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Features

The Swiss Postal Passenger Service

Climbing in the Gotthard region

The Postal Passenger Service Today

The Postal Passenger Service opens up areas without rail links. Its route network of 7600 km extends from the Swiss Plateau to the remotest alpine valleys and constitutes a vital public transport system for residents and tourists alike. The network consists of over 600 lines and is about a third longer than that of the railways. In 1978, 1279 postbuses travelled 44 million kilometres, carrying 57.1 million pasengers – more than 156000 a day. Traffic and revenue structure has greatly changed over the years. In 1958, individual ticket holders accounted for 57.63% of passengers and 68.72% of revenue. By 1978 these shares were down to 41.6% and 55% respectively. Season ticket holders now account for over half the passengers, but only 28.5% of revenue, as they benefit from substantially lower fares. Party travel, with only 4.5% of passengers, represents 15,4% of revenue.

Post Office – Railways Cooperation

The postbus and rail timetables are, of course, coordinated. Combined postbus and train journeys can in many cases be made with one ticket. But cooperation extends further than that. In the Upper Engadine, for example, Rhaetian Railways and the Postal Passenger Service jointly operate the socalled Sports Bus, which is popular with both visiting and local winter sports enthusiats. From 8 a.m. to 7 p.m., Sports Buses ply every half hour between the Upper Engadine resorts and the valley stations of mountain railways. Radio communication between the vehicles and the operations control centre enables extra buses to be put on as required. The Sports Bus thus eliminates the need to take one's own car and face the often frustrating search for a parking place. It is, moreover, included in the Upper Engadine Season Ticket along with the Rhaetian Railway trains, the mountain railways, ski lifts and indoor swimming baths.

From Mail Coaches to Postbuses

The Swiss Post Office's obligation to run a passenger service dates back to 1st January 1849, when the Federal Post, as it was then called, took over from the 18 independent Cantonal Posts. The former owners' vehicles, now marked with the federal white cross on a red background, began operating to streamlined schedules and a uniform fare structure. Despite these improvements, the advent of the railway soon forced the mail coach off the major routes, and it was not until after the turn of the century that the automobile provided a means to take up the challenge. As early as 1906 the Post Office purchased four «automotive conveyances» and opened its first «motorized» service. This was to remain the only one for a number of years, as it needed the technical development stimulated by World War I to bring the motor bus to such a point of perfection that its success was henceforth assured. From 1919, however, the postal bus made its appearance on more and more routes, and, looking back, one is surprised to see how quickly it also conquered the Alps.

At the Schwaegalp