

Mass Transit

Photos and story by Lucy Birmingham

It's clean, incredibly efficient and, safe—just avoid rush hour or you may end up crushed beyond repair. The Japanese railroad and subway systems are a testament to the meaning of clean and efficient. Even the monstrous crowds during Tokyo's rush hour are a feat overcome daily.

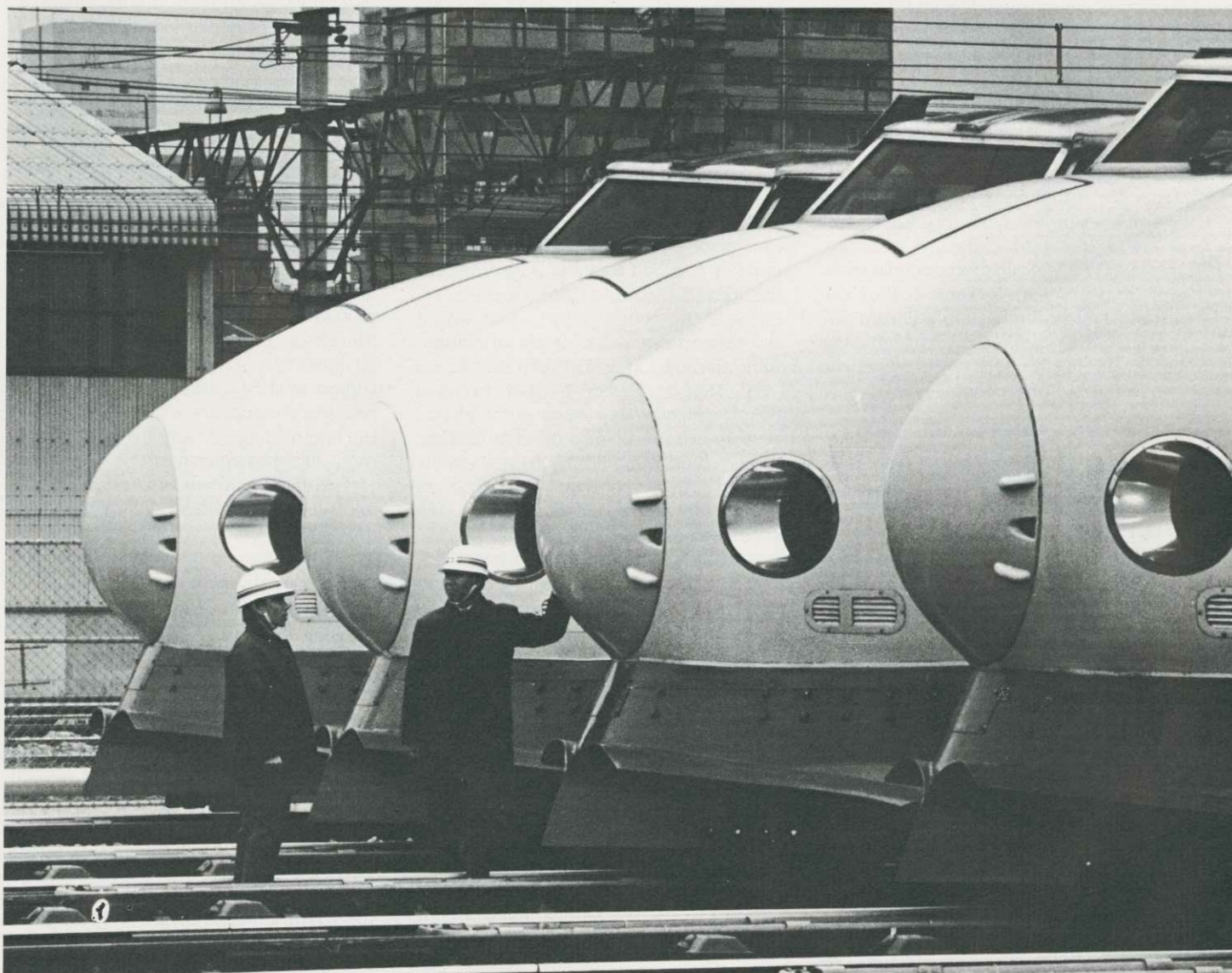
In Tokyo, block-long Yamanote loop-line trains depart stations every two or three minutes. It's almost shocking. On an average, one million people pass through Shinjuku Station everyday. On a "slow" day at Ueno Station, ticket collection for the "bullet train" dips to 15,000.

Ticket-takers are sometimes faster than automatic machines and always extremely helpful and informed about the area surrounding the station. They'll go out of their way to help visitors unable to speak Japanese. The



"bullet train," known in Japan as the *shinkansen*, still maintains an untarnished record of no accidents even after over 20 years of service, still one of the fastest trains in the world.

But it's not all crowds, and one does not always have to feel like a canned sardine. Japan's railroad system is vast and runs through the most scenic countryside in uncrowded one-, two-, and three-car splendor. In all, riding Japan's trains and subways is a uniquely pleasant experience. ●



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