to California took three weeks by stagecoach. Granted that's slower than a jet, but I'd rather do that than be stranded on the tarmac for six and eight hours with nothing to eat in a plane that smelled like a septic tank.

At least on the stagecoach you could get out and stretch your legs. If you were to experience "mechanical problems," wouldn't you rather it be the harness on a horse as opposed to the loss of a couple engines that are keeping your pressurized aluminum coffin airborne? And wouldn't you rather be held up by Black Bart the unarmed poet than have your plane flown into a building by a terrorist?

They say you could buy a Concorde stagecoach for \$1,200-\$1,500 a hundred years ago, which is about what a typical airline ticket costs if you have to change it at the last minute.

Mark Twain called the stagecoach “a great swinging and swaying thing.” If that doesn’t describe air travel I don’t know what does.

On the Concorde stagecoach 13 cow hides were used to make the suspension, and the seats were upholstered in the finest leather. They also did not do double duty as “flotation devices.” Granted, both the stagecoach and the jet feel like you’re riding a bucking horse and you felt beaten up like an empty piñata when you got off, but at least there was a good chance your luggage got there when you did.

In the book I read about stagecoaches, there was a reprint of an article published in the Omaha Herald in 1877 called “Stagecoach Etiquette.”

We are in dire need of a similar article today on airline etiquette. One of the rules was: “Spit on the leeward side of the coach. If you have anything to take in a bottle pass it around; a man who drinks by himself in such a case is lost to all human feeling.” See what I mean? Wouldn’t that be better than five dollar drinks?

“Don’t swear, nor lop over on your neighbor when sleeping,” read the rules. To which I would add, especially if you weigh over 300 pounds and are wearing a sweaty tank top. I would also like to see the matter cleared up regarding use of the arm rest if you are sitting in the middle seat. And while we’re on the topic, there should be no switching of seats! I’m not giving up my aisle seat just so you can sit and argue with your girlfriend.

The Concorde Stage held nine passengers but you could put another seven on the roof. (Try doing that on a Boeing 737!) It also said that the best seat was the one furthest up, the one next to the driver. I suppose that’s how First Class seating got started in airplanes. But the way I figure it, you’re going to hit the ground first when we crash.

If the horses ran away with a stagecoach, nine times out of 10 you’d get hurt if you jumped off, but I guarantee that you’ll be hurt 10 times out of 10 getting off an airliner while it’s moving at full speed. Another rule of the stagecoach was that if the driver asked you to get off and walk, you did it. If that happens on a commercial jet I’d recommend you NOT do it.

It's the Pitts

Written by Lee Pitts

Instead, I'd lock myself in the lavatory the rest of the trip to keep from getting off. The pilot won't find you there to ask you to leave, and you'll have a lot more leg room than in coach.

Yes, there is much in common with riding on a jet and a stagecoach as illustrated by the last rule of stagecoach etiquette: "Don't imagine for a moment you are going on a picnic; expect annoyance, discomfort and some hardships."