



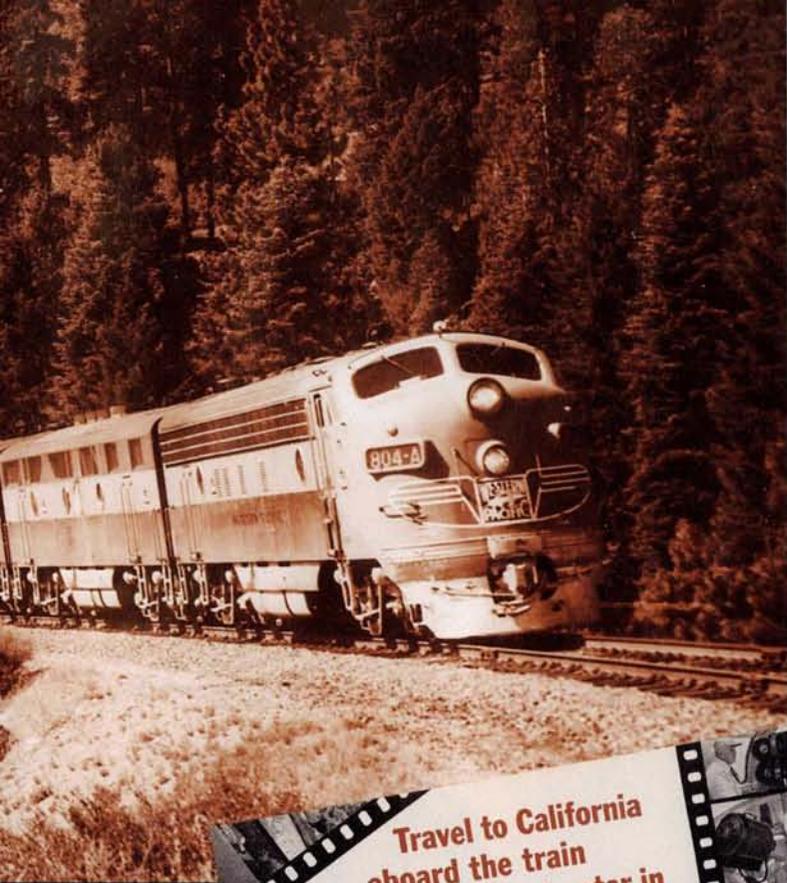
WHEN

CINERAMA

RODE THE C.Z.

The famous *California Zephyr* starred in one of the first super-wide screen movies

BY DAVID LUSTIG



FRED MATTHEWS

**M**OVIEGOERS had plenty of big-screen fare to choose from in 1955. They could pass their 50 cents through the little window at the front of the theater and buy a ticket to see William Holden and Kim Novak in the steamy *Picnic*, Frank Sinatra, Marlon Brando, and Jean Simmons in *Guys and Dolls*, or the everyman story of *Marty* with Ernest Borgnine. Then, of course, there was Fred and Beatrice Troller in *Cinerama Holiday*.

Who? Everyone knows Holden, Novak, Sinatra, Brando, and Borgnine. But the Trollers? And what is *Cinerama Holiday*?



EDDIE BRANDT'S SATURDAY MATINEE

Fred and Beatrice Troller

*Cinerama Holiday* didn't play everywhere, so even if you're old enough to have seen it when it was released, there's a good chance it might not have come to a theater near you. But if you saw it, chances are you remember it still.

One of the most sophisticated and technical filming processes of its day, Cinerama was, like 3-D movies with their wacky glasses, one of Hollywood's answers to the challenge of television. Although not introduced to the theater-going public until the early 1950's, Cinerama was the 1930's brainchild of Fred Waller, a motion-picture engineer at Paramount Studios.

As originally designed, the process photographed a scene with three cameras mounted together as a single unit and using a single shutter to record a wide-angle view roughly equivalent to human sight. Although standard 35mm film was used, each frame was 50 percent taller than the standard movie frame, and the camera was geared to run at a higher speed to improve resolution. Viewed on special curved theater screens encompassing 146 horizontal degrees and 55 vertical degrees, Cinerama movies were meant to make audiences feel as if they were immersed in the action they were seeing.

*Cinerama Holiday* was the second commercial film shot using the trademarked process, follow-

Travel to California aboard the train chosen to star in "Cinerama Holiday"!

Perhaps you'll never go hurtling down a Swiss mountainside on a bobbed, or zoom through space in a jet plane, but there's one travel adventure in "Cinerama Holiday" you can enjoy in person. And that's to cross the country aboard the Vista-Dome California Zephyr. Upstairs in one of the five Vista-Domes, you look up, look down, look all around at the magnificent scenery unfolds before you. You travel through, the mighty Colorado Rockies...cross the High Sierra...wind down the entire length of California's Feather River Canyon. And, you see it all during daylight hours!

Pullmans...Chair Coaches...Buffet Lounge...Observation Lounge...through Pullman New York-San Francisco

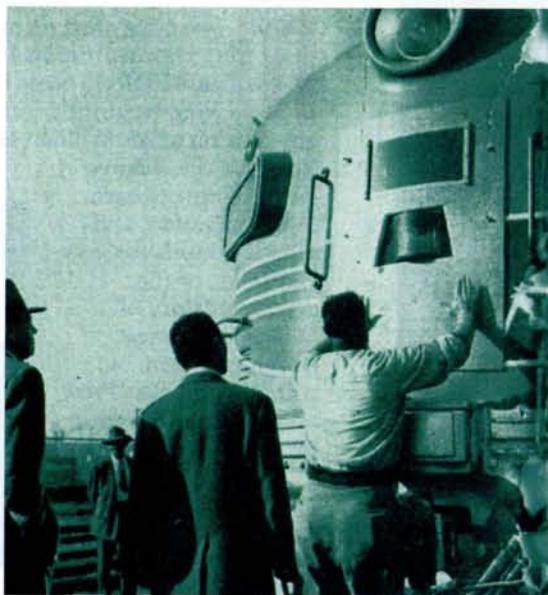
VISTA-DOME *California Zephyr*  
CHICAGO - DENVER - SALT LAKE CITY - OAKLAND - SAN FRANCISCO  
**WESTERN PACIFIC**  
For illustrated California Zephyr booklet, write Jos. G. Wheeler, Dept. NG, Western Pacific, 576 Mission St., San Francisco 5.

THE MOST TALKED ABOUT TRAIN IN THE COUNTRY

MICHAEL ZEIGA COLLECTION

Future film star FP7 804-A leads the *Zephyr* west at Williams Loop, east of Keddie, Calif., in 1952. An ad in *National Geographic* played on the train's movie role.

Production crew members check the plywood panel that replaced the locomotive's nose door; the rectangular opening above the curved camera lens was a window for cameramen.



Bill Hocker, of Louis de Rochemont Associates, stands on a colleague's shoulder and 804-A's coupler as he holds a "take" board before the wide-angle camera.



FOUR PHOTOS: WP MILEPOSTS, ART LLOYD COLLECTION

WP p.r. man Art Lloyd and his wife, Eleanor, enjoy a moment in one of the Cinerama special's dome cars.

ing 1952's *This Is Cinerama*. Produced by Louis de Rochemont, *Cinerama Holiday* was a tale of two real-life young couples, John and Betty Marsh from the U.S. and the Trollers from Switzerland, as they visited each other's native land. After touring westward across the country—including a side trip through Arizona on a motor scooter—the Trollers begin their return on the luxurious San Francisco-Chicago *California Zephyr*, one of the premier passenger trains of its day. Once in the Windy City, the Swiss couple would meet their American counterparts to compare notes before heading home.

The 300-lb. camera (opposite page) is handled with care during one of its many moves from diesel to dome car.

The CZ was a natural choice for this wide-screen travelogue. With a schedule built around scenery, it was the first (1949) and best long-distance "cruise train." Its normal consist included a whopping five dome cars: three coaches, a lounge, and a sleeper-lounge-observation car.

Although filming was done on all three of the CZ's sponsoring railroads—Chicago, Burlington & Quincy; Denver & Rio Grande Western; and Western Pacific—the majority of the work, according to retired WP public-relations man Arthur Lloyd, was done on the WP. Filming on the Rio Grande was primarily in scenic Glenwood Canyon, while CB&Q footage was confined to the Trollers' arrival in Chicago.

As with any Hollywood production, considerable behind-the-scenes effort was required. Rather than film aboard a regular CZ run, the producers arranged for a special train. Covering the CZ's entire route, it was formed of six CZ cars (baggage, diner, two sleepers, dome coach, and dome observation), a standard sleeper, and a Western Pacific business car.

To ensure the clearest possible photography, the glare-proof, slightly tinted glass that was so handy in allowing regular CZ passengers their



spectacular Vista-Dome view was removed and replaced with thin sheets of optically perfect Plexiglas panels, which were carefully cleaned each time the special stopped. Also, the first three pairs of seats on each side of one of the domes were removed to allow setting up the camera when shooting scenes through the windows.

Another Cinerama camera platform was set up in the nose of WP FP7 804-A so meets with other trains could be filmed. The regular nose door was replaced with a specially made version with a small window. Since the film crew on this part of the shoot had only one Cinerama camera—which weighed 300 pounds and cost \$250,000—it was transferred back and forth as needed.

Cabling was laid throughout the train to con-

nect the movie equipment and lights to the special generators in the baggage car. Telephone lines kept everyone aboard in touch with each other. Movie-company trucks loaded with extra generators and spare parts were sent ahead of the special on a freight train, "just in case."

Aboard the special train were the Trollers; Otis Carney, the writer and producer in charge of this particular Cinerama unit; director Philippe de Lacy; cameraman Harry Squires; an additional two-dozen-plus movie production people; several WP employees to oversee and assist in the special operation; and the usual train, engine, and on-board service crews.

Filming began February 21, 1954, when the Cinerama camera caught the regular CZ departing Oakland. The special followed on the 22nd, with the camera in 804-A's nose dutifully recording the train moving through downtown Oakland and splitting CTC signals on the road. At Niles, the camera was moved back to the dome coach. The train overnights at Oroville, Calif.

On the second day, photography began near Pulga to capture the meet with the westbound *Zephyr*. The special then backed to Bloomer to photograph the Trollers enjoying the beauty of the Feather River Canyon. A brief stop at Portola allowed the production crew to set up klieg lights in the lounge portion of the obs car for shots that evening as the mini-CZ headed east to Salt Lake City. At Portola, an impromptu snowball fight broke out among the cast and crew. On arrival at Salt Lake, the special and its film crew were handed off to the Rio Grande, which in turn forwarded it to the CB&Q in Denver.

*Cinerama Holiday* hit the big screen later in 1954 and was one of the biggest moneymakers of 1955. But Hollywood can be fickle. While the movie was a success, the expense of modifying theaters with the giant curved screen, multiple-speaker system, and special projection equipment limited the number of places in which Cinerama movies could be shown. There was also one big flaw: when projected, the lines of the three separate images were clearly visible.

The three-camera process limped along until *How the West Was Won* and *Best of Cinerama* were released in 1962. After that, the wide-screen concept with the Cinerama name was revamped using a single 70mm camera. A number of notable films were produced in that format including *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World*; *The Greatest Story Ever Told*; and *2001: A Space Odyssey*. But the new process just didn't deliver the "part of the picture" experience the original technology, however flawed, provided.

Both Cinerama and the *California Zephyr* seemed full of promise when the two came together in 1954. Though both ultimately faded from the scene, they're remembered as symbols of the optimism and inventiveness of postwar America. ■

