

THE VINSON VIEW

Quality maniac and master shopper Nick Vinson on the who, what, when, where and why



WHAT IS GOOD ON BOARD IN EUROPE...

Trenitalia's executive class, with just eight seats, full table service and a meeting room for working. If you book early enough, it costs the same as business class.

On Germany's Inter City Express, the glass separation between the driver's cabin and the first-class passenger area, for a 180-degree view.

A decent meal in your seat, such as on Spain's AVE trains in *preferente* class.

Trenitalia's *pulizia a bordo* service, which means that one or two cleaning staff walk up and down the trains during journeys, keeping the cabins and the toilets spic and span.

Healthy, fresh food, like the ItaloBox from Eataly, sadly no longer served on Italo trains.

A bow from the crew, as on the Shinkansen bullet trains in Japan, when entering or leaving your carriage. It shows your custom is valued.

Silent coaches, providing they are clearly labelled and properly policed.

Open Wi-Fi, without having to provide your email address and signing up for marketing messages.

01 Tunnel vision

Picky Nicky isn't on board with Eurostar's retrograde refurb

Like many frequent users of the Eurostar train service between London and Paris, I have been waiting for the day that you can work from your Wi-Fi-connected seat. I travelled on Wi-Fi-connected high-speed trains in China in 2010, so never really understood the long wait. So imagine my disappointment when I stepped on board Eurostar's new e320 trains, and found they were not connected.

I posted a photo on Instagram with #stillnowifi and #dumb hashtags. Minutes later, comments came in from a gaggle of respected fashion critics, including *US Vogue's* Sarah Mower, *Vanity Fair France's* Virginie Mouzat and *The Telegraph's* Lisa Armstrong, their essay-length comments slaughtering the new carriage design. By then I had been busy banging my knees on the underside of the extendable tables, tried and failed to figure out how to turn off my light (the cabins are overlit as it is), while also wondering why anyone would want to 'slim down a seat' and wishing for the comfort of the old Philippe Starck-designed seating with their wool velvet covers.

Shortly afterwards, a design website contacted me for comment, as it had noticed my post and the slew of passionate comments. It published a story on my post, which received further comments online and was included in its newsletter, arriving

in my inbox with the title 'Eurostar redesign "disaster"' – pure Picky Nicky power.

Still, a train that gets me to Paris from St Pancras in two hours and 20 minutes is pretty impressive, although we pay for the privilege. So when an investment like this comes out so wrong, it makes you wonder, is designer Pininfarina to blame, has it lost its edge, or does Eurostar just lack a creative chief? Perhaps it just lacks competition. Deutsche Bahn plans to operate an Inter City Express (ICE) service from Germany to London, but development of its Class 407 trains is behind schedule and complicated by the need to operate on British, Belgian, French and German systems. When Italo arrived on the scene in Italy, it certainly shook things up, and existing operator Trenitalia rose to the challenge.

There is light at the end of the Chunnel, though. Gare du Nord is set for a major upgrade, thanks to a masterplan by Jean-Michel Wilmotte, to be completed in 2023. Meanwhile, the Eurostar terminal, currently painful to use, is getting a €15m makeover. So by November there will be a double-sized business lounge, designed by Softroom, which will be accessible from the expanded control area and lead directly to the boarding area. As for the Wi-Fi, apparently it's being tested, and one day should work for at least part of the route. ★



02

Material gain

The slick Céleste d'Eric Schmitt collection, in silver, alabaster, brass and marble, features the Fontainebleau-based designer's signature curved forms. christoffle.com



03

Make it snappy

British swimwear label Orlebar Brown's 'Design-Your-Own' service lets you print your favourite picture onto swim shorts via its #SnapShorts app. orlebarbrown.co.uk