

Zeitschrift: Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal
Herausgeber: Swiss Railways Society
Band: - (2018)
Heft: 135

Artikel: An Appenzeller Bahn veteran
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-853760>

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An Appenzeller Bahn Veteran


Bill Salter



No.56 at Wasserauen.

All Photos: Bill Salter

Diesel Electric Railcar BCFm 2/4 No.56 was built by SIG in 1929 as one of a pair for the Appenzeller Bahnen, (AB) at a time when the rising price and difficulty of obtaining coal were making steam operations difficult. At the time the company thought electrification would be unaffordable and diesel traction was looked on favourably, following successful trials of a prototype SLM diesel on the Gossau to Herisau line. Two diesel railcars, seating six in 2nd Class and twenty-four in 3rd Class, were therefore acquired and were numbered at the time as Nos.25 and 26. The Oerlikon generators and electrical equipment on the cars were powered by 136kw Sulzer diesel engines similar to those used on lake steamers of the period. In fact electrification came to the AB just a few years later in 1933, so these railcars saw little intensive

use before being transferred into the reserve. This limited use means that No.56 has survived for almost 90 years in practically original condition. It is kept at the AB Museum in Wasserauen and only ventures out a few times a year. Another interesting point about these vehicles is that they were the first in Switzerland to sport the characteristic asymmetrical front windows used on many metre gauge railcars, the wider window being the one in front of the driver's desk. The trailing carriage is preserved, AB open-sided 'summer coach' No.CK39 built in 1889, the oldest still-operational vehicle on the entire AB system. Again it is in practically original condition. The main photograph shows these immaculately preserved historic vehicles at Wasserauen on the 26th May 2018 about to depart with a Railway Touring Company charter to Urnäsch. 



1. Exterior of engine compartment.
2. Führerstand' in cab.
3. 1889-built Summer Coach.
4. No.56 running round the trailer at Urnäsch.