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MOB-BLS-ZB Three lines but no third rail



The test coach at Interlaken Ost.

PHOTO: Golden Pass

A new solution to an old problem appears to be coming to fruition. The 189kms from Luzern to Montreux are served by three railways. The two long metre-gauge operations of the Montreux-Oberland-Bernois (MOB) and the Zentralbahn (ZB) are separated by 53 kms of BLS standard gauge track between Zweisimmen and Interlaken Ost. On the ZB between Luzern and Meiringen there are several rack sections, at mostly 1 in 8. The MOB from Zweisimmen to Montreux is electrified at 900V dc, while the rest of the route is electrified at 15,000V ac 16.7Hz. So the passengers who book the spectacular through journey (marketed as the Golden Pass route) have to change twice, which for some rather spoils the fun.

For the last 20 years a "Third Rail"

study group has been in existence with the intention of trying to get the metre gauge rolling stock across the standard gauge section using dual gauge track. However, the complexity of this, especially in Spiez with its heavy traffic, has to be seen to be believed, as track geometry, switching, interlocking and signalling would all have to be expensively modified. Costs are unrealistic. However proposals to allow some through running of panorama cars are nearer to realization. Financial support from the Confederation and Cantons and technical support from the railways and the Federal Transport Department (BAV) has resulted in the development of a light air-suspension bogie with variable gauge. This was described in the June 2009 edition of Swiss Express. The use of this innovative



A Golden Pass train at Gstaad on the MOB.

PHOTO: Michael Wild

bogie, and its associated infrastructure, could permit MOB cars to operate through from Montreux and Interlaken, certainly the section of highest business interest. The Zentralbahn rack section over the Brünig pass remains inaccessible; every vehicle in the train (not just the locomotive), must have rack wheels and braking, and meet other technical norms. On the MOB the 1 in 14 adhesion

sections on its climb from the level of Le Léman at Montreux mean that coaches must not exceed 8 tonnes – whereas a fully rack-equipped ZB Brünig route coach weighs 16 tonnes.

The innovative dual gauge bogies were demonstrated at Montreux in May to local authorities and the press. The bogie design has been further developed by Prose AG at Winterthur and the

Super power for the test coach on the standard gauge.

PHOTO: Golden Pass/MOB





The test coach at Zweisimmen.

PHOTO: Beat Feller

components manufactured by Alstom AG at Neuhausen. The components were assembled at the MOB's own technical workshops at Chernex. The prototype bogies have been mounted on Golden-Pass coach BDs 220, built as a second class observation car with bar area but reconstructed with a lift to load passengers travelling in wheelchairs. This presumably will not be needed once the

MOB's new fleet of low-floor coaches, described later, is in service. Extensive trials have taken place on both metre and standard gauge and, thanks to the Golden Pass/MOB's Marketing Team, we have photos of the coach on one of its outings beyond Zweisimmen to Interlaken in this magazine. As well as being branded Transgoldenpass, it carries both the Goldenpass and BLS logos.

The standard gauge portion of the Golden Pass train at Interlaken West. PHOTO: Rupert Chambers



It is understood that the Golden Pass marketing people (and others) are not too disappointed by the apparent technical impossibility of running right through, as they are aware that a large number of the tourists who make the Montreux – Luzern trip also wish to visit the Jungfrau Region around Interlaken during an extended break between trains. Attractive as the village of Zweisimmen is spending additional time there does not have the same appeal to the professionally managed tour parties. Tourism politics also come into play here. A carefully managed break between trains in Interlaken will allow the sale of a trip on the BOB (although perhaps not to the top of the Jungfrau), or a period of time for passengers to sample the ‘retail opportunities’ offered by the town itself. Run through Interlaken and the money does not get off the train. It is not just about the trains and the scenery!

The MOB has also taken delivery of the first bodyshell for their new fleet of eight low-floor observation coaches, which are designed to meet the requirements of equality law for disabled travellers on the Golden Pass route. The

contract for the bodies was placed with Raily SA of Biel and, as with the rebuilt 5000 series railcars, the MOB works at Chernex will fit these out. Running gear for the new stock will consist of Alstom’s Centro 1000 bogies. The bodies incorporate large, fully insulated, picture windows for all of the very comfortable seats and wheelchair spaces on both floor levels, with fully-accessible toilets. Roll-on access is possible from station platforms of standard height not only for passengers with reduced mobility but also prams, buggies and luggage. Space has also been earmarked for cycles and skis. The first coach to be completed, Bs 231, began trials in March and when the full fleet is in service they can be used not only with locomotive hauled trains but also sandwiched between the two cars of the workhorses of the semi-fast MOB trains, the reliable 4000-series automotrices built in 1968.

This article was collated from information supplied by Michael Farr and s’Murmeli.

Scale plans of the new coaches are on our website.

A ZB train waits at Luzern in March 2010.

PHOTO: Malcolm Bulpitt

