

PAINS ON TRAINS

A COMMUTER'S GUIDE TO THE 50 MOST IRRITATING TRAVEL COMPANIONS



ANDREW HOLMES AND **MATTHEW REEVES**



CAPSTONE

PAINS ON TRAINS

FOR EMBATTLED COMMUTERS EVERYWHERE...

PAINS ON TRAINS

A COMMUTER'S GUIDE TO THE 50 MOST IRRITATING TRAVEL COMPANIONS



ANDREW HOLMES AND **MATTHEW REEVES**



CAPSTONE

Copyright © Andrew Holmes and Matthew Reeves 2003

The rights of Andrew Holmes and Matthew Reeves to be identified as the authors of this work have been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988

First published 2003 by

Capstone Publishing Limited (A Wiley Company)

The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester,

West Sussex PO19 8SQ, United Kingdom

e-mail: info@wiley-capstone.co.uk

www.capstoneideas.com

All rights reserved. Except for the quotation of short passages for the purposes of criticism and review, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

CIP catalogue records for this book are available from the British Library and the US Library of Congress

ISBN 1-84112-564-4

Designed and typeset by Baseline, Oxford, UK

Printed and bound by T.J. International

This book is printed on acid-free paper

Substantial discounts on bulk quantities of Capstone books are available to corporations, professional associations and other organisations.

Please contact Capstone for more details on +44 (0)1865 798 623 or (fax) +44 (0)1865 240 941
or (e-mail) info@wiley-capstone.co.uk

Contents

Preface	6	THE MAMMOTH	112
Acknowledgements	8	THE MOBILE PHONER	116
TRIAL BY COMMUTING	10	THE NEW WORKER	120
THE BEGGAR	16	THE NIGHT CLUBBERS	124
THE BELLIGERENT	20	THE NOSE PICKER	128
THE BORN IN A STABLE	24	THE NUTTER	132
THE BROADSHEET	28	THE OVER YOUR SHOULDER	136
THE CITY BOY	32	THE PERVERT	140
THE CLIQUE	36	THE PHANTOM FARTER	144
THE CREATIVE	40	THE RESERVIST	148
THE DEADBEAT	44	THE RITUALIST	152
THE DEATH BREATH	48	THE SARDINE PACKER	156
THE DOUBLE SEATER	52	THE SLEEPER	160
THE DRUNK	56	THE SOCIAL CLIMBER	164
THE ENGAGER	60	THE SPINSTER	168
THE ENQUIRER	64	THE STARER	172
THE FAMILY	68	THE STINKER	176
THE FAST FOODER	72	THE STRETCHER	180
THE FLAMBOYANT GROIN	76	THE TERRITORIALIST	184
THE GADGET	80	THE TEXTER	188
THE GAGGLE	84	THE TOFF	192
THE GROUP	88	THE TRAIN TIMER	196
THE HERO	92	THE TRAVELLER	200
THE HIGH-FLIER	96	THE VOMITER	204
THE LATE STARTER	100	THE WHEELED CASER	108
THE LOVERS	104	THE YOUTH	212
THE MAKE UP ARTIST	108	Afterword	216

Preface

It was one of those rare days. Work had been enjoyable and I was in a good mood. That morning I had spent time busying myself with clients and had even managed to steal myself some time to discuss my latest ideas with my publisher. I got to the station in plenty of time, expecting to unwind on the commute home. Pointless, I know, but I can dream. Not surprisingly the train was late, untidy and filled with the usual mixture of people with whom I would not choose to spend any time, let alone a fifty-minute train journey. I settled in my seat, thumbed to my place in my book and began reading.

Not long into the journey, it started. The guy opposite on his mobile, addressing the entire carriage. "I can't believe it! The Evening Standard have just published my article! It's fantastic, I'm so pleased!" Okay, I thought, I'll cut the guy some slack, as having a piece in the evening newspaper might be the apogee of his writing career. Perhaps he was on the phone to his wicked, self-centred mother whom he wanted to impress, or maybe his boyfriend. I didn't know. To be frank, I didn't care. But it didn't stop. No sooner was one call finished than the next began, repeating the same words over and over again (had he been rehearsing in the toilet all day?). Now, either the chap concerned had plenty of friends, or he was calling people randomly to demonstrate to the rest of us how literary he was. And I do bow to his achievement, you understand. It's not every day you have something published in the Standard. Yet I would wager on the second option. His voice was so loud. Was that blood trickling from the ears of his neighbour? Everyone in the carriage had to

endure his attempts to impress – surely there was no other reason for so much noise over such a trivial event.

I took time to look at him. Couldn't help it really, given the spectacle he was making of himself. He was what I call a Creative (you'll see more of him later), all in black: black polo neck, black jacket, a pair of black shades in his top pocket on this dark winter evening (but maybe he had an eye complaint). And, like this genre of people, his jacket showed off his dandruff; a light smattering, but enough to show that he had a problem. I was not alone in my contempt. Another traveller leant towards me and remarked "What a tosser!" I bonded with a suitable expletive. Although our exchange had been sufficiently vocal for the Creative to overhear, it made not a jot of difference, as he continued bellowing his wonderful news for the entire train journey.

But every cloud has a silver lining. It struck me that commuting life is made more miserable by some of the characters who travel on the trains. On studying my fellow commuters more closely, I noticed there were many different types of annoying people, some more common than others, some certainly more irritating and some even amusing. Virtually everyone tolerates them and only rarely does anyone make a stand. Then revenge came to me, like a bolt from the blue. Pains on Trains, that's it! – fighting back on behalf of the embattled commuter who can derive some entertainment value at the expense of those who make a bad journey still worse. I would, of course, like to thank the clod who made this particular journey especially bad. Without his help I would still be gritting teeth and rolling my eyes. If only I could be bothered to find out his name...

Acknowledgements

Writing this book has been a real departure from the usual material I turn my hand to. All my other books to date have been on business subjects, scholarly and practical. Creating them involves input from a small number of key thinkers. This book has been very different. When I mentioned the concept to my friends, family, colleagues and anyone who would listen, their eyes lit up as they responded "Have you got the person who...they really annoy me!" and "Here's a story for this Pain". It was obvious I had hit a raw nerve and it seemed that everyone wanted to have their say. So I would like to thank the many people who added their input, including James McColl, George Stevenson, Linda Latham, Isambard Kingdom Brunel, Richard Hartley, Chris Frost, Michael Storrier, Linda Bowman, Dr. Beeching, Ken Wareham, Nick Birks, Phil Highe, Bart Smith, Martin Lloyd, Andy Wicks, Zoe George, successive governments who have underinvested in our railways, Andy Baggott, Peter Mussett, Donna Peters, William Huskisson (the first person to suffer from train travel), Godert van der Poel, Nigel Albon, Stephanie Hyner, Michael Campbell, Simon Viney and of course all the anonymous commuters who have unwittingly provided the role models of the Pains contained within this book.

I would like to pick out a few people for particular attention. First to Richard Burton at Capstone who believed the idea was a winner. Second to Philip Read who put me in contact with Matt Reeves, who has done such a fantastic job of capturing my perspectives on commuting life in such striking images. Thirdly to Nick Birks who was kind enough to read through my early manuscript and provide some very constructive comments. And finally to Sally, my wife, who although initially sceptical, recognised I had this type of book in me and added her usual critical and valuable input.

Trial by commuting

"Pains breach the accepted understanding that train travel should be a silent, contemplative pursuit; the bread slices that cushion the work sandwich."

– **Nick Birks**

Recent research into happiness has shown that we are at our least happy during the morning commute to work and not much happier coming home. This degree of unhappiness is, of course, closely followed by work itself so there may be some degree of correlation. According to the same research we are at our happiest when having sex. So the only way we can enjoy our commute is to have sex at the same time. And, as we shall see, some people do.

THE MORNING HUSTLE

The six o'clock alarm shocks you awake. It's a bleak Monday morning, and you have another great day at work ahead of you. Many of us will sigh at the prospect of scraping ourselves out of bed at such an ungodly hour and I do wonder just who would work, given the choice. Not many, I imagine. There are of course a happy few who see it as the pinnacle of self-actualisation, but most of us pursue our 'careers' through economic necessity, nothing more and nothing less. But this

book isn't about the joys, or otherwise of work, so let's move on. You've grabbed some breakfast, fed the children, rushed out of the door, and driven to the station (or been ferried there by a dutiful partner). It's time to get on the train. You make your way along the station platform to precisely the same place you did the day before, the day before that, and the day before that. In fact for the whole of your commuting life. It is said we are creatures of habit. If nothing else commuting reinforces this widely held view.

Depending on the time of your train, you may stand at different places along the platform. If it's the early train, perhaps you will stand at one end. If the later train, the other. Everyone has their spot. The next time you make your way to your chosen position, cast a glance across the people up and down the platform. They are the same ones you see every day. Each of them depressed, cold, dejected and generally pissed off to be standing, yet again, on the same bloody platform at the same bloody station. Groundhog Day has nothing on this. I don't know whether it's a blessing or a pity that no one speaks. They have been taking the same journey for years and still they do not acknowledge anyone around them, let alone talk to them. It's odd, given that we spend more time with these people than we do with our family and friends. They view each other with disdain and suspicion and in any case are probably too caught up in their own petty worlds of work; it's trivial and meaningless to be concerned about anyone else. My sister-in-law loves to play games with the platform lemmings (as she calls them). From time to time she will move from her usual platform position to another. This creates fear, uncertainty and doubt in minds of those left. "Does she know something we don't?" "Is this a shorter train than normal?" "Oh, bugger, does this mean I won't be getting a seat?" Everyone shifts uncomfortably from side to side, not knowing what to do. They think to themselves "If only someone else would make a move, then maybe I

could." They display true herd instincts. Usually of course there is nothing abnormal about the train, and if they had moved position, they would have lost their seat. The same is true when it is a rainy day. Everyone cowers under the safe haven of the covered platform and waits like runners on the starting block for the train to appear. No one dares to move, but as soon as one brave soul decides to go for it, everyone follows like sheep being rounded up by the sheepdog.

All of us stand impassively and apprehensively, hoping there will be enough seats. Standing for fifty minutes is not the best way to start your day, but it is a real prospect for most. As the train pulls in, knuckles whiten as heartbeats and blood pressure rise. Loins are girded for the scramble to come. Men and women jostle for an optimum position as near to the door as possible, whilst those at the back attempt to squirrel their way through to the front. If you have negotiated this nerve-racking process to secure a seat, you can draw breath ready to settle into your relaxing journey into work. Indeed it's time to get this book out and begin your now favourite pastime of Pain Spotting.

Having sat, or for those unlucky in the seat lottery, stood or squatted your way to your destination you now have to endure the long march to your final resting place – work. But even leaving the train and walking down the platform is a dangerous and at times infuriating affair. You have to contend with the Darters who move at a hundred miles an hour dashing between people. They are either genuinely excited by another day at the office or have a desperate need to empty their bowels. The Darters will bump you aside, oblivious to your presence. Then there are the congenial Smokers who light up as soon as their lungs are exposed to fresh air. You are caught in the blue cloud created when they pause to light up. As you try to move past, you get a final waft only to find there is another one in

front. And we shouldn't forget the Wheeled Caser (more of them later) trundling up the platform like an elderly lady with a shopping trolley. The wake they leave appears to be a prized island of tranquillity unclaimed by others until you get your feet caught by the case as it castors on its precarious way. By the size of some of these, they may well be used for some mysterious trade in dead bodies. But taking the kitchen sink to work makes them look important. And finally, although I could go on, there is the Zig Zagger who can't make up their mind which way they are going. Is it left, right, forwards or backwards? No one knows. Perhaps they are controlled remotely by an evil station attendant just to finish you off before the daily grind. No matter how you might try to anticipate them, they will thwart you at the last minute, blocking your escape route. Then once outside of the station, you contend with the beggars, buskers, canvassers and anyone else who thinks you are going to part with your well-earned cash. All of this infinite monotony is soul destroying and pointless. Clearly, for many of us, making it into the office is a Herculean task. But don't forget, you have to get home again.

THE EVENING DÉNOUEMENT

At the end of the day, when you have dealt with all the nightmares on your desk, had your ritual humiliation from the boss, motivated your staff and spent the vast majority of the time surfing the Internet, abusing the phone system, sending emails to your mates, and oh yes, doing some work, you have the joy of trying to get home. Just like the morning, you stand along with everyone else waiting like lemmings, heads upwards staring blankly at the indicator boards, hoping to find out when (or if) your train will depart. Then when it is time, you rush towards the ticket gates desperately hoping to get your seat. Pushing, shoving, kicking and sometimes punching your way first onto the platform and then onto the train.

Anything to get a double seat. Habit again takes over. Do you sit in the middle of the train so that you can be near the exit when you pull into your station, or do you walk to the end where you can get some peace and quiet and, most importantly, a double seat? But, don't worry, whatever you do you will have ample opportunity to continue Pain Spotting. Only when you reach the sanctuary of your home can you finally relax and recover ready for the next day.

USING THIS BOOK

This book, if you hadn't already figured it out, is all about those people who aggravate you on your daily commute. It designed in a way that allows you to spot your most hated commuter whilst at the same time expressing your own inner feelings in an accessible and light-hearted way. I am writing what you are thinking. Thus, in the same way that bird spotters identify the lesser spotted warbler, this book helps you to spot the Broadsheet, Engager and Family. But it goes beyond that, as it identifies how you can avoid them and seek your revenge if you are brave enough; not the sort of thing you find in the average bird spotting tome, unless you are armed with a shotgun. Each entry in Pain Spotting includes:

- The general characteristics of the Pain (including anecdotes and stories from fellow travellers)
- Their annoyance rating, which rates the Pain from 1 (limited annoyance) to 10 (extreme annoyance)
- Their rarity, which rates the Pain from 1 (exceptionally rare) to 10 (very common)
- Any seasonal variations, which will identify any seasonal changes to the Pain
- A range of avoidance/revenge strategies (with suitable escalation).

Long gone are the days when Jimmy Saville (for those of us old enough to remember him) would say with a cheerful voice "let the train take the strain". These days, it's "Let the train take the Pain". Read on and become one of the growing army of Pain Spotters. Maybe we'll meet at a Pain Spotting convention sometime soon.

Matt and I hope you enjoy this book. We are planning other volumes, including Pains on the Payroll and Pains in Public. The next two volumes will allow you to track how people can change from one Pain to another and build The Complete Guide to Pain Spotting, something you will cherish for decades to come. So if you would like to vote for and promote your favourite Pain at work or in public, then why not email Matt and I with your contributions and stories at pains_on@hotmail.com.

At the end of each entry I have also given you, the reader, an opportunity to record that you have spotted the Pain and add your own annoyance rating. Like any 'spotting' pastime, it has to be interactive, fun and have a sense of purpose to it. You might choose to swap entries with your friends and families and, God forbid, your fellow commuters. All you will need then is a brown anorak to feel right at home. You might also choose to wrap the book in brown paper to disguise your antics.

The Beggar...

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

Sure, we can all fall on hard times, and care in the community programmes mean more vulnerable people have to cope for themselves. But no one likes beggars. However watching peoples' behaviour when a Beggar works a carriage is always an absorbing experience. Most will do their utmost to avoid eye contact with them in the hope that they will be ignored. Fat chance. A few will actively engage the Beggar in direct conversation, quizzing them on their predicament and offering them some moral support and the odd piece of fruit. Unfortunately for the majority who attempt to evade the Beggar, they usually fail because the Beggar is an expert at grabbing peoples' attention. The Beggar is always filthy, you know the sort of thing, black hands, dirty face, probably skid marked pants and of course smelly. They often carry cans of Special Brew or cider and swig the drink as they stagger up and down the carriage asking for some spare change. They say this is for a cup of tea but by the look of them it is probably for their next fix of crack cocaine. It's no wonder everyone wants to avoid them. They usually make statements such as "I was in the last Gulf War" or "The Police have kicked me off the streets again. I can't understand it, why aren't they sorting out the drug dealers?" When it comes to securing money from the poor passengers, they adopt one of two strategies. First they will attempt to *entertain* you with a cacophony of crass music or singing. I have seen beggars using traffic cones as instruments, dressing up as animals and using old tins to amuse the commuters.



MINIP 7

On conclusion of their act, they walk around pushing their disgusting flesh into the faces of the cowering passengers in the hope of being paid for their efforts. Of course very few people oblige. Most say "I'm sorry, I haven't got any change," as they try to avoid their cash jingling in their pockets. Others look down at their crotch hoping to see something more interesting. A few of course will feel suitably embarrassed and pass the Beggar a few pence. And when this is not enough it is usually followed by some expletive like "Is that all, you F***ing tightwad!" Because the Beggar is, by and large, pretty unsuccessful they move along quite quickly and eventually into the adjoining carriage. This is usually followed by a collective sigh of relief. There are other variants of the Beggar which can be more sinister including the women with a baby, the unemployed foreigner, or the particularly menacing thug. I was told of one foreigner who was working the first class carriage of a busy train. When he came to a friend of mine he placed a card which said "I am an Croatian refugee and I need some money for some food" onto his laptop (he could, of course, speak no English). When my friend failed to oblige, he picked up the card and got of the train. Only when the doors had shut did my friend realise that the Beggar had taken his mobile phone as well. The Tube is a particularly good place to spot the Beggar mainly because it is metropolitan. The Tramp is a variant of the Beggar who, judging by the following story, should be avoided at all costs. A tramp got onto the Tube with an ice cream and sat between two well-dressed commuters, one male and the other female, and began to lick away at his cone. Both the man and the women eased themselves away from the tramp as much as they could as the smell was unbearable. Unfortunately, the tramp sneezed and streams of phlegm went everywhere, on the lady, the man and on the tramp and his ice cream. As if this wasn't bad enough the tramp carried on eating his ice cream even though it was now topped off with some rather large globules of snot. At least he didn't ask for any money.



ANNOYANCE RATING

8 – looking at the reaction from the commuters who end up being entertained by the

Beggar you can see that most are upset by their presence. I guess most of this stems from the abhorrence that someone could exist in such an appalling state and that this was being pushed into their faces. Let's face it, most of us like to lead our lives in bubbles where we pretend that everything is good in the world. We all like to act as if beggars don't exist. So when they do appear we feel somewhat guilty. This is not lost on the Beggar who will often carry a moth-eaten blanket or have a scraggy-looking dog by his side secured with a piece of rope. All help to increase the sympathy vote but do little to improve their cashflow.



RARITY

2 – The Beggar is pretty rare on the trains. You tend to find more of them on the Tube in London and in those provincial cities that have underground systems. You will also find them on the Metro in France, although you have to be fluent in French to understand them.



SEASONAL VARIATIONS

Winter will bring out more Beggars than the summer because of the cold weather.

The **bitter winds** and the **driving rain** will force them to find warmth and what better place than the train or underground system.



AVOIDANCE / REVENGE STRATEGIES

- 1.** Sew up your pockets.
 - 2.** Offer them the telephone number of the Big Issue so that they can pull themselves out of the gutter.
 - 3.** Give them a bar of soap and tell them to get a wash.
 - 4.** Pretend to be a foreign visitor and take their photograph as a memento of your visit.
 - 5.** Smear your self with mud and wear shabby clothes so that you won't be accosted
- Tick here when you have spotted the Beggar

RATE THE
BEGGAR'S
ANNOYANCE



The Belligerent

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

There are a lot of angry people in this world. The pressures of work, poor or failing marriages and mundane existences have the capacity to turn us all into loose cannons. You might think this was bad enough, but transport has the ability to tip us over the edge and none so more than trains. The Belligerent is a very angry person who you want to avoid if you can. However, as long as the belligerence is not directed towards you, they can offer some very hilarious diversions. As is often the case, we do not find many Belligerents on the way into work, but plenty on the way home. My financial advisor was travelling home one evening, around seven o'clock. The ticket inspector was making his rounds when he came to a couple of women (in their mid twenties). "I'm sorry, these tickets are not valid," he said. "What do you mean, they are not valid? They let us through the barrier!" they replied "I'm sorry, they are not valid for this line, they are for the Fenchurch line. You'll have to pay ten pounds each." "But it let me through the barrier, it is valid!" said one of the women. This toing and froing went on for a few more minutes. Then the ticket inspector said "You'll have to pay up." "I can't," came the reply. "Then you'll have to give me your name and address." "I'll give you a false one." "Then in that case you'll have to provide some proof of identity." "I'm not going to!" Then someone interjected further down the carriage "Just pay the money, you f***ing slut". Then an old woman piped up: "I think it is appalling how people avoid paying for their tickets." The incensed women retaliated "Yeah, and you're the type who probably sits in the toilet and hides