

# FOR OLD TIME'S SAKE

A motorman for 40 years, he returned for a day to sample sleek, new trains

**Rajendra Aklekar**  
Mumbai, October 3

AS THE old man got into the motorman's cab at Churchgate station, memories of hundreds of similar — and yet, oddly, different — journeys rushed back almost like the trains he once drove.

He had been there, done that, for nearly 40 years.

But 81-year-old Charles Francis Amarol, one of the city's oldest living motormen, could smell the change in the new, polished local he now sat in on Friday. "It's fascinating. The technology, the gleaming steel coaches, all look nice," he said, getting emotional. "Everything has changed."

Electric suburban trains on the Western Railway were introduced in January 1928.

Born on April 17, 1927, Amarol was appointed apprentice motorman with the Bombay Baroda and Central India — that's what the Western Railway was then called — in February 1946.

It was the launch of a long career behind the driver's handle.

"I drove my last local from Churchgate on April 30, 1985," said Charles, who took a ride till Bandra on Friday, sitting beside the driver's seat. "I feel I have been on a test ride once again today."

He had driven the first local between Bandra and Victoria Terminus (now Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus) on the Harbour line in the late '60s.

He was also the first to run trials of the 100 kmph suburban trains and of a new braking technology.

"Earlier, trains were wooden as compared to today's that are in gleaming



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**CHARLES FRANCIS AMAROL (81), former motorman**

steel. Mumbai's suburban network has seen various types of trains from England's Metropolitan Cammell carriages to Japanese-made and German-made ones — and I have driven them all," he said, nostalgia mixed with equal ounces of pride.

And air-conditioning was apparently planned many years ago, too. "The Britishers did try air-conditioning in a few coaches. During the trial, two cigarette packets

were kept near each seat for the officers to smoke," he said. "But the smoke and air-conditioning didn't go well together."

For once, the childhood cliché of 'I want to become a driver' proved true in Amarol's case.

His father was a steam engine train driver in Bombay. "I took over in 1946, once my father retired," he said.

"Charles was a master at his job, always ready for new trials," said P.C. Sehgal, managing director of Mumbai Railway Vikas Corporation. "He had an exceptional career."

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