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Overland from Switzerland

by Alan Pike OBE

Above: RABe EC set 1051, at Frasne
but for how much longer?

Photo: Les Heath

We thought that we would try the overland route from Interlaken to London. On 1st July 1995 we took the 08.16 from Interlaken West to Bern. During the previous week, most trains we had used on the SBB/BLS in the area had run late and this was no exception. We were 7 minutes late off Thun and 9 minutes late into Bern leaving only 6 minutes to get across to platform 13 with our luggage to get the 09.20 train which pretends to be a TGV to Frasne.

For quite a while, this was a "Grey Mouse" RABe set but after wheelset trouble, it was replaced by a loco hauled train, or so I understand.

Today it was "Grey Mouse" RABe 1051 which left at 09.24, presumably awaiting 'connections' such as ours. To my surprise, it runs as a semi-fast to Neuchâtel although all passengers must pay the TGV supplement.

Drinks and sandwiches from the buffet car are advertised which are served by - the train's maintenance engineer!. A note on the menu asks for our understanding that "...no service is available in the case of technical disturbances".

Fortunately, there were none and we arrived at Frasne a little early for the cross platform connection to the TGV for Paris, Gare de Lyon consisting of a single, well filled TGV No. 117.

Arrival in Paris was on time at 13.59 and we

did not have to wait too long for a taxi to take us across Paris to the Gare du Nord. If you do not have much luggage, the Metro can often be quicker and certainly much cheaper.

We could have caught the 15.19 Eurostar arriving at Waterloo at 17.17 but chose to eat at the pleasant air conditioned first floor restaurant at the station. However, the 17.10 got us into Waterloo on time at 19.09, a splendid journey overall.

As to cost, a return journey second class works out at about £195 depending on the type of ticket one takes, especially on Eurostar. For the over 60s, the Rail Europe Senior card offers some £30 reduction on the Paris to Bern leg of the journey making it a competitive and comfortable way of getting to and from Switzerland

EXTRA INFORMATION:-

On the 30th June, the daytime trains were provided by a scratch loco-hauled rake, replaced by RABe 1051 for the evening working. 1055 successfully worked the daytime working on the 5th July, only to fail at Bern at 17.04. Arrangements were made to attach a loco and drag the unit using the emergency coupling, but the train had not left by 17.30.

NJF