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EDITOR'S JOTTINGS

With the AGM only a couple of weeks ahead, I should like to set out how I see *Swiss Express* should develop, more to start an informed discussion than to lay down the law. I start from the remits given at the 1990 AGM, to provide news, in *English*, of Swiss Railways and, of even greater significance, not to do badly what commercial magazines do far better.

Following from this, I feel we should also provide members with ideas for their future visits, and how better than by publishing the highlights of member's visits. Here I feel that a maximum of 1,000 words and two to four *good* photographs from which to make a choice are all that is needed.

Turning now to photographs, the conventional three-quarter front view of an Re4/4, whether set against a mountain backdrop or the sky, is not required, most members should by now be familiar with this view, and the substitution of a Re6/6 or Ae 6/6 makes no practical difference. Even for the cover we can avoid the usual striking view, for here *Swiss Express* has one advantage over the commercial magazines, we do not need an eye-catching picture that can be seen across the width of the newsagent's. Instead we want an *interesting* picture that ideally provides members with some information. Topical photographs are always welcome, even if taken last year! If anyone has good snow scenes, they'll come in handy for the December issue.

I want to present a varied selection of articles in each issue, striking a balance between travelogue, technical and descriptive/historical features but here we come up against the magazine editor's dilemma, we can't print what we don't receive. I'm pleased to say we have a reasonable spread of material in hand at present and we do have a small, but willing group of members who provide a steady supply of material. However, this does mean that there must be a bias towards their interests and so, if you feel that your pet subject is being neglected, your remedy is obvious. Produce the article!

You may well say "I don't know a lot about it." The fact is, we can't accommodate a lot. To take a specific example, the Lausanne Ouchy line is a fascinating railway and to do it full justice needs at least 10,000 words, thirty to fifty photographs, a map, several detailed plans and drawings of the stock. This would involve years of research and innumerable visits to Lausanne - not, I'll admit, an altogether unpleasant prospect if time and finances permit. Fluent French would be essential since, apart from anything else, only a *Suisse Romande* publisher would be interested. However, I suspect that a score of members could provide us with a 1000 word precis of the story, locate one or two good pictures and leave me to dig out the map. This is the essence of journalism, organising one's limited knowledge of a subject into a short, readable feature.

I'd like to mention modelling articles, since not only is there a dearth, but we face a couple of serious problems. Switzerland is unique, not so much in having a large number of individual railways, but in the fact that members modelling allegiance is split amongst these lines. Hence an article on detailing a BLS model is of no interest to members modelling the RhB whilst something on the RhB will hardly satisfy those who follow the SBB itself! The split between standard and metre gauge modelling only serves to make matters worse. If we then consider the other railways worth modelling we discover the coverage of your prototype is inevitably spread rather thinner than a seaside landlady's margarine.

There is another point, here I speak from long experience with commercial magazines, the length of a worthwhile modelling article. One A4 page is the absolute minimum, two to four are more the rule. Our page size,

A5, is half that of the commercial journals, so just double up the pagination. We can only consider the short, support type account, a decent in depth construction article is really too long for our pages. Such features are best sent to *Continental Modeller*, which not only can do the job properly, but will reach a far wider audience, over 12,000 as opposed to a mere 600+. If the writer takes care to include reference to the Society in the text, we will get an invaluable press mention and the cause of Swiss Railway Modelling will be enhanced. However, don't credit the article to Joe Bloggs, *Swiss Railways Society Member No X1066* because it will only end up as plain Joe Bloggs.

In my opinion, the needs of modelling members are best met by general features covering technical details of the Swiss prototype; John Jesson's Signalling articles are an excellent example of the sort of thing I have in mind. I am however open to reasoned argument on this point, a good, short well illustrated article would work wonders.

We must never forget that *Swiss Express* is an amateur publication with an extremely limited circulation. This does put limits on what we can do since we must work on even more of a shoestring budget than the commercial magazines. This is why the setting is now done on a relatively low-tech computer - for those in the know, an 8-bit BBC Master and a Epson compatible 9-pin dot matrix printer. Nevertheless, this does provide me with elementary desktop publishing facilities which eliminate a host of technical niggles and delays that bedevilled my working life. Indeed it gives a wholly new meaning to the phrase "in house", for every phase of production up to the point of handing the pages to the printer is directly under my control and last minute corrections are no more than a minor inconvenience. I'm well aware that, with a PC compatible, some costly software and a laser printer we could work wonders but that means serious money which the Society hasn't got and couldn't justify spending in this direction if it had.

This brings me to one vital point, an editor should stamp his personality onto a magazine. If he tries to be all things to all people, inevitably the result is bland and uninteresting. This will of course introduce bias, but this can be eliminated in an amateur society by the simple process of replacing the editor from time to time. Which is another way of saying that in due course I hope to hand over to someone else, preferably someone with that PC compatible, advanced DTP software and access to a laser printer.

Earlier this year, eight travel consultants from British Rail International's Rail Centre spent some time with the BLS at Bern and Interlaken to gain experience of Swiss practice. Later in the year, BLS staff will be guests of BR at Victoria. One wonders who will profit the most from the exchange



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