



We all have heard about or maybe even seen an armored vehicle, but how about a train car. The Gold Coast Railroad Museum (GCRM) has the Ferdinand Magellan. Its code named was 'U.S. Car Number 1.' It was the land-based predecessor of Air Force One. It was the President of the United States' transportation cross country from 1942 until 1958. "It is the only private railroad car specifically designed for the president of the United States. The Pullman Company built the Ferdinand Magellan in 1928 and refurbished it." <nps.gov>

Presidential Users

President Roosevelt (FDR) traveled 50,000 miles on the Ferdinand Magellan. President Truman was also a frequent user. In 1948, Truman made a whistle-stop tour for reelection across the country (31,700 miles-356 speeches). President Eisenhower preferred Air Force One and rarely utilized the train. In 1958 the train was 'declared surplus.' The car was mothballed by the White House, but it could not find a federal museum to claim it. A Florida legislator and the President of the University of Miami started negotiations with the federal government and acquired it for \$80,277.53 in 1959. It became part of GCRM. <atlasobscura.com> <nps.gov>

Interesting footnote regarding the use of the Presidential train and the Ferdinand Magellan. President Roosevelt preferred the train to travel at no more 30 mph so as not to cause any rocking while he was in his wheelchair. President Truman, however, urged the train's engineer to travel at 80 mph. <atlasobscura.com>

Life after mothballing

"But the *Ferdinand Magellan's* official duties had not yet ended. In October 1984, President Ronald Reagan incorporated the car into his train "Heartland Special," which he used to campaign along the same route that Truman had used in Ohio. "Nothing can stop us," Reagan proclaimed from the observation deck, "because this train is bound for glory." <whitehousehistory.org>

In 1985, the car was declared a National Historic Landmark."

The Ferdinand Magellan

"The train has nickel-steel armor and three-inch-thick bullet-resistant windows. The rear door alone tips the scales at 1,500 pounds (though this inconvenience is minimized by carefully balanced hinges). In total, the car weighs 142 tons—almost double the weight of the standard 80-ton Pullman car. By way of comparison, a modern M1 Abrams tank weighs 62 tons. The Magellan enjoyed first right of way wherever it traveled, and railroad companies kept other traffic at least 30 minutes ahead or behind the President." <atlasobscura.com>

"The interior of the Magellan contains a Presidential Suite (two separate bedrooms for Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt), two guest rooms, a conference room, and an observation lounge. The rear platform was wired with a microphone and loudspeakers that came in handy during whistle-stop campaign speeches." <atlasobscura.com>

"When it was in service, the Magellan traveled with a fleet that included sleeping and office cars for White House staff, an Army medical car, and a communications car nicknamed "the crate." The Presidential Limousine and Secret Service Cadillacs were brought along in a special garage car. Two locomotives were often required to drag this ensemble up steeper track grades." <atlasobscura.com>

Security for the President's train included railroad's police to check overpasses and functions. Other officers were at stations. Tracks were also checked to ensure that switches and rails were in order. <atlasobscura.com>

For interior photos of the Ferdinand Magellan go to <theculturetrip.com>.



Originally built in 1928, the Ferdinand Magellan was one of a group of six Pullman cars named after famous explorers. The other five were: David Livingstone, Henry Stanley, Marco Polo, Robert Peary and Roald Amundsen. These charter cars were all placed in the service pool at about the same time and were operated and promoted by the Pullman Company. America's elite ranging from Wall Street tycoons, to Hollywood socialites to Washington D.C. congressmen used the rail cars. In fact, at one time or another all of these Pullmans may have been utilized by President Herbert Hoover and then Franklin Roosevelt. The Roald Amundsen, for example, was frequently assigned to Roosevelt prior to 1942.

GCRM display information

After Pearl Harbor, great concern arose over espionage and possible threats against Roosevelt's life. It was at that time White House aids Michael Reilly and Steven Early suggested the use of a custom-built railroad car with armor plating. Although Roosevelt was a wealthy man by birth, he and his wife Eleanor were extremely frugal with any public expenditure for the presidency during those depression and post depression years. Roosevelt finally approved the idea of a personal rail car, but only after he was told it would serve future presidents as well. He asked that the décor of the car be kept very plain and simple - no ostentatious additions.



The Car and a hurricane

"Hurricane Andrew in 1992 derailed the collection of antique and rare train cars to the tune of \$3.5 million. The outside of the historic armor-plated 1928 Ferdinand Magellan, the rail car used by Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry Truman, was battered by the storm but provided a safe haven for museum caretaker Bob Lewis. He and his wife Jesse weathered the storm inside the 142.5-ton car, which vibrated only slightly. The hurricane's winds were 145 mph gusting to 175 mph. A 625-foot-long steel shed covering four tracks and much of the rail car collection was reduced to rubble by the storm and parts collapsed on top of the cars." <upi.com>

Today, the Ferdinand Magellan is GCRM's headliner and a classic American railroad exhibit to view.

Sources: <https://www.goldcoastrailroadmuseum.org/our-railcars>, <https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/ferdinand-magellan>, <https://theculturetrip.com/north-america/usa/florida/articles/a-brief-history-of-the-ferdinand-magellan-presidential-railcar-in-miami-fl/>, <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/franklin-d-roosevelt-s-train-ferdinand-magellan>, <https://www.architecturaldigest.com/story/railcar-article>, https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/presidents/us_car_number_one.html, <https://www.businessinsider.com/inside-the-special-train-used-by-presidents-fdr-to-reagan-2020-1>, <https://nationalrrmuseum.org/blog/all-aboard-next-stop-the-white-house/>, <https://nationalrrmuseum.org/blog/notable-presidential-trains/> and <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1992/10/30/Rail-museum-vows-to-rebuild-after-hurricane/7975720421200/>.

7-part series on the [Gold Coast Railroad is at acuri.net/florida](https://www.acuri.net/florida)

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