

Riding Semi-Accessible Rails with Great Success

By Survivor Jann Hartman

The Auto Train was my latest travel adventure, in March of this year. Riding the rails has been quite an interesting experience for me. It was certainly easier when my husband was my travel companion, but is still doable for me, at least for now. I have gone cross country from Seattle, WA to Lancaster, PA and up and down both coasts. Because I live on the west coast, my favorite option for east coast rail travel is to fly to Chicago and catch the train there. Chicago has a wonderful lounge with snacks and restrooms, and a nice food court inside the building. And, of greatest importance, it is accessible!



My Mom (who resides in Florida) wanted to take Dad's ashes up to PA, and visit friends and family while we were there. Because I had joined her in Florida, the Auto Train, which runs from Lorton, VA to Sanford, FL, and back, seemed like the best option for us. They load your vehicle on the special train cars. Note: it can take an hour or two to get your vehicle upon arrival. If you need your vehicle earlier, you can pay an additional small fee; but, we were in no hurry. Unfortunately, a significant snowfall mid week slowed us down, but it was still a good trip for us. Even with the surprise storm the days before, my father was buried with full military honors, on a beautiful, sunny day. I was surprised by my dear friend and fellow Polio survivor Bob Shaub.

The Superliner Accessible Bedroom runs across the width of the train car, so there is one window on each side to see out. A curtain separates the dining area (which makes into the beds) from the bathroom area. Keep in mind that the beds are bunks, and the top one is up two very large steps, or up a ladder. Since neither of us could get up to it safely, we opted to share the bottom bunk. Even if we had our own beds, the ride is very shaky with some big jolts when they changed tracks! If you can sleep thru it all, consider yourself lucky!



The Dining Room is not accessible, but your attendant will bring your meals, as well as coffee/tea and water. The meals are listed on their website. We both enjoyed the beef: it was very tender and delish! You get a choice of meals in the evening, but in the morning you just get a continental breakfast (sweet rolls, fruit, coffee). I always ask for milk (extra protein). There is a button to signal for help or whatever you need.



If you want to go without a sleeper, another option would be Business Class where you sleep in the seats that recline (foot rests come up, too). You can still get meals delivered to your seat. They have ramps they put out for entering the lower level of the train. There is no way to get upstairs where there is a lounge that shows movies. I had my own movies on my Kindle, and games and music as well. (I have found that for some reason, the Wifi is very unreliable.) You generally have it while in the station, and can send and receive email then.

Even with the limitations we had while on board, the Auto Train was a nice adventure for my 94 year old mom and me. Having an able bodied person as a companion is always a good idea. We both stayed downstairs in our bedroom, and used the services provided. Go to the Amtrak website, and check it out - they often run sales. It may be just the trip for you. Always check the schedule ahead of time - sometimes you arrive at a station in the middle of the night so you should be prepared for anything. That's why I always travel with water and a couple of power bars. You just never know! I'm always glad to go while I still can. Great memories!

<https://www.amtrak.com/auto-train>

<https://www.amtrak.com/making-reservations-for-passengers-with-a-disability>

www.papolionetwork.org

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