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EUROPE'S MOST EXCITING TRAINS

by FRANK DAVEY

(Editor of "Holiday Fanfare")

It was something to be the guest of British, Dutch, Belgian, Luxembourg, French, Swiss and Italian railways — all in one week. Actually, my invitation to the inaugural run of the new TEE (Trans-Europ-Express) trains at the end of June came from the Swiss Federal Railways. But it was wise of the others to make one a guest, too; this forestalls comparisons, and comparisons are notoriously "odorous"!

Our outward voyage from Harwich to the Hook of Holland was across a smooth sea in torrid weather.

Rotterdam's new city shopping centre I found oddly reminiscent of Crawley New Town in England.

Through Brussels, Metz, Strasbourg and Basle, to Zurich we were taken efficiently by the diesel-electric

Zurich, as befits so wealthy and important a city, seemed conscious of its stately dignity; the shops of the Bahnhofstrasse would be difficult to match anywhere in Europe.

Next morning, we boarded the first of the new TEE trains, which were really the object of our journey, the "Ticino", which was to carry us to Lugano. Railway experts among our number grew excited — increasingly so as the afternoon wore on. It was, indeed, impossible for the mere layman to remain unmoved by the fact that he was now in part of a shining new link in a chain joining no fewer than ninety important towns of the European continent.

The excitement mounted as we left the lake of Uri, passed through Altdorf with its legend of William Tell, and began to climb through the valley of the Reuss towards those amazing spirals — especially at Wassen, whose church tower first appears high above the railway line and later is seen far below you! The new TEE train takes these gradients of 1 in $37\frac{1}{2}$ and 1 in 40 at speeds of 53 m.p.h. or more. Through the nine-mile engineering marvel of the St. Gotthard tunnel from Göschenen to Airolo, and down the four more spirals which descend to the more Southern climate and architecture of the Ticino, it still astonishes to realise that one has passed 1,000 feet under Andermatt. At Bellinzona, it was found that we had burned out something in our brave locomotive; but the second unit took us easily down to Lugano.

Of Lugano it is difficult to speak except in superlatives. Samuel Butler, the satirist, who was not an easy man to please, wrote of the people of the Ticino that they were among "the best and most lovable in the world" and said his one desire was to return there. The beauty of Lugano and its lake, as well as the hospitality we enjoyed, made me feel exactly that.

Crossing the lake next morning in TEE "Gottardo" to Chiasso and Milan, I took more notice of the comfort of the new train, though the journey took us but one hour. Warm colours and air-conditioning were but a part of this. The whole 411-foot length of train is insulated; between the double-glass of the windows a Venetian blind descends or ascends at the press of a button — and the passenger can alter the angle of the slats at will. His chair is of aircraft type, its position changing also at the press of a button. Lighting is cunningly diffused from the roof in each of the five coaches.



TEE "Edelweiss". The names of the rivers we passed would have inspired Hilaire Belloc to a series of discursive studies of Europe's history or dissertations in praise of her wines — Scheldt, Meuse, Moselle, Rhine; especially if one added those we were to cross later — Rhône, Saone, Seine.

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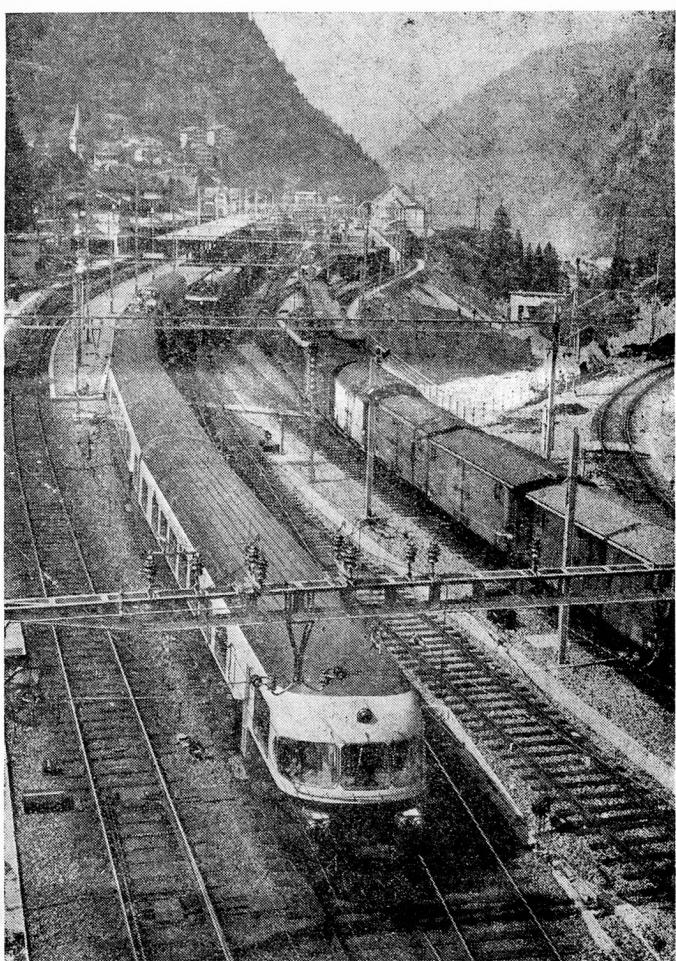
... in a class
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THE MAIN STATION
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The four new trains were produced in the works of SIG at Neuhausen and the Oerlikon factories. Technically, I suppose, their chief feature is the method by which the traction units are designed to adapt themselves to use 3,000 volts D.C. in Italy, 15,000 volts 16½ cycles in Switzerland, 25,000 volts 50 cycles from Vallorbe to Dole in France, and 1,500 volts D.C. from Dole to Paris Lyon. This adaption is made simply by the driver pressing a button in his cabin.

No wonder Milan's city band played us out of the station when we left by TEE "Cisalpin", to skirt Lake Maggiore's beautiful shore, through the Simplon tunnel (again at unprecedented speeds), and down through the Valais, beloved by poets such as Rilke and Gerard Manley Hopkins, to Lake Geneva.

I gazed up to the Alpine heights, marvelling that those melting snows were the source of the power that



(Photo: Swiss National Tourist Office)

moved our train. At Lausanne, we left to cross the Jura for Dijon. The 511 miles, Milan to Paris including frontier stops, took precisely eight hours — faster than it had ever been done by any train before.

A final word in praise of the exceptional smoothness of the new TEE trains. Through all this wealth of European scenery it seemed as if one were not on rails at all, but in the gondola of an airship. This, and the excellent fare provided in the dining-cars, makes TEE travel fit for kings and millionaires!

THE SWISS FEDERAL RAILWAYS BUILD ELECTRIC TEE TRAINS

Electric TEE trains will soon be running over the famous Gotthard Line, and will thus fill-in a long-outstanding gap in the network covered by these modern means of travel. The Gotthard Line has been left out of the picture up to now because all the present Trans-Europ-Expresses, to give them their full name, are driven by Diesel-motors. Diesel-railcars, or similar locomotives, are not, however, considered as being suitable for hauling, or propelling, heavy trains over the steep gradients (up to 1 in 40) of the Gotthard, at speeds which would not interfere with the smooth working of other fast trains on this heavily loaded line; not to mention the inconvenience of traversing the (about) 9½ miles of the Gotthard tunnel with fume-emitting Diesel-engines.

The Swiss Federal Railways have, however, arranged for four electric train sets to be built — at a cost of 4,000,000 Swiss francs each — with which TEE services Zürich-Gotthard-Milan as well as Milan-Lausanne-Paris can be provided, from summer 1961 onwards.

These new trains, each consisting of five car-units, have a length of about 404 feet, a weight of approximately 244 metric tons, attain, on suitable sections, maximum speeds of near enough 100 miles per hour, and provide the most up-to-date accommodation with all corresponding amenities for 126 passengers. The tractive performance is assured by electric motors, located in a special car-unit, having an output of 3,400 h.p.

The design of the new coaching stock is based, to a large extent, on the several years' experience with the Diesel railcar trains which the Swiss Federal Railways built, in co-operation with the Netherlands' Railways, for the TEE services Zürich-Amsterdam and Brussels-Paris. The trains just mentioned consist of a "machine car" (i.e., a traction unit), a car with kitchen and dining-room, a centre-corridor coach, and a side-corridor coach. It has been proved, however, that most travellers have a preference for centre-corridor coaches similar to the standard ones used in Swiss domestic traffic.

The passenger cars of the new TEE trains will, therefore, all be of a centre-corridor type. The special facing of the vestibules, which has proved to be popular in the SFR/NS TEE trains, is maintained. A new arrangement has, however, been adopted for cloak-rooms and luggage-rooms, which are now of larger dimensions and situated at one end of the coach, near the entrance doors, with W.C. and toilets being placed together at the other end of the carriage.

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