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Man and Machine: The Best of Stephan Wilkinson

Stephan Wilkinson

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"They sit on a spur of test track outside General Electric's locomotive factory in Erie, Pennsylvania, panting and grumbling like two old lions half asleep. The ominous, muttering rumble is the idle of 8,800 horsepower--24 cylinders with pistons big as buckets, turbochargers the size of washing machines, two V12 engines driving alternators five feet in diameter. For here are two units of the most advanced diesel-electric locomotives in the world: a pair of GE Evolutions."--Excerpt from "Do the Locomotion" in Man and Machine Stephan Wilkinson--a longtime expert on the ways men entertain themselves when no one is telling them what to do--takes readers into the high-speed, high-risk world of restored jets, fast boats, and Formula 1 cars. Wilkinson visits a factory where Amish men build custom ambulances, flies an airliner from the glory days of air travel, meets a bird that is a killing machine, and has a hot date with a handgun. In another chapter, Wilkinson relates the hazards of flying purely on instruments, and why being able to do so can make the difference between life and death. He draws from his own misadventures in flight and explains exactly why the high-end Beech Bonanza is known as “the doctor killer.” And dissecting the finely tuned instrument that is the Formula 1 car, Wilkinson relates how the engine's connecting rods actually stretch at 19,000 rpm, even though they're made of titanium, and what can happen when a racecar brakes at 6Gs. Always entertaining, Wilkinson takes men, and maybe even a few women, where they love to go--under the hood, over the mechanic’s shoulder, and behind the wheel.

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