

TOKYO FROM THE MONORAIL

Just outside Tokyo's splendid International Airport the Monorail starts, almost level with the ground. By the time it reaches its other terminal near the centre of the city, 8 miles and 15 minutes away, it is at a height of about six storeys.

In many ways ~~the~~ ^{monorail} represents modern Japan at its best. It is smooth, white, clean, with every appointment from the terminal escalators to the ^{white and} grey interiors, ^{of the carriages} impeccably designed in the international functional idiom.

On a massive concrete beam held aloft by T shaped pylons it flies above the shallows of Tokyo Bay, above canals lined with barges and little wooden houses with vine-covered verandas, above steel yards and junk heaps and multi-lane freeways and low block-like buildings of many shapes but only one colour.

The colour is grey. The ^{buildings'} walls are grey cement. The roofs are darker grey. The tangle of telephone and power wires makes a grey net above the damp charcoal roads. At this time of the year the very air is a muggy, smoggy grey. The ^{extraordinary} mess that makes up much of Tokyo is thus very different from the Australian ugliness. It is a preoccupied, monochromatic, ^{careless} untidiness rather than a varicoloured, competitive, ambitious prettiness.

Some appalling plastic trinkets in the stores ^{of Japan} give evidence of a soft core of visual vulgarity somewhere in the community, but generally this is hidden ^{at home} behind the shojis. In the public street there is virtually no bad taste. Buildings simply happen, exhibiting no taste at all or they are conscious works of art, as is the Monorail in its own way, ^{and usually successful}.

Monorail is not a good name. The ^{three-piece train} sits astride a single beam, which bears its weight, but it has a subsidiary stabilizing rail lower down the beam on each side. Six rubber-tired wheels, ^{each of the} idling horizontally in ^{long side skirts of the carriages} bear on the side rails and hold the train stable even on the sharp, banked curves.

It is a good idea for public transport. The ride is as smooth as a concrete beam, the route is ^{independent of traffic or other} independent of obstructions on the ground ^{comparatively}.

and the ^{rail} structure can be infinitely more attractive than ^{the} overhead wires of tams or trolley-buses, as Tokyo's engineers have demonstrated.

Nevertheless the brave experiment of the Japanese company which erected the world's longest commercial monorail in time for the Olympic Games last October has not produced encouraging evidence for this ^{newest and} once-promising answer to ^{some of the} world's ^{urban} transport problems. After the Games, and six months or so of ^{curiosity} ^{induced by} local citizens, the system is ^{now} running at low capacity and its economy looks much shakier than its carriages. Funnily enough, the idea which originally recommended it — the apparent flexibility and simplicity of a single rail — is ^{one of} the roots of the trouble. [It turns out that the single rail has to be so huge and heavy that it is not really very flexible at all. Points are massive mechanical installations and branch lines or intersections are difficult. The one ^{linear} route in Tokyo is of limited service and attraction to citizens at the rate of 6/3 (Australian) for the single fare. However it is not hard to imagine a continuous ring monorail successfully circling the heart of ^{one or another} Australian city in lieu of underground railways, in years to come. ^{and Tokyo has shown that the elevated train creed} (Not only on the monorail system but in all branches of construction Tokyo built so enthusiastically for the Olympics that it is still lying low and getting back its breath. [Raised ribbons of four-lane arterial roads were built. These are criticised by some traffic engineers as being too narrow. Speed is limited to 45 MPH because the lanes are not wide while the curves are quite Baroque. ^{it however} ~~but~~ road construction is now dropping far behind the demand, and building activity is lagging than it has been at any time since World War II. The new graduates from Tokyo's ten schools of architecture find deflating ^{work} in the employ of building companies.

[I certainly do not mean to suggest any air of depression. It is just that Tokyo's building has slowed from a sprint to a progressive walk. Japan's ^{3rd} four or five star architects with international reputations at the highest level are keeping busy one way or another. Mayakawa

because of bureaucratic interference
he has felt obliged to resign as archt for the ⁽³⁾

has plenty of municipal work away from the capital. Yoshimura is building a house for John D. Rockefeller at Tarrytown, New York, although he has troubles at home. [For five years this good architect has been working on the design of a completely new, completely modern Imperial Palace. He has had his design altered again and again - not by the Emperor (who only asked for the stairways to be easy-going and has no real authority anyway) but by bureaucrats. At last, with the new palace half erected in the Imperial Gardens, interference has become too much for the architect and he has just resigned, although his colleagues are trying to get him back to the job. [Meanwhile, Tange, ^{his city works held up by lack of funds,} has built Tokyo's first Roman Catholic cathedral.

[Kenzo Tange, who last year was awarded the Royal Institute of British Architects Gold Medal by the Queen, has followed up his brilliant successes on the Olympic stadia with this great modern cathedral, although a major skyscraper he had planned five years ago is going slow because of the shortage of funds, Santa Maria, one of his finest works.

[The floor plan is a huge diamond shape with the altar in one corner. The walls start rising vertically from the diamond but they twist as they climb so that by the time they stop some 130 feet overhead they have formed a ^{huge} cross which is a white window to the sky.

[These walls are shell-thin concrete, naked grey on the inside (outside they are sheathed in single lengths of stainless steel) and a vertical slit between them behind the altar at the apex of the diamond is filled with thin marble slabs through which daylight penetrates dimly.

[The formal essence of Japanese traditional architecture, in ancient shrine and temple and farmhouse, is a subtle combination of curved and straight lines. The twisted planes of Santa Maria's walls reflect this combination of curve and straight line in a thoroughly contemporary structure. They are thus satisfyingly sensitive to ^{with} the old and the new vision: a blend of East and West as serene as that personified by the Japanese nuns in the vestry. [Tange, who is not a Catholic, not a Christian, has produced a building of

Japan has come to the top of world creative level of modern architect

triumphant power and suitability. But how can one country produce ^{private} buildings as magnificent as this and at the same time make such a mess of the public ^{below} [Driving away from ^{Santa Maria} cathedral through narrow streets crowded with non-maintained buildings, broken fences, piled rubbish bins, posts, wires and signs, Kenzo Tange bent forward and exchanged a few sentences with his driver. Then he ^{leaned back} laughed and confessed ^{in English} "I asked him did he have to drive through such ugly streets; couldn't he find a better route. He said it's very difficult; all the streets in this part are as bad. Tokyo is a very ugly city."

* streets? It is all too easy. We do it in our own different way nearly as blatantly as Japan - [It is ^{in fact} strange to think how much Australia and Japan have in common at this time. Not only that marked contrast between private beauty and public squalor. ^{The two countries} also are the most highly developed industrial nations in Asia, and for all the enormous differences in background are the two most advanced in the ways of Western culture. Each also is on the receiving end of the international carned culture of today and is in danger of losing identity.

Yoshino
without
with their baskets

MAEKAWA and or
and public