

# Taking train to Belarus' original railway capital

MT correspondent surveys origins of Belarusian Railways

By Vladimir Yakovlev

If I need to go to Baranovichi, I try to take the train. Although, 150km separates this major industrial city from Minsk, you can arrive quickly and in comfort by taking the high-speed, international level rail link. However, something in the soul resists this choice.

Baranovichi is sometimes called the capital of Belarus' railway system (although the leadership of the local branch objects through modesty). It has two railway stations and an old steam engine in its coat of arms. In fact, the city only appeared thanks to the railway; in 1871, a steel track was laid from Smolensk to Minsk and Brest. This is why, to my mind, to arrive by car would be a sign of disrespect — especially if you are planning to visit the first and most representative rail museum countrywide.

"Yesterday, 11 excursion groups visited our Museum of Railway Equipment," notes my guide, the Chairman of the Veterans Council of the Baranovichi Department of Belarusian Railways, Piotr Tur, smiling with pride. "Schoolchildren and students, whose future will be connected one way or another with the railway, were among them. Tomorrow, filmmakers are coming to shoot scenes. I've visited many museums — even in Germany and Russia — but have only seen carriages and locomotives. Meanwhile, we have everything needed for a railway to function: from the hammer for driving spikes into sleepers, to the bell stamped with the letters 'MPS' — used to notify the departure of a

train."

Belarusian Railways doesn't charge an entrance fee for the museum, which is somewhat symbolic. After all, every exhibit is connected with the lives of local people. If an elderly man who once devoted his life to the railway wants to enter, how can you take money from him? Devotion to the railway can be amazing, with some families having worked in this industry for up to 300 years. The Mazyuk family has six generations of railway engineers, while the Yanovichs have five generations of driving crew. The job of railwayman has always been difficult and filled with heavy responsibility but it has also been well-paid, steady employment with prestige.

There is also an element of romance. Piotr Demidovich Tur grew up on the railways, beginning as a railroad master and eventually becoming a chief engineer. He still remembers seeing a steam locomotive, wrapped in smoke, for the first time, as a little boy.

Former railway worker and engine driver Vasily



Steam engines at Museum of Railway Equipment in Baranovichi

Skomorokh tells us, "I first worked with steam engines, which burnt coal. It is 200km from here to Slutsk and back, where peat for the local power station was loaded. It took about six hours by road. The stoker would use eight to ten tonnes of coal for the furnace and the whole team would

be black from the dust and smoke by the end of the trip. Of course, before we gave the engine to another crew, we'd have to wipe the cab with kerosene and then wipe it dry, so there wasn't a speck of dust. Only then did we shower and rest. Even so, you could be called onto another train at any moment."

There are many unique exhibits at the Baranovichi rail museum, including a bi-axial heated goods van, invented in 1928. You can tour coaches of different classes, as seen only in historical epic films. A special part of the exhibition is devoted to railway troops (a formidable platform houses two large-calibre anti-aircraft machine-gun quad units). As early as 1876, Baranovichi had two railway companies, just ten years after the world's first railway brigade was created.

A new display is being

discussed, offering dioramas from the past. However, steam engines are not gone forever; they're still used for training, retraining and skills upgrading, at Gomel branch Belarusian Railways. Brest also boasts its Museum of Railway Equipment, where you can apply for an internship operating steam engines. Of course, diesel and electric locomotives remain the dominant form of driving trains but Belarusian Railways is considering adding a retro train between Grodno and Porechie (where the first railway traffic in modern Belarus set off, for the St. Petersburg-Warsaw route, nearly 150 years ago). The original railway station from those days still exists in Porechie.

Returning to Minsk, I take a modern European-level regional route train, which is streamlined much



New machinery

like an airplane. The conductors wear a stylish uniform and it seems that everything revolves around speed. We reach the capital in just half an hour; it's our future — no matter how much we may love steam engines.



Electric train at railway station in Minsk

## 'Moscow-Brest' train of memory

By Alexey Pimenov

Muscovite veterans (who defended the western frontiers of the Soviet Union in the early years of the Great Patriotic War or who participated in Operation Bagration to free Belarus) were passengers on the unusual train, alongside over 200 members of children and youth organisations from the Russian capital

The first stop was made in Minsk, where passengers joined Belarusian veterans in laying flowers at the Pobedy Square monument. They

also visited the Museum of Great Patriotic War History, as well as the Mound of Glory and Khatyn memorial complexes.

On June 22nd, at 2.00am, the train arrived in Brest, where veterans once helped defend the walls of the fortress. The Day of Memory and Grief saw the former soldiers visit the Brest Hero Fortress Monument and the Defence of Brest Fortress Museum, as well as taking part in a service at Ceremonies Square, laying flowers at the Eternal Flame and dropping wreaths into the Western Bug and Mukhovets rivers.

## Partners target innovations

By Olga Bestuzheva

**State Science and Technology Committee of Belarus and Russian New Technologies Development and Commercialisation Centre (Skolkovo Foundation) sign co-operative sci-tech and innovation agreement**

The two sides are developing collaboration in the preparation and implementation of sci-tech and innovation projects, fulfilled primarily within the framework of the Interstate Programme of Innovative Co-operative Development of the CIS, running until 2020, as well as within Union State programmes, and those of



the EurAsEC, SES and other interstate unions.

It's planned to develop partnership in priority sci-tech areas for Belarus and Russia: power engineering and energy saving, medicine and medical technology; medico-biological and in-

dustrial biotechnologies; bio-informatics and pharmaceuticals; information, communication and aerospace technologies; and nuclear technologies.

In future, corporate research centres may appear, as well as Belarusian organisations and enterprises on the premises of the Skolkovo Innovation Centre, with the aim of creating joint high-tech manufactures. Moreover, joint projects are planned to train Master's degree and post-graduate students at higher educational establishments in Belarus and Russia. Exchange and internships for partner companies are also planned, alongside the realisation of joint projects.