The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Wanted: Roof-Riding

By Kevin O'Flynn

August 18, 2010



You can imagine James Bond doing it if they were to make another Bond film in Russia. Say he is on the Trans-Siberian Railroad or an elektrichka commuter train to Bakovka and the villain is getting away, so Bond sets off to chase him — an evil adversary intent on destroying the world with an almanac and the portable fan he has bought from the hawker on the train.

The villain, though, has smashed a train window and climbed onto the roof. He seems to be getting away, but then Bond does the same. Despite the train's dirty sides, there is not a speck of dust on Bond's Brioni suit, and he appears on the roof. The chase begins. It's meant to be a long chase — but "Gkkkkkk!" and they are both flung off the train. Electrocuted.

Apparently, Russian train roofs are not made for dramatic good-meets-evil chases. The trains have an electric cable that runs along the roof and will happily kill you before you meet your archenemy over the restaurant car.

Running along a Russian train roof had never really featured in my plans, but the knowledge that the roof was a deathtrap wormed its way into my brain as did the fact that everyone — Russian at least — seemed to know this, but foreigners not so much. There was a visitor to

Russia who I was told climbed up for a laugh one night and was tragically killed on the roof of a train.

“It’s not every wagon. It’s every second wagon,” Colleague No. 1 said of the electric cable, after asking, “Why do you want to run along a train roof?”

“You don’t always get killed. What if it is a steam train?” Colleague No. 2 said.

“Are there still steam trains?” I asked.

“There are in my village,” he said, before musing about the steam blowing out at the runners up above. “That’s not going to be much fun,” he added.

The idea had appeared in my mind again as Komsomolskaya Pravda ran its regular teenagers-are-freaky article on Thursday.

When they are not dressing up as prostitutes at Vorobyovy Gory and seeing who can get the most “Johns” in one night — consummation never actually takes place, as the girls then run away after agreeing on a price — the paper reported that the teens are “roof-riding” along suburban trains, which have a cable that can give you a 3,000-volt shock. A video shows them sitting on the roof smiling.

More than 3,000 teenagers have been cautioned for breaking safety rules on trains in Moscow, and 92 have been fined for roof-riding, the paper reported.

A 15-year-old was seriously injured in April when the electric cable got him.

Original url: https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2010/08/18/wanted-roof-riding-a742