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Autor: Gavazzi, Mario
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A Distinguished Diligence Mario Gavazzi



In July 2016 the Gotthard stage coach is in the depot at Affoltern am Albis ready for being transported back to Zurich. *Photos: Mario Gavazzi*

This December public transport on the Gotthard route that links the Ticino with the rest of the Confederation, takes a quantum leap forward with the railway through the newly opened 57km long Gotthard Base Tunnel coming into full timetabled service. The previous step-change in public transport on this route was the opening of the original Gotthard Tunnel in 1882, something that totally revolutionised trans-alpine travel. Prior to this travellers over the historic pass were faced with a difficult journey by horse-drawn diligence (stagecoach), that carried both passengers and mail on this important transit across the alpine barrier that divided the country. The diligences ran between Flüelen, where they connected with the ships from Luzern, and Camerlata near Como, where onward transport into Italy was available and were organised by local operators in Uri and the Ticino. With the coming of the railway these local business disappeared and most of the fleet of diligences moved to other areas or were simply scrapped.

However the last of the original "Gotthard-Postkutsche" is still in existence and has recently been through a major restoration process. This diligence, that was probably originally built around 1860, but there is no exact record of the date or who constructed it, survives for all to see in the entrance to the Zürich premises of the Schweizerisches Landesmuseum. This building is just a short walk from Zürich's Hauptbahnhof. It is known that this vehicle was operated by Post CH AG's predecessor organisation the Schweizerische Post-und Telegraphenbetriebe (PTT) up to the opening of the railway, when it was withdrawn but apparently not disposed-of. In 1897 the PTT management donated it to the National Museum at Zürich that was then being developed prior to opening in 1898. Today the museum considers the diligence

to be the most photographed object in its collection and in recognition of both its historic and current status they arranged for the comprehensive restoration to take place. For this, the diligence was moved to the museum's repair depot at Affoltern am Albis (ZH) in summer 2015, where experts from the Luzern-based conservation and restoration specialist company 'Objektgerecht' were able to use their skills. The vehicle was then returned to greet visitors to its Zürich home at the end of July 2016. There are many locomotives and trains, plus the buildings and tunnels of the original Gotthard line, to recall the story of this historic route since 1882 – but there is only this original diligence to recall the movement of people and post before the opening of the railway. +



LEFT: First class part of the "Gotthardpostkutsche".



TOP RIGHT: Flüelen-Camerlata was the first direct way between south and north Switzerland.

BELOW RIGHT: Kurt Michel from the enterprise "Objektgerecht" at work.

