

# BUDAPEST

244.

# RIDES

Taking a tram or a bus in Budapest is not everyone's idea of a pleasure ride. During rush hours, to squeeze into one of the jampacked cars on the Grand Boulevard—main artery of the city—is a feat one may rightfully be proud of.

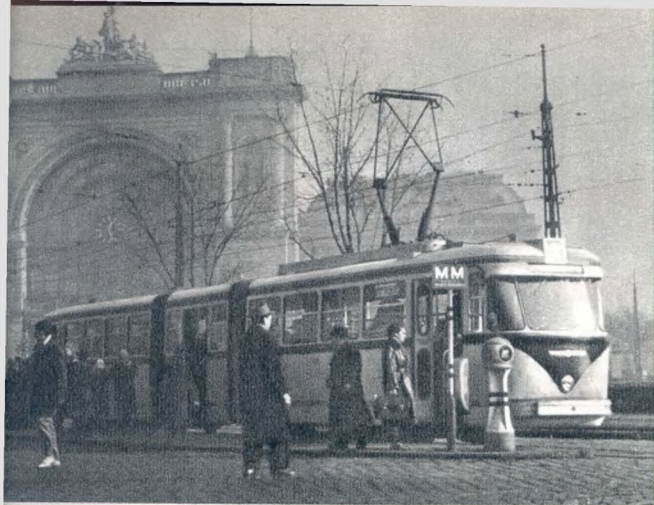
Such things are common of course to most big cities in the world. Yet organizing and directing a transportation system that caters for two million people is no child's play. Back in 1945, during the months that followed the end of the war, each tramcar that came bumping along in war-scarred Budapest would be greeted with a standing ovation. But where are the snows of yesteryear? and where are the joys of seventeen years ago? Today, if a couple of minutes pass before the next tram comes along, the Budapest citizen is apt to become nervous, glancing every second at his wrist-watch.

Yet trams and buses are put into service in Budapest by the scores, arriving at shorter and shorter intervals. But all that is not enough for the inhabitants of Budapest, for the Budapest citizen likes to get around fast—and cheap.

What means of conveyance are there to carry him?

First, there is the tramway, forefather of all types of public vehicles in Budapest. Its ancestor was the horse-car tram, which would peacefully trot along the streets and supplied the contemporary Tin-Pan Alley with the theme of a still-surviving song-hit beginning "On top of





Trams like this are helping to handle the growing traffic

A common sight in Budapest—"double" buses



the omnibus, at night." (They were double-deckers.)

The trams of Budapest are painted yellow, except for the electric trains that ply between the city and some of the suburbs, which are olive green. A half-hour ride by tram brings one to the heart of the city from nearly any point. This may not seem an achievement apt to excite world-wide interest, but in a city which spreads over an area of 30 to 40 kilometres up and across and which still has an abundance of narrow old streets, this is no mean performance. To top it off, huge crowds of factory and office-workers commute to the capital each morning from distances varying from 50 to 100 kilometres.

And, when in Budapest, nearly all take a tram. Budapest trams have had their looks improved a lot. Some older cars (made between the two world wars) are still in service. Tram fares

are cheap, whether you ride the old or the new. If you take a tram in, say, Budafok (in the south-western part of the capital) you can ride all the way across town to Újpest (in the northeast) on the same transfer ticket, for 70 fillérs (100 fillérs = 1 forint). Weekly tickets for workers and students cost even less.

For those who wish to travel faster, I would recommend the buses. (The price of a transfer ticket on the bus is 1.50 forints, through ticket, 1 forint.)

Bus rides, a rather expensive kind of transportation between the wars, have become an "article of mass consumption." Thousands of blue buses ply the routes of Budapest. Many of them are "double buses," that is a bus and a trailer bus joined together like the carriages of a train. There are routes which run round the whole length of the ring of the Grand Boulevard, others climb up the sides of János Hill and

Liberty Hill. (The last named "competes" with the only mountain tram line in Budapest. But this is by no means a cut-throat competition—both buses and cog-wheel trams are packed with passengers.)

There are several trolley routes. Both swift and noiseless, the trolley-bus has nevertheless not wholly become "acclimatised" yet in Budapest.

"Hey! Taxi!"

Well, yes. Call you may, but it won't stop—in this, it resembles perfectly its Viennese or Parisian counterparts. Another resemblance is that taxi-drivers are, on the whole, experienced guides, walking (or rather, riding) directories of places to go. I suggest that, if you should happen to lose your street map of Budapest, you take a taxi. Soviet Moskviches and flashy Volgas and Polish Warszawas are running in the streets.

You mean, how to take one if they all seem to be engaged? Pardon me. That's why they're taxis. Still, just pick up the phone and dial 22-22-22, and they will send one round to pick you up. (Provided, of course, (a) their line is not busy, and (b) they have a cab available.)

Budapest has not only streets: it also has a river—a fairly large one—traversing the city from north to south. Small river steamers that seem to be relics from the late 19th century can be seen puffing up and down and across the river Danube. Also plying the river are white aluminium river buses gliding under the bridges, past the floodlit Fishermen's Bastion on Castle Hill, en route towards St Gellért Hill or Margaret Island.

What I want to say is, come and ride with us through Budapest!

You'll find the trip rewarding.

**Ferenc Baktai**

(Photos by Mária Sziklás, György Lajos and Tamás Fényes)





Budapest's fleet of taxis carry their share of the traffic



Buses are slowly ousting the tram



The morning rush at a station of the interurban train



The end of the line

"Take it easy," advises the conductor in friendly debate with an impatient passenger

