

# DB Museum in Nuremberg— The Home of German Railway History

Rainer Mertens

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## Background

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German railways were born in Nuremberg on 7 December 1835 when the first steam train departed from the city on a 6-km journey to the neighbouring town of Fürth. This marked the start of developments that would catapult Germany into the industrial age within a few decades. The Royal Bavarian Railway Museum—the first museum dealing with the railways, their technology and history—opened its doors just 65 years later on 1 October 1899, making it Germany's oldest museum of transport history.

Together with the postal section opened in 1902, the Museum of Transportation—as it became known—has been a cornerstone of the Nuremberg museum scene from its inception. Since 1925, the museum has been housed in what was then new premises in Lessingstraße, just south of the old centre of Nuremberg. 1985 saw the addition of a rolling-stock hall, followed in 1990 by the acquisition of a 1.5-ha outdoor area.

The privatization of railways and postal service in the early 1990s saw the greatest changes to the museum since 1925, because the railways and postal service sections were split into separate museums. The latter section is now the Museum of Communications and is managed by the Foundation for Post and Telecommunications History, which also manages three other museums.

In 1996, the railways section, which has some 80% of the museum area, was renamed the DB Museum, becoming the official museum of the then new Deutsche Bahn AG (DB AG) railway company formed 3 years earlier by the unification of the Bundesbahn and Reichsbahn (former West and East German railway operators). Although managed separately, the two museums still continue to work closely together. For example, services such as the ticket office, shop, café and

exhibition spaces are run by the DB Museum on behalf of both museums.

When DB AG took over management, the long-established railway museum underwent extensive renovation under the leadership of Dr Jürgen Franzke, its new director. The museum was visualized as playing an important role in presenting DB AG's corporate image to the public. During the following years, the exhibits have been fully updated both in terms of form and content, the collections have been rearranged and catalogued in a computer database, and services have

been widened and modernized. Out-of-date sections have been removed and new areas of activity have been started. Furthermore, new locations have been established nationwide to house the large collection of more than 100 pieces of rolling stock, giving the museum a presence throughout Germany.

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## New Directions

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Following some renovation of several parts of the Nuremberg main building, the



Germany's oldest railway carriage on display in new permanent exhibition

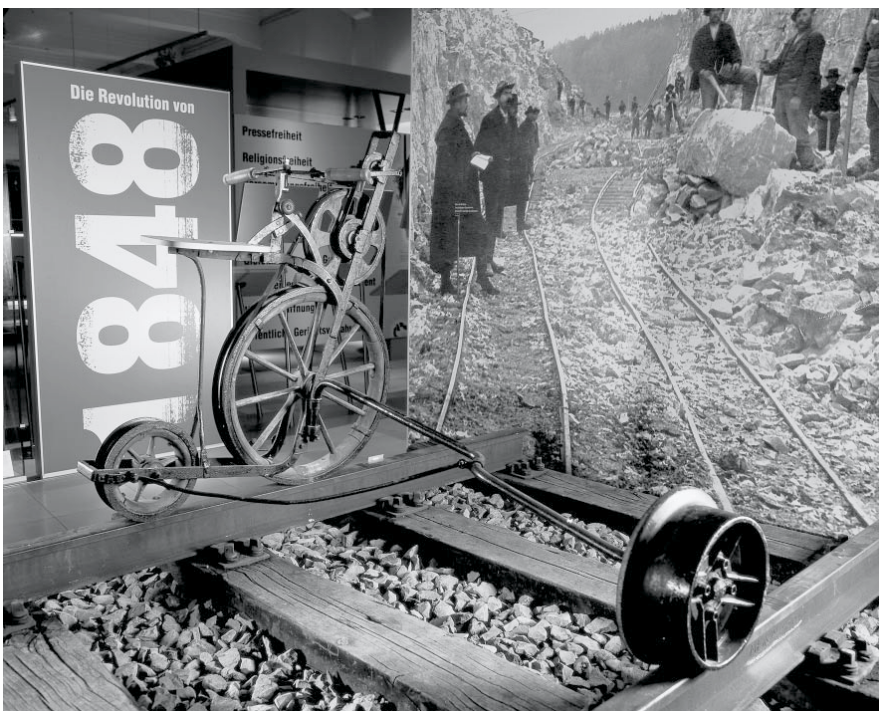
(DB Museum)



Start of the permanent exhibition: English coal wagon of 1829 from the National Railway Museum at York (DB Museum)

main renovation started in 1999 and then a new permanent exhibition covering an area of 2500 m<sup>2</sup> and dealing with the history of railways in Germany was set up gradually. This project clearly shows

the new direction the museum is taking. Originally, the museum was seen as dealing with the history of technology, so its main task was to demonstrate the technological development of railways as



Railways and 1848 Revolution exhibition

(DB Museum)

a transportation system. As a consequence, original rolling stock was exhibited along with signals and signal boxes, communications technologies, and other technologies related to railway construction. However, there was no social, economic and cultural context showing the significance of railways beyond the purely industrial. The Eras of Railway History exhibition, which opened in the 1985 anniversary year, was the first to examine the economic and political conditions in the 19th and 20th centuries paving the way for the development of railways, although priority was still given to railway technologies.

With this new permanent exhibition, the technological development of Germany's railway system is now integrated into a holistic consideration of the railway's history and its reciprocal interactions with politics, economics, culture and society. Visitors move chronologically through 200 years of railway history, from its beginnings in England around 1800 until the present. Some exhibits, such as *In the Service of Democracy and Dictatorship: The Reichsbahn and the Reichsbahn Company 1920–45*, and *On Separate Tracks: Railways in East and West Germany 1945–89*, as well as a special section dealing with the history of railway stations, have been complete for several years. The next and largest section covering the period from the start of German railways until the end of WWI opened in October 2005. The completion of a section dealing with railway reform and the present and future of railways in Germany is planned for 2007.

### Team Planning

The exhibitions were planned by a six-person team of historians under my leadership. Support and advice was received from a museum advisory committee set up by the DB AG board

and containing historians, railway experts and politicians, including historian Lothar Gall, Hermann Schäfer, head of the Bonn Museum of History, and Günther Gottmann, former director of the German Technology Museum in Berlin. The Nuremberg offices of designer Marius Schreyer and graphic designer Jörg Müller were responsible for the exhibition design.

### Holistic Presentations

The aim of holistic presentation of railway history is to strike a good balance between presenting complex information on one hand and offering visitors an entertaining and exciting museum experience on the other. Consequently, various topics are arranged in a clear thematic way within an overarching chronological order. Key objects provide visual points of orientation—the remains of destroyed railway platform pillars provide the focal point for the topic Destruction and Reconstruction, while the Railways in the Economic Miracle theme is envisioned through exhibits of a Goggomobil micro-car and a rail bus.

Some topics needed total reworking and display in new ways. For example, the history of the Reichsbahn is now represented for the first time in the On Separate Tracks exhibition shown in parallel with the history of the Bundesbahn. Issues such as the role of the railway in the Cold War, the different economic developments in each country, the technological achievements of the respective railways and the travel cultures that developed on each side of the Iron Curtain are at the heart of the exhibition, which concerns both the railways and a panoramic overview of 50 years of postwar German history. The parallel presentation permits direct comparison of particular developments in former East and West Germany, such as the initial



19th Century Railway Passengers exhibition

(DB Museum)

teething problems of each railway system, the respective modernization processes, and employees' working conditions. Equally, The Railway under National Socialism exhibition is now presented to the public with an appropriate length and in a high-quality way. Those responsible for the exhibition were particularly

anxious to ensure that the role of the state railway in WWII and the Holocaust is shown openly and clearly. The scale of the forced labour, the importance of the railway as a pillar of the war and its culpable involvement in the Holocaust are all clearly presented by exhibits, texts, pictures and documentary film. The



Railway Modernization in 1920s exhibition

(DB Museum)



Railway under National Socialism exhibition

(DB Museum)

railways in Germany until WWI. Two key exhibits are veterans of railway history—an English coal wagon dating from 1829 and an original passenger carriage from the first German railway—illustrate the transfer of railway technology from England to Germany and are of great intrinsic interest as one of the oldest European railway vehicles standing next to the oldest remaining German railway vehicle.

The answer to why Nuremberg brought the railway to Germany is found by watching a short film produced especially for the exhibition, which brings key figures from that time back to life. Nuremberg's original 6-km stretch of track sparked off development of the German railway network, which exceeded 33,800 track-km by 1880.

The A Century under Steam exhibition makes reference to steam locomotives of this period. It was chosen to evoke images of noisy steam-powered machines and factory chimneys bellowing smoke, recreating a factory with towering mounds of coal and steel. The railway was a key 'locomotive' driving German industrialization; it carried jobseekers to the industrial areas, leading in turn to rapid growth of cities. Exhibition visitors find themselves in the middle of a large period city where they encounter a crowd of characters, ranging from schoolchildren and workers to well-to-do holidaymakers. All travel by rail and show their tickets.

The WWI exhibition reveals another aspect of railway transport—it ensured a supply of reinforcements, making possible the new mechanized warfare. The last room uses a dramatic and shocking presentation on the importance of railways in the course of WWI.



The original Royal Waiting Room of the former Nuremberg Central Station (1863)

(DB Museum)

media, visitors and partners who provided materials for the exhibition—Holocaust survivors, former forced labourers, etc., have praised the exhibition.

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### Key Exhibits

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The section opened in October 2005 covers the period from the beginnings of

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### New Media

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The design of the new permanent

exhibition has been developed according to modern museum standards. Visitors find a diverse range of objects, documents and interactive elements embedded within a landscape marked by various experience spaces, large-scale wall illustrations, and AV media. The presentations are designed not to overwhelm visitors and construction of fake historic sets was actively avoided. Inclusion of an educational expert on the team allowed first-visitor interest to be accounted for in designing the exhibition, selection of exhibits and use of text. This was not always an easy task, because the spaces of the old building frustrated some aims of the exhibition designers.

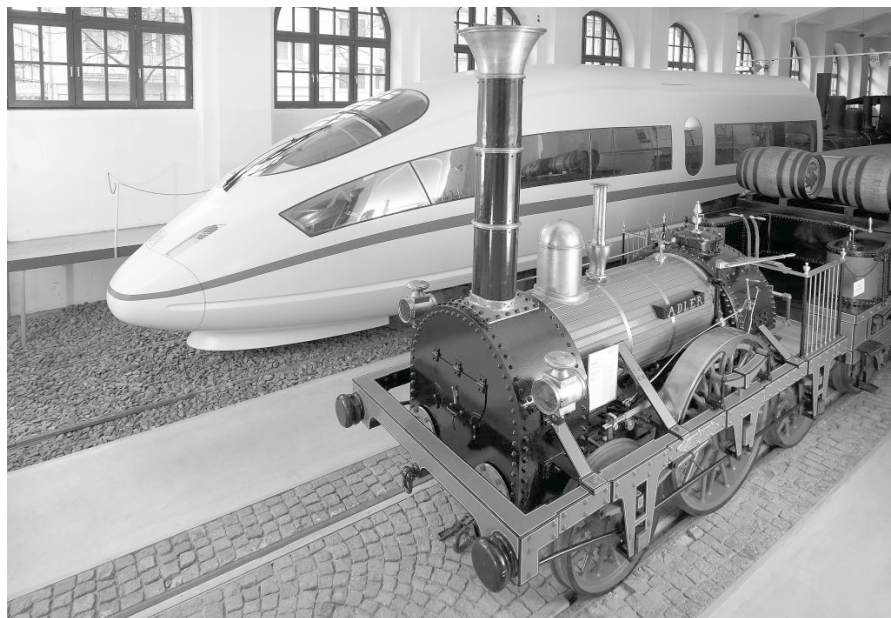
Other exhibition areas have been newly redesigned alongside the permanent exhibition. The Railway Experience created in 1997, offers a playful introduction to the railway theme based on the idea of 'museums to touch.' Spread over an area of 1000 m<sup>2</sup>, the railway world can be experienced using all the senses—movable models explain development of the railway system, the actual driver's cab of an electric locomotive can be explored inside and out, a tunnel can be traversed to vividly illustrate the differences between tunnel construction then and now, using sights, sounds and smells, and an exciting diorama shows railway development and associated changes to the landscape and settlements in the 19th and 20th centuries. A particular magnet is the interactive driving simulator allowing visitors to try their hand at being a train driver while sitting in an actual cab and navigating a range of computer-simulated track sections.

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### Historic Rolling Stock

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Another attraction is the 25 or so pieces of historic stock on display in two halls, ranging from an original 1945 passenger carriage from the Ludwigsbahn railway to the *Nordgau* steam engine, the oldest surviving original German locomotive, the



Replica of *Adler* and *ICE* side-by-side in rolling stock hall

(DB Museum)

*Fliegender Hamburger* 1932 with its groundbreaking technology and design, and the *TEE-Triebzug* VT 11.5 from the 1950s. Full-size replicas of the oldest and newest engines—the *Adler* and *ICE 3*—sit side-by-side, embodying the 'from *Adler* to *ICE*' motto of the DB Museum.

In addition to its unique stock collection, the museum has an important collection of railway objects and documents related to the history of German railways. Some 10,000 objects, ranging from signalling mechanisms to complete signal boxes are stored by the museum. The collection includes 400 uniforms—one of the most important uniform collections in Germany—as well as a collection of 200 model trains (1:10 scale) with the oldest dating back to the 1880s. In addition, the museum has a huge document archive of over 1 million photographs, around 100,000 pictures and 2500 m of shelved written materials. Especially important are the photographs dating mostly from 1930 to 1990 from the various photographic departments of the railway companies, as well as a collection of rail tickets extending back to the earliest years. Of

special interest is the several-thousand-strong collection of advertising placards dating from the 1920s. Historic film can also be found in the museum's collection but most has been handed over to state archives, as has the majority of official documents from pre-1920 local and state railway companies. Finally, the museum has an extensive library of railway-related literature.

Both the documents and literature are open to the public for reading in the museum's unique reading room, which was renovated in 2001.

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### Public Access

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Since 1999, the museum has been systematically reordering and cataloguing the documents, objects and literature in a computer database in cooperation with the DB AG archives in Berlin as part of the Railway and Company History Information System project. Over 100,000 data items have been entered so far and the collections are already accessible



Library reading room

(DB Museum)



Children's railway world

(DB Museum)

online internally, and public Internet access is being planned.

The richness of the museum's collections and exhibitions is made accessible to the public in many ways. An educational

programme aimed at specific target groups offers guided tours, museum-based games, and special events. These range from teacher education events to children's birthdays, school group visits

and a programme for apprentices working for the railway. The publicly accessible library and document archives offer a wide range of services, from quick research to picture reproduction. Different museum rooms can be hired for all types of event, ranging from weddings to conferences.

Finally, a varied event programme ensures that a visit to the DB Museum is never boring. A particular recent high point was the special exhibition *The Baghdad and Hedjaz Railways—German Railway History in the Near Orient*, which caught the public imagination far beyond Nuremberg.

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### Local Exhibitions

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But not only Nuremberg has been changing; in order to house the large collection of rolling stock—now over 100 engines, wagons and carriages—while also making them accessible to people beyond Nuremberg, a number of locations are in the process of being built across Germany since 2001. At present, historic railway stock can be seen in authentic surroundings at locations in Koblenz and Halle. The Koblenz location is in a former wagon repair yard in the Lötzel area and houses 15 vehicles. Six electric locomotives sit side-by-side with several unusual saloon carriages from the Reichsbahn and Bundesbahn periods. The Halle location is in an historic engine roundhouse that belonged previously to the Halle Locomotive Research Institute (LVA), which made a considerable contribution to the high technological level attained by railways in the GDR. A particular attraction of the Halle location is the collection of high-speed steam locomotives from the Reichsbahn.

These locations are assisted by volunteers who focus on preservation and restoration of historic stock—work that is very labour intensive. This cooperation has great

benefits for both sides—the railway fans can pursue their hobby, while the museum benefits from an inexpensive means of caring for its historic railway parks. In addition to the stock collections, these locations host small permanent exhibitions of local interest or numerous special events. Visitors to such events enjoy the special atmosphere of the historic workshops and sheds.

### Fire Damage

The large fire at the Nuremberg depot of the DB Museum on 17 October 2005 caused huge loss when it destroyed an historical shed and damaged 24 pieces of valuable rolling stock in storage there. These included an operational replica of the *Adler* steam locomotive and its four carriages built for the 100th anniversary of the Nuremberg and Fürth railway in 1935. The DB AG board has decided that they must be rebuilt to operational condition in time for the 175th anniversary in 2010. Whether any other damaged vehicles can be restored is now being examined.

Despite this accident, the renovation of the DB Museum will continue in the future. By using its main base in Nuremberg, its locations throughout Germany and a varied programme of events, the museum will present a 'total railway experience,' leaving behind the limits of traditional museums. This is the right and necessary course for any museum competing for visitors against other leisure and entertainment activities. Surveys show that the main visitors to the museum are not railway fans—although they an important group—but are families with children. This means the museum is competing with wildlife and leisure parks, cinemas and other modern entertainment experiences, necessitating a high level of investment in exhibition technologies and equipment, as well as the ability and

General Information on Deutsche Bahn AG DB Museum	
Lessingstraße 6 90443 Nuremberg Tel.: +49 (0) 180-444-2233 Fax: +49 (0) 911-219-2121 info@db-museum.de http://www.dbmuseum.de	Opening Hours: 09:00 to 17:00 Tuesday to Sunday
	Tickets:
	Adults €4
	Children (6–14 years), schoolchildren €2
	Groups (10 or more people) €3
	School groups (per pupil) €1.50
	Guided tours by appointment



Outdoor area activities with young people

(DB Museum)

readiness of staff to meet the needs of the modern consumer and leisure society while not losing sight of the museum content, quality of exhibits, and preservation and documentation of railway history.

The DB Museum has set its sights on

offering the public demanding content in an entertaining and accessible way, based on one of the world's largest collections of railway history. ■



### Rainer Mertens

Dr Mertens is Head of Collections, Exhibitions and Marketing at the DB Museum. He studied history, political science and economic science at Erlangen and obtained his doctorate from Bayreuth. His publications include *Profil eines Reformers zwischen Aufklärung und Romantik* co-author with Johannes Scharrer; *Was ist Was?—Die Eisenbahn* (co-author); *Geschichte der Eisenbahn in Deutschland* Vol. 1–3 (co-author), and other articles on railway history and the 19th century.