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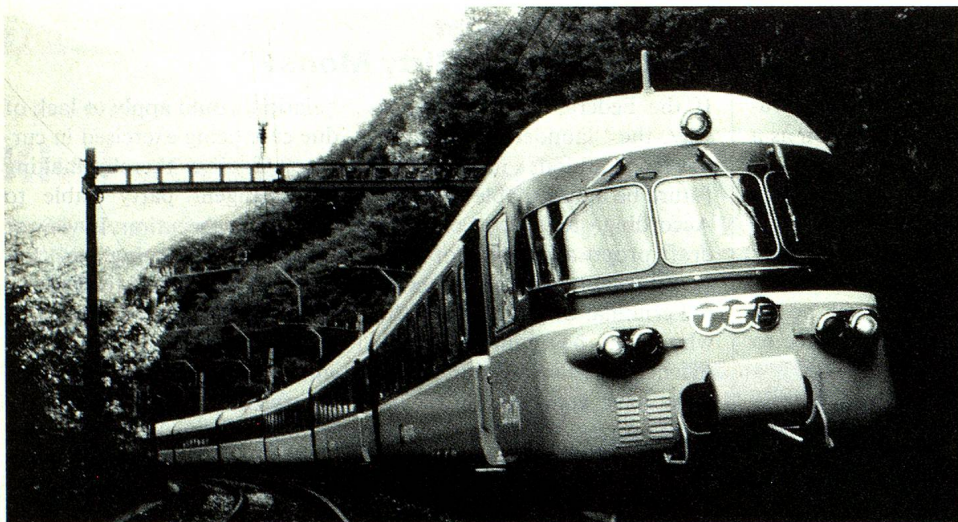
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From the "TEE" to the "EC"

## A Monument to Quality

*The Trans-Europ-Express ("The TEE") of 1961 soon became a symbol for superb Swiss quality. By now the remaining five TEE's have been transformed into Eurocity trains. In effecting this transformation, it was felt desirable to ensure that any innovations would as far as possible be in harmony with the styling of the old TEE's.*

Everyone knows the TEE. When the Swiss Federal Railways (SBB) launched their star train in 1961, it brought with it a whiff of cosmopolitan sophistication and luxury: it was for first class passengers only, its furnishings and fittings were of superb quality, its dining cars were spacious as well as elegant. For those who wished to travel in style, in accordance with what they regarded as their social standing, there was now a form of transport that offered an alternative to the aeroplane.

Technically, the TEE was a pioneering triumph. It was the first multi-current unit in European railway history: one could now travel through the whole of Europe without a change of locomotive, in spite of the four different voltages in use.

The technical innovations and the touch of luxury about the TEE inspired the engineers to design an equally up-to-date exterior, which was given the form of an integrated moveable tube. Instead of individual carriages being strung together, one after the other, the designers produced a "two-headed snake", 160 metres long, capable of being driven in both directions. This last-mentioned feature necessitated siting the motor in the middle of the train, with the

kitchen in the same coach, while the adjoining coach housed the dining car and the bar.

Full credit for the design goes to the architect Walter Henne. He succeeded in creating something unique that we can look back on as an industrial monument and as the embodiment of Swiss modernity at the beginning of what were to be the "boom" years.

"Travel to the 1964 Expo by the TEE!" That advertising slogan symbolised the atmosphere of the period, an optimistic feeling that everything would be possible: "Build and consume more and more!" The environment was still seen merely as pretty countryside scenery. Switzerland, which had as an island of peace in war-torn Europe for the "réduit" generation now started to become the international turntable for the go-getters, the men of action. And the fact that the TEE was the expression of this euphoria of progress is what made it an industrial monument.

But there was another characteristic to justify our regarding the TEE as an industrial monument: this was the way it symbolised the concept of "Swiss Quality". And in spite of all enthusiasm about the future the

SBB managers did not forget to make plans for solving immediate problems. Railway trains are expensive capital goods, but they have a long life. A Rolls Royce can prove cheaper in the long run than making do with a run-of-the-mill small cheap car. So in the case of the TEE, the concept of high "Swiss Quality" was seen as of paramount importance – the TEE would have to last forever. The aim of providing at all events a provisional taste of eternity resulted in the manufacture of the TEE involving virtual hand-craft workmanship – even if this meant something like trying to make a custom-built suit under mass-production conditions. Walter Henne succeeded in making the train not only durable but elegant as well and never in the least clumsy or ugly. He showed us the difference between enduring good taste and passing fashion. His designs were admittedly in harmony with the spirit of the time, but they have still not become outmoded. One recognises the period of their creation but they have retained their freshness. And that is why it has proved possible to re-build and modify the TEE without sacrificing the standards of "Swiss Quality".

\*

When the SBB had to come up with plans for re-modelling the TEE their main concern was however not quality, but rather considerations of marketing and profitability, of inherent necessities and planning headaches. The SBB had at first thought of selling off the remaining five TEE's, but it soon became clear that these trains that had grown old in their years of service would still be needed to enable Switzerland to fulfil its commitments in connection with the new Eurocity (EC) concept. This involved bidding farewell to the idea of a "luxury" train, with the original number of seats (then all first class) being increased from 168 to a total of 231, whereof 84 would be for first class pas-





sengers and 147 for second class. To accommodate more seats, more room was needed – and that was found in the dining car, half of which was sacrificed to gain space. Because of the reduction in space in what was left of the dining car (enough to seat only 18 persons), it was arranged that a waiter would bring first class passengers their meals – provided they had ordered in advance.

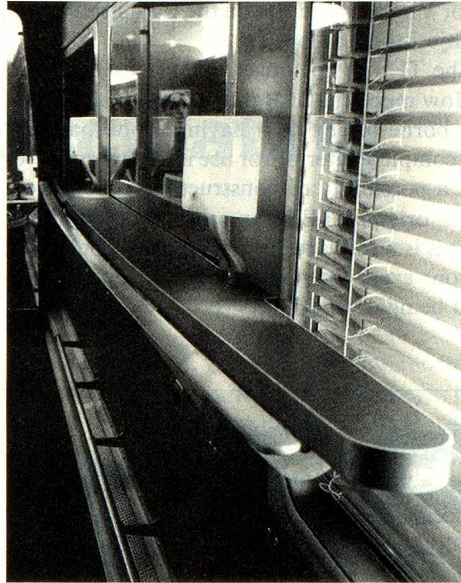
Quality has not been set aside because of marketing considerations in every department. Thus aeroplane seats have not been adopted, although that might have provided space for a few additional seats. The ample leg-room in the first class coaches has been made available to second class passengers as well. The distances of the seats from one another (necessitated by the position of the windows) has also not been reduced.

The architect and designer responsible for the transformation, Franz Romero, made a thorough study of these trains before he even began to draft his proposals for their modification. This was out of respect for the work done by Walter Henne in his day – a respect tinged with melancholy, as if one takes a lengthy look at the 1961 TEE's, one can see how much we have lost in barely a single generation in terms of quality. The perfection of skilled craftsmanship cannot be achieved in a hurry.

Happily however there are some areas where quality has survived. The principal SBB workshop at Schlieren, near Zurich, gives a good example of this. Compared with the noise and frenzy of a building site, this establishment offers an atmosphere of meticulous and unhurried conscientiousness. There is a work-force of skilled craftsmen who would not dream of bragging about their probity, conscientiousness and sense of responsibility, but who live and do their daily work in accordance with such principles. There one finds locksmiths and tool-makers, carpenters, upholsterers and electricians – in short, all the craftsmen needed. And they all seem imbued with the traditional spirit of the railwayman, and are proud to identify themselves with the SBB and with their work.

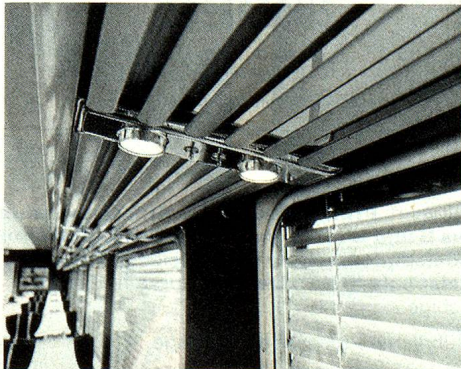
Romero wanted to pick up the threads where Henne had ended his work, retaining as much as possible of the original designs, and adding innovations in the spirit of Walter Henne: using similar materials and exercising the same meticulous care, but without attempting to re-create Henne by imitation.

What true care involves is best illustrated by the attention which is given to detail. In the bar for instance there is, opposite the serv-



ing counter a stand on which you can put down your glass and even rest your elbow. Romero calls it his “surfboard” (photo). It is made of dull-surfaced black linoleum, framed by an aluminium profile and supported by two brackets, as is the handrail in front of it by five more brackets, fastened to the underside. Illumination comes from two lamps rescued from the former dining car. When you sit down, you can see the underside of the “surfboard” stand. It offers another example of attention to detail: it too is lined with black linoleum, and the supporting brackets are fitted flush with its surface. And these brackets have not been selected hurriedly from some thick catalogue of optional industrial fittings – no, they have been made to special designs. For nowadays the standard “optional accessories” are the very antithesis of quality.

And it is only with meticulous precision that new elements should be added to the precious designs of the original TEE – precision not only in form but in draughtsmanship and execution too. Thus in the new bar, the line of the handrail and the curve of its aluminium edge are the result of careful



thinking and perceptiveness. They express deep concern with analysis and form.

Thus this stand with its handrail, which at first seems an insignificant detail, contains all the elements of the statement and message of the entire process of transformation. From a study of the details, it is evident that the task has not been that of “inventing” a new TEE but rather of understanding the creative form of the original in order to be able to supplement it.

\*

The most obvious change resulting from the conversion of the old TEE into a Eurocity train is perhaps the new seating arrangement. It is the complete antithesis of what the “geniuses” among the suppliers would offer. Instead of today's usual foam-stuffed basin-like plastic chairs with their heat-sealed units, Romero insists on an “additive” construction. His seats must be *built* – not cast, moulded, shrunk or extruded. Romero sees the old principle of skeleton plus encasing as still valid – he wants the shape of the seat to indicate how it was made. The individual components must be clearly separated from one another: the sheet-metal pedestal, the side-walls with sunken little



pull-out tables, upholstered seats and backrests. The assembly is screwed together by hand. The pivotal points for movement are indicated by clearly visible articulations. Even the upholstery material is specially woven with front and back in different colours, and mechanically interlocked. The principle is the same for both seats and wall: the construction and the mechanical fastening must be recognisable.

By looking at the finished product one should be able to see how it has been made. And the same applies in the reverse direction: everything can be dismantled and disassembled without damaging it. No item is destined to be thrown away. “Swiss Quality” has nothing to do with the mentality that characterises the “disposables” industry. A Rolls Royce does not end up in a “cemetery” for old cars, but in a museum!



The interior design of the TEE was kept in harmony with the basic principle of its tubular shape, which was emphasised in such a way that wherever you look, you have a view of the entire coach, while the unbroken line of the racks for hand luggage underlines the length and speed of the train. The "two-headed snake" travels fast indeed, and deserves its name of "Silver Arrow". Emphasis is no longer laid on the train's suitability as a vehicle for "luxury" travel

for VIP's, but rather on the train itself as an object to be admired.

The TEE is no longer what it used to be. How much the SBB themselves deplore this is borne out by their having "mothballed" a complete interior for use if and when there is a possibility of constructing a replica of the original TEE for museum exhibition. This is a forward-looking type of conservation: every intervention should be capable of being reversed.

The process of transformation has been carried out with the care and respect that an industrial monument deserves, and Romero's work is deserving of grateful recognition: it has achieved the truly unconditional objective of being "just right".

*Benedikt Loderer; photos: Franz Romero; SBB. (Slightly shortened from "Hochparterre: Zeitschrift für Design, Architektur und Umwelt".)*

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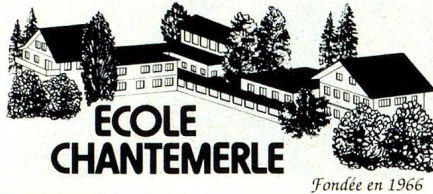
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