

reading bank

The new age of the train

- 1 You are going to read about the development of high speed trains. Read the article and put the sentences (1-6) into the text in the best places (a-f).
- 1 But the Chinese face the problem of maintaining a low-cost service.
 - 2 Several train companies would like us to think so.
 - 3 perhaps the 'new' age of the train is really just round the bend.
 - 4 Recent figures suggested China carried 25% of the world's passengers and freight on just 6% of its railways.
 - 5 In reality, the trains are mainly built abroad on the basis of technology transfer agreements
 - 6 Now China is joining in.

- 2 Read the article again and mark the sentences true (T) or false (F).

- 1 The world speed record attempt was made to advertise French trains. _____
 - 2 Until the new trains were introduced into China, the journey between Shanghai and Beijing took nine hours. _____
 - 3 Trains are seen as one answer to China's growing transport problems. _____
 - 4 6% of all world passenger travel takes place in China. _____
 - 5 In the future the new Chinese trains will have internet access. _____
- 3 Complete the summary with the words below.
- hoped advantage overcrowded
faster image improved outweighs
both increased lead

- 4 Match the words or phrases (1-10) with the definitions (a-j).

- 1 shunning
 - 2 promotional stunt
 - 3 hurtle
 - 4 cope
 - 5 freight
 - 6 stiff competition
 - 7 grumbings
 - 8 key sector
 - 9 assemble
 - 10 heavy-hitter
- a sth that is done in order to attract people's attention to advertise sth
 - b to deal successfully with sth difficult
 - c avoiding sb / sth
 - d goods that are transported by ships, planes, trains, or lorries / trucks; the system of transporting goods in this way
 - e to move very fast in a particular direction
 - f to fit together all the separate parts of sth
 - g a situation in which people or organizations compete with each other strongly for custom
 - h protests about sth that come from a number of people but that are not expressed very clearly
 - i the most important part of an area of activity, especially of a country's economy
 - j (in politics or business) a person who is powerful

China's railway system faces several challenges: demand ¹ supply on many lines leading to ² trains; there is ³ competition from other means of transport; people cannot afford to pay higher prices for ⁴ services. It is ⁵ that new bullet trains will help to meet these challenges. Rail officials believe that ⁶ trains will ⁷ to an increase in ⁸ passenger and freight capacity. An added ⁹ of the new trains is that they will help give Chinese rail a futuristic ¹⁰.

Over to you

- 1 How quick, safe, and reliable is train travel in your country?
- 2 Do you ever have to work on the train - if so, how comfortable do you find it?

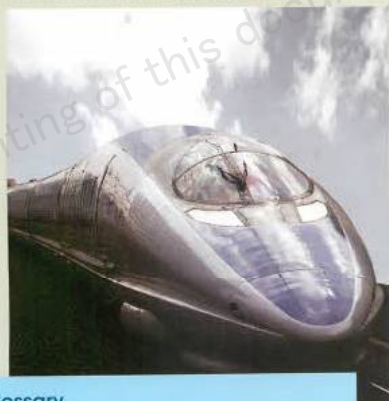
Answer key
1 increased
2 improved
3 raised
4 added
5 hurtled
6 assembled
7 led
8 increased
9 improved
10 futuristic
11 increased
12 improved
13 raised
14 added
15 hurtled
16 assembled
17 led
18 increased
19 improved
20 futuristic

The new age of the train

They say that trends always come full circle. First, it was the train that heralded the golden age of travel. Then the motor car, and then the plane. So could it be that we're about to see a revolution in travel with more and more people shunning the airways for the railways again?

a A French train with a 25,000-horsepower engine and special wheels broke the world speed record recently for conventional rail trains, reaching 357.2 mph (574.8 kph) as it shot through the countryside to the applause of spectators. The trip was a promotional stunt by the French rail industry, showcasing their wares to the rest of the world, and establishing themselves as market leaders in a new era of high-speed train travel.

However, it's not just in France where rail travel is reinventing itself. In the UK, new pendolino-style trains are being marketed as cleaner, greener, and just as efficient as other forms of transport – allowing you time to yourself as you hurtle through the countryside. These Italian-developed trains, made by the French-owned company Alstom, are speeding across a range of European countries including Finland, Portugal, and the Czech Republic.



Glossary

- herald** to be a sign that sth is going to happen
horsepower a unit for measuring the power of an engine
wares things that sb is selling, especially in the street or at a market
pendolino-style in the style of the Pendolino trains made by the Alstom company
slogan a word or phrase that is easy to remember, often used by a political party or in advertising to attract people's attention or to suggest an idea quickly

b The Chinese state railway company has recently launched its own high-speed rail service linking Shanghai with the nearby city of Suzhou, making the 53-mile trip in just thirty-nine minutes. As the new system develops, it is hoped that on some routes top speeds will climb to 155 mph, cutting two hours off the trip between Shanghai and Beijing, making it possible to do the journey in as little as nine hours. However, for the time being there will need to be speed restrictions on some sections of tracks which are unable to cope with the new high speeds. 'We were facing a logistical nightmare,' a spokesman for the company said. 'we were struggling to cope with increasing transport demands so the trains are seen as a way to boost passenger capacity.'

c The Chinese Xinhua news agency quoted officials as saying the speed increase would raise passenger capacity by more than 18% – in other words, 300,000 more train seats daily and freight capacity by more than 12%. The new trains have a futuristic element and in keeping with this high-tech image, the trains support internet wi-fi services for those with laptops and other mobile devices wanting to keep in touch.

The upgrade was seen as essential as the railways have been facing stiff competition from the growing road system and increasingly inexpensive, more convenient air travel, meaning passengers are preferring these other forms of transport to the overcrowded railways. **d** Already there have been grumbings about the fares on the new services which are nearly 50% more than current express trains. But the spokesman claimed that as more seats become available, the prices will level off.

China, home to the world's fourth-largest economy, is keen to show off the new bullet trains as evidence that it can develop its own technology in key sectors, and is not simply where the world comes to assemble products.

e with industry heavy-hitters such as Japan's Mitsubishi-Kawasaki, Canada's Bombardier, German giant Siemens, and France's Alstom.

Back in the 1970s in the UK, the state-run rail company proudly declared in an advertising slogan that it was the 'Age of the train'. Maybe they were thirty years too early –

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