

Virgin Trains' Azuma inspires new trend for hipster trainspotter

New findings revealed by Virgin Trains have unveiled trainspotting as the latest emerging hipster trend, as millennials with a thirst for photography, high-speed travel and fast-moving technology declare their love for trains online like never before, the train company informs in a press release.

With barely one year to go until the launch of the new high-tech Virgin trains, interest from millennials shows no signs of slowing down as Azuma continues to spark spikes in conversations on social media. Since announcing the new fleet last year, the train operator has seen three clear peaks in engagement from fans, including Azuma's inaugural test run to Scotland in August.

Social media analytics platform Talkwalker has also identified more millennial Instagrammers documenting train travel than ever before. #Trainporn and #train_nerds saw a year on year increase in posts of over 200 per cent between January and September 2016-2017, while on #ukrailscene, posts increased by 615 per cent for the same period, with 76 per cent of these posts made by the under 35s.

To delve further into this emerging trend, Virgin Trains worked with subculture expert and author of Style Tribes, Caroline Young, to identify the top next-generation train lovers taking over social media – millennials with a thirst for 'real' experiences, photography and a love of technology.

Caroline commented: "This new type of train fan is an avid social media user who seeks unique adventures and experiences

that will help them connect with, and impress, thousands of other users. Not only is there a certain 'geek chic' attached to the concept of trainspotting, but the journey becomes part of the travel experience as people enjoy the chance to observe scenery, read, listen to music, and even write. Technology is key to their lives, and we know they're snapping and sharing their real-life experiences more than ever before."

Caroline continues: "The new Azuma fleet will be giving this new wave of trainspotter something they've been excited to see for years – a totally revolutionised fleet of trains equipped with the perfect mix of speed, advanced technology and sleek design that we know the modern rail fan craves."

The top next generation train fans, as identified by Caroline Young, are:

1. @AllTheStations. With a social media presence of over 50,000 followers – this young couple charted to fame earlier this year when they challenged themselves to visit all 2,563 stations in Great Britain, capturing a digital documentary as they went – all fuelled by a crowdfunding project
2. @kings_transports. Dramatic backdrops and a feel of adventure, Marzia and Cekotto have amassed 73,700 followers from around the world
3. @version3point1. Branded as a 'train whisperer', Scotland-based Anne's page is filled with beautiful photography on sweeping coastlines and her rail travel
4. @cpsedmonds. Sharing 'train stuff' and beautiful black and white architectural shots

Hipster couple, Vicki and Geoff of All The Stations blog, and number one on Caroline's list, are typical of the next generation train fan. When they visited every national railway station in Great Britain, they regularly posted video content of their coast-to-coast adventure, which took three months to complete and was closely followed by their online millennial

audience.

Vicki, who has already visited the Darlington factory where Azuma will be built, said: "We've loved the response to our videos, which have now reached more than six million views, as it really shows that there is a growing interest in railways and train travel, and many are younger enthusiasts who, like us, are keen to have an adventure and explore the country by rail."

Aileen Jordan, Director of Azuma at Virgin Trains on the east coast, said: "We're really excited to see trainspotting transcend generations and become as popular amongst hipsters as it is with regular fans. Azuma has been sparking conversations on social media since we unveiled the train last year, and we're delighted it is inspiring a younger train enthusiast. We're looking forward to exciting even more fans when our trains hit the tracks in a barely a year's time, and move us into the next era of high-speed passenger train travel."

Set to revolutionise journeys on the East Coast, Virgin Trains' Azuma will transform the UK rail industry when the new fleet comes into service from December 2018 – 65 trains will provide an extra 12,200 seats and increase capacity into Kings Cross by 28 per cent during peak time. Azuma will slice 22 minutes off East Coast journeys, making London to Edinburgh in just four hours, and London to Leeds in two hours, the norm throughout the day.

Each Azuma train will come complete with distinct new interiors, ergonomically designed seats, enhanced leg room, faster and free* Wi-Fi, power sockets for every seat, more overhead luggage space, a state-of-the-art seat reservation system, and superior catering throughout.

Photo: Virgin Trains' Azuma inspires new trend for hipster trainspotter. Photo from Virgin Trains.