

## First-class rail travel booms as students and football fans help ticket sales soar to more than 11 million

- First class travellers are likely to be students or stag and hen parties
- Pullman Carriages with a full silver service meal are doing a roaring trade
- Booked in advance, many first class tickets are now affordable

By [Daily Mail Reporter](#)

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First class rail travel has hit a record high in Britain but it's thanks to boozy revellers and youngsters rather than stuffy city gents and business executives, new figures show.

More than 11 million tickets on the upmarket train compartments were sold last year, believed to be higher than even the golden age of rail travel back in the 1950s.

Yet the modern first class passenger is more likely to be a student, football fan or on a stag or hen party than the upper class image from films like *Brief Encounter*.



**Living the high life: Despite the recession, first class travel is proving popular, as in this restaurant car on the train from London's Liverpool Street station to Norwich**

The latest figures are from the Association of Train Operating Companies rounding up all the regional railway operator's into a nationwide total.

Before the recession the most common kind of upmarket traveller was a high powered commuter or public sector worker who could get the bumper fares paid for on expenses.

But now it is often more likely to be a gang of revellers off on a hen weekend who have picked up a first class ticket for just £5 a journey more than they would have paid for standard fare.

Other typical commuters taking up the best seats on the train include students going home for a weekend having used their railcards to book the cheapest fares well in advance.

Football fans are now more prepared to travel in a bit of style for away games as opposed to the old 'football specials' where they were herded like cattle into packed carriages.

There are also other, more bizarre groups of first class travellers.

According to Virgin there is a booming market in youngsters travelling from London to Manchester on Saturday evenings just to go to trendy nightclubs.

And First Great Western are doing a roaring trade in nostalgic middle aged railway fans travelling first class just to recreate their own golden age of travel on Pullman Carriages with a full silver service meal option.



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**Fan of first class: Chancellor George Osborne was famously caught out by ticket collectors after he refused to move to standard class last year, despite not having a first class ticket**

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It marks a massive turnaround in the kind of passenger now filling the plusher seats in first class, where they get free food and drink and more attentive waiter service.

A few years ago the prices for first class fares on some city to city routes were so high it was often cheaper to fly instead.

Since then employers have cut back on paying for expensive travel for their workers - even MPs have been forced by their expenses scandal to travel on standard class carriages.

A first class seat from London to Manchester, booked in advance, can now be bought for as little as £36 one way, for instance.

## **FIRST CLASS TICKET SALES**

2003 - 6,738,921

2004 - 6,922,701

2005 - 7,222,645

2006 - 8,148,420

2007 - 8,851,311

2008 - 9,787,707

2009 - 9,325,282

2010 - 9,722,875

2011 - 10,318,926

2012 - 11,040,364

This led to rail companies bringing down the costs and bringing in special offers, particularly at weekends and evening, for instance offering upgrades to first class for just £5 or less.

And it has sparked a boom in travelling in style but from a whole new market, said ATOC, which has been compiling first class ticket sales since 2003.

Back then just 6.7 million were bought, rising to 9.8 million in 2008, dropping the next year but then recovering to the new record high.

However, the 11 million figure is likely to be the highest ever as recently published statistics show the number of UK train journeys of 1.4 billion in 2012 was actually a 90-year-high.

Michael Roberts, Chief Executive at ATOC, said: "Train companies have responded to the tough economic climate by offering a range of deals and investing in improved services to encourage more passengers to travel first class.

"It is exactly this kind of commercial approach by operators that helps to explain why travelling by train has become more popular over a double dip recession, generating revenue to pay for services and sustaining government investment."

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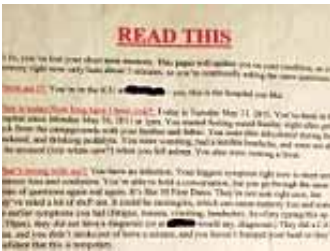
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I like first class on FGW trains to Exeter or Plymouth from Taunton. A weekend supplement of a fiver gets you a nice big seat, and free tea and cakes. It's good value for money.

- [Hillbilly](#) , Dorset, United Kingdom, 05/3/2013 18:56

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A first class price for a second class rail system

- [Abolishechr](#) , London, United Kingdom, 05/3/2013 18:37

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Ah, the British rail pricing system, one of nature's incomprehensible and infinitely complex creations. And the ultimate argument against intelligent design theory.- [Simon](#) , Leeds, 05/3/2013 12:46.....Actually British Rail's pricing system was simple it's only since privatisation that the pricing system has become incomprehensible.

- [Martin](#) , Reading, 05/3/2013 18:10

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I'm guessing you actually get a seat if you're in first class? I am a standing up London commuter:)

- [Egg race](#) , London, United Kingdom, 05/3/2013 17:16

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Just remember...." the rich get richer and the poor get ... who cares !!!!

- [s\\_gee](#) , stafford, 05/3/2013 17:13

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Quote "I live in Germany where it's possible to book a ticket online, print it off at home and reserve a seat in standard class. Why are NONE of these things possible in Broken Britain? Nev'r mind - just answered my own question.".....  
These things are ALL perfectly possible. In fact, you don't even have to print the tickets for some routes, you can just show a barcode on your mobile. But I suspect you're probably just new to the 'wide wide world of webs' and don't understand how to do these things.

- [woof in a dog](#) , Coventry, United Kingdom, 05/3/2013 13:59

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In fairness, you can only get a decent price if you book well in advance and don't deviate from the train you booked a seat on - 'open' first class tickets and those bought closer to the journey date are far more expensive. Can I also say that as a 'public sector worker' all of my first class trips have been paid entirely out of my own wages, aside from a few very senior managers we absolutely do not get first class travel on expenses.

- [Gordon](#) , Airdrie, 05/3/2013 13:35

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Who would want to travel with a carriage full of plebs.

- [Steve](#) , Cheshire England, 05/3/2013 13:29

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Recently I have been able to buy 1st class tickets cheaper than I could buy Standard Class Rather nice to be fed and watered without the need to leave my seat

- [alan](#) , Edinburgh uk, 05/3/2013 13:27

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No idea why I was red arrowed for my last comment. What I said is true right before your eyes - ignorant folk saying students aren't as poor as we thought, unable to distinguish between those with wealthy parents and those living entirely on their loan..

- [Bob the Welder](#) , London, United Kingdom, 05/3/2013 13:14

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