



Metro-North's New M8 Rail Cars

I have seen the future and it is cool... very cool.

Metro-North has finally unveiled a full scale, un-powered mock-up of the new M8 rail car it designed and Kawasaki is building for Connecticut commuters. All I can say is "Wow!"

Much of the credit goes to renowned designer [Cesar Vergara](#), who has commuted for years from Connecticut and spent many months riding the Harlem and Hudson line cars to learn from their successes and mistakes.

From the outside, our new cars will look much like those M7 cars running in Westchester and on the LIRR. But on the inside, it's all first class... though it's still two and three seating. The color scheme is deep burgundy and rich cream with frosted silver and aluminum.

The windows are bigger. The overhead baggage rack has a soft, scalloped look. The lights run the length of the car and are offset by oval accents in the vestibules. The floors are a non-skid rubber made in Germany.

There are single leaf doors instead of doubles. An overhead LED displays the next stop, complemented by an automated PA system. The crew can talk to each other on their own intercom and there's a separate intercom for emergency use by passengers to contact a conductor.

Yes, the seats are still two on one side and three on the other, but they look much more comfortable. Covered with artificial leather, each seat has its own headrest with airline style winglets to stop snoozers' heads from landing on a neighbor's shoulder. Between the headrests are grab bars to assist getting in and out. And wonder of wonders, the seats have an extra inch of "pitch", or distance from the back of the seat to the next one. They will be soft, but not bucket-style as we now have. And each window seat will have a power plug for laptops.

The new M8's will have vacuum toilets capable of holding five days of effluent, though pump-outs are promised more often... e.g., they shouldn't stink.

And thanks to ADA requirements, they'll be roomy too!

Each train set will be equipped with GPS so it will always know where it is, as will the railroad's control room. Space is being designed for the addition of WiFi gear, but none is installed for now, pending a study with Amtrak.

Despite earlier plans to have cars share power conversion duties (with one car being powered by third rail and its mate fed by overhead catenary), all cars will now have both third rail and pantographs, but be permanently coupled in "married pairs".

AC traction motors will offer speedy acceleration and convert braking energy into generation of electricity to be fed back into the overhead wires. Because the new cars are heavier and there will be so many of them (300+), Metro-North and CDOT are worried about whether the existing power infrastructure can handle the load. (When the M7's were first added to the Harlem division major upgrades to the power grid were needed).

The first eight cars will now arrive in the fall of 2009 for testing and acceptance by the end of that year. They're being manufactured by Kawasaki in, of all places, Lincoln, Nebraska. Despite fears to the contrary, CDOT promises that the M8 maintenance facility will be finished by the time the first cars arrive.

So, for those of you who think I'm an old grouch with never a positive thing to say, read this column again. The new cars are coming and they're great!

(See images of M8 on page 2.)



JIM CAMERON has been a Darien resident for 17 years. He is Chairman of the Metro-North Commuter Council, a member of the Coastal Corridor TIA and the Darien RTM, but the opinions expressed here are his alone. Reach Jim Cameron at jim@camcomm.com or www.trainweb.org/ct



Metro-North's New M8 Rail Cars



First M8 car, fresh from the Kawasaki plant in Japan



Rendering of vestibule



Rendering of interior seating