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Autor: Jesson, John
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Big, Beefy and Brown - The BLS Ae6/8 by John Jesson

THE PROTOTYPE

After the SBB Crocodiles, the BLS Ae 6/8 is possibly the best-liked standard gauge Swiss locomotive. The class has had a long life, the first examples, 201 and 202, being introduced in 1926.

The acquisition of new locomotives became necessary as a result of substantial traffic increases during the 1920's, the basic design being influenced by the good results obtained by the SBB with individual axle drive. The BLS ordered two locomotives from Breda and SAAS. The specification required an hourly rating of 3300 kW, a world record at that time, and the locos had to move a load of 550 t at 50 km/h on a gradient of 27‰. The result was the Be 6/8, Be because of the maximum speed of 75 km/h.

The two locomotives were successful and were followed by two more, 203 and 204, in 1931, from the same suppliers. All four machines had an angular bodyshell, similar in style to SBB locos of that time. However, when

more locomotives were required, sanctions were in force against Italy, so the order went to SLM for the mechanical parts, and SAAS for the electrical parts.

205 and 206 were delivered in 1939, with 207 following in 1941 and 208 in 1943. Although the same in concept, in one respect these four locomotives differed from their earlier brethren. The bodyshell was designed with rounded ends, giving a streamlined appearance very different to the 1920's designed'locos.

When delivered, locos 201 - 206 were inscribed with the full "Bern - Lötschberg - Simplon" logo on each side. The first 4 had cast number plates with raised edges, positioned near each end of the bodysides and on each end. The later 4 had individual numerals in the same locations and have retained these throughout their lives.

In 1939, the original 4 were modified to a maximum speed of 90 km/h and their power was raised to 3880 kW, and were reclassified Ae 6/8. Between 1942 and 1944, the painted company



Above Left: The prototype at Spiez in August 1995.

Above: The model by Roco.

name was replaced by metal letters "BLS". It is recorded that all 8 locos were so treated, but photographs of 202 and 204 in the early 1950's show no ownership at all.

In 1950, the braking resistances of loco 204 were repositioned on the roof, from their original position in the machine room. By the end of 1953, the whole class had been similarly modified, although retaining both pantographs. During 1955/56, 201 - 204 were rebuilt with body styling similar to that of the later locomotives. The only really obvious difference between the two groups was the cab windows. Whereas 205 - 208 had a pair of narrow windows centred under the top headlight and flanked by one large (drivers) window and the access door, the rebuilding of 201 - 204 incorporated two large windows, not centred, flanked by a narrow window and the door, which was positioned further round towards the side of the locomotive.

Various improvements were made at the same time, to all members of the class, although the raising of the power to 4400 kW and the maximum speed to 100 km/h only applied to 205 - 208. The early 1960's saw the removal of one of the pantographs to make way for more

braking resistances on the roof and, belatedly, the raising of the power and speed of 201 - 204 to match the later locos. Alterations were also made to the bodyside ventilation louvres, the old horizontal louvres for traction motor cooling being replaced with vertical louvres, and the installation of large louvres for transformer cooling.

The class has not spent its entire life on the Lötschberg line. In 1939, 205 was exhibited at the Schweizerischen Landesausstellung in Zürich, possibly direct from the manufacturers. During 1940, two of the first series were exchanged with 2 x SBB Ae 4/7 for service on the Gotthard line. The Gotthard line again saw the class between 19/8/58 and 9/9/58, when the Simplon line was blocked, and no less than six of the class, 202, 204 - 208, were loaned to assist with diverted traffic.

THE MODEL

Until now, the only models available, if they could be found, were from the Swiss so-called



Above: The prototype.

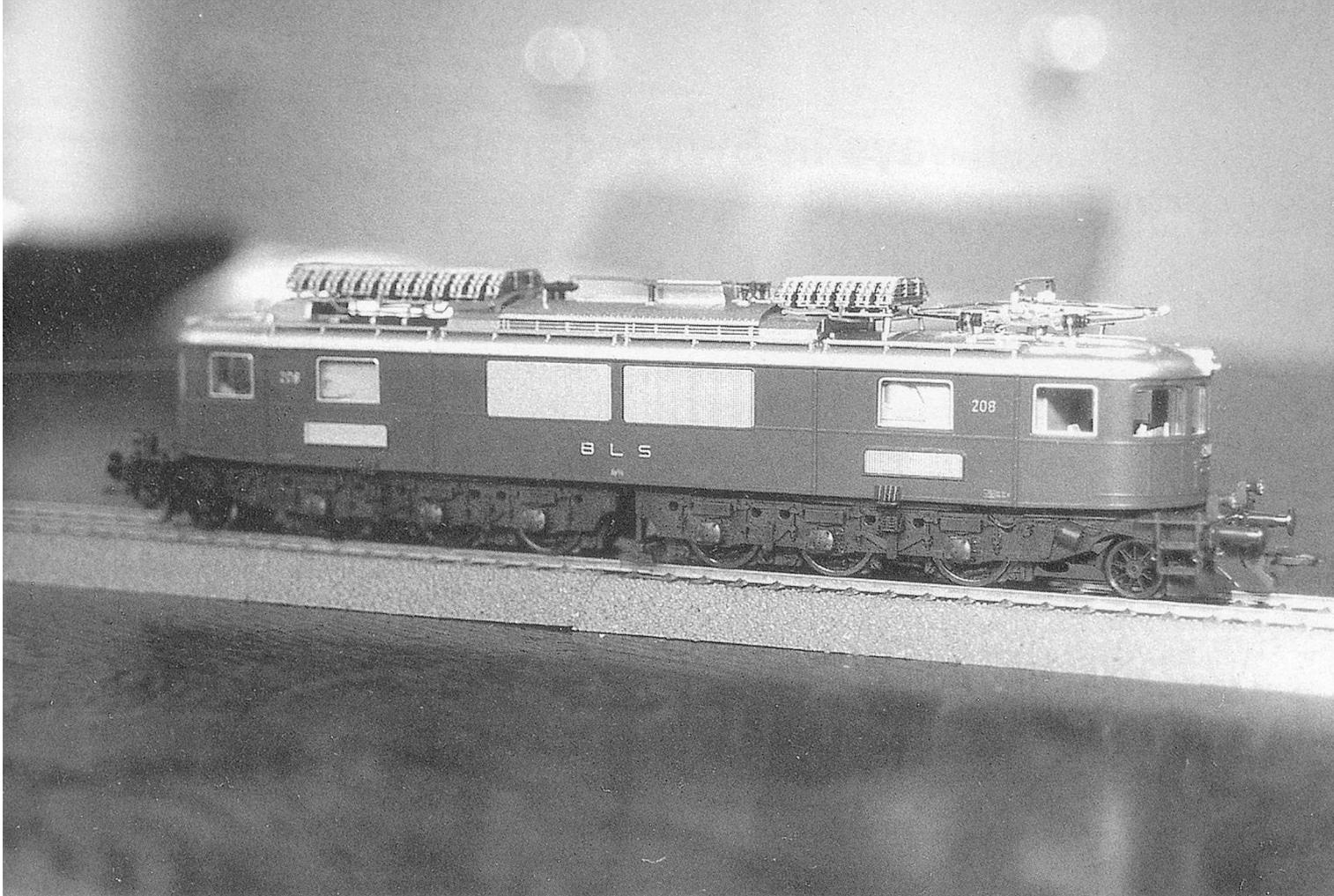
"brass" manufacturers - Fulgurex, Metropolitan and Lemaco, and a disappointing cast-metal version from Roxy. Last year, Roco announced an HO model of this class, which is now available. First impressions are very good, with a perfect finish and superb, quiet running.

The locomotive depicted is 208 in its most recent form, with one pantograph and the large banks of braking resistances on the roof. Internally, the model follows current Roco practice. A large cast metal bed holds the double-ended motor, which is fitted with two flywheels and drives all 12 driving wheels through carden shafts, gear boxes and spur gears. 4 of the wheels are fitted with traction tyres, 2 on each bogie. Above the motor is a printed circuit board, through which the electrical connections are made between track/overhead (either or both), motor, headlights and, if required, digital control chip.

Well detailed cab interiors are provided, with a driver at the non - pantograph end. The headlights are wired so that all three are illuminated at the front in the direction of travel, while the lower right is illuminated at the rear, as is Swiss practice. Detail is superb throughout, on

body and chassis, with the very obvious braking resistances being works of art. As the most visible feature of the model, these stand out, and Roco have really excelled themselves in their reproduction. Other detail includes a very fine pantograph fitted with a slightly overscale Swiss head. The model comes fitted with the new Roco universal coupling, but these are plugged into standard NEM boxes, so may be easily changed. The livery seems to my eye to be exactly the right shade of brown, with the "BLS" letters and loco numbers raised and picked out in silver. On the side without the large transformer cooling louvres, a builders plate is printed between the centre windows. The lettering is tiny, but can be picked out with a powerful magnifying glass - and shows the loco to have been built in 1939, the only error I can find on the whole model.

As usual, various detailing parts are provided, in three packets, for mounting by the owner. One pack contains a pair of standard European couplings and, a nice touch, a spare universal



Above: Another view of the Roco model.

coupling. Another contains a full set of (8) wire handrails, plus a spare, ready - painted yellow, while the third packet holds various plastic parts such as front handrails, windscreen wipers, the bufferbeam paraphernalia, a set of Roco close couplings and a wide DB-style pantograph head. Clear instructions show how to dismantle the model, change the pantograph head, and show where to add all the bits. There is also a separate instruction sheet showing how to instal a digital chip, and a complete list of replacement parts, with their catalogue numbers.

A few tests showed that the model performs every bit as well as it looks. Minimum speed is the lowest I have ever found on a model - a scale 5.8 km/h - while the maximum is a scale 125 km/h with the pantograph leading and 133 km/h the other way. A load of 7 indifferently - running coaches made little difference to these figures. The model weighs-in at 570g.

Unfortunately, models of this calibre do not come cheap. My impression is that Roco prices jumped with the entry of Austria into the EEC

and, coupled with the exchange rate, have pushed the price in Britain to over £200, on a par with the Swiss price.

Catalogue no: 43710. Price: £209=45.

Review sample provided by:

Victors, 166 Pentonville Road, London N1 9JL

DIMENSIONS

(All dimensions in mm)	1:1	1:87	Model
Length over buffers	20260	232.9	232.3
Width	3000	34.5	34.5
Height to cab roof	3780	43.4	43.3
Ht to pan (lowered)	4500	51.7	53.5
Buffer height	1050	12.1	12.1
Buffer separation	1750	20.1	20.2
W'base (pony-ldg dvr)	2600	29.9	29.3
W'base (1st-2nd dvrs)	2200	25.3	25.0
W'base (2nd-3rd dvrs)	1900	21.8	21.8
W'base (3rd-3rd dvrs)	3200	36.8	36.9
Dvg wheel diameter	1350	15.5	15.5
Pony wheel diameter	950	10.9	10.5