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The SBB in HO (part 3)

The continuing saga of the Nitpicker

by John Jesson

Having dissected the older types of van, let us now look at a pair of post-war examples.

Gs, Gqss, Hkks (type K4)

The 1950's saw the introduction of a number of standard wagons on many of the railway systems of Europe. Although basically the same, most countries incorporated their own design features, making the wagons more or less distinguishable. So it was with the standard goods van, designated by the SBB as type K4, later Gs or Gqss. The latter was fitted with universal electrical through wiring and was passed for 120km/h, allowing its use at the head of passenger trains. The Hkks was a series of 45 vans originally built for APROZ, and were without ventilator covers. Building of the K4's extended from 1956 until 1965, during which period 3860 were built, most of them lasting into the 1980's.

Hbis-v/-x/-vx/-vxy (also -w, by personal observation).

The Hbis, in contrast to the K4, is uniquely

Above: Unlike the earlier vans, some K4s remain in revenue service, but they are by no means common. This example was at Airolo in September 1994 and was designated Gqss-tz.

Swiss. It is one of the more modern 2-axle van of the SBB (although building started in 1967), with two half-length doors each side, and by 1981 nearly 3000 had been built. There are three distinct designs. The most common has ribbed sides and roof, another has smooth sides and a ribbed roof, while the third, of which building started in 1982, has a ribbed side and a smooth roof.

The designations stand for:

- G - covered wagon of standard type.
- H - covered wagon of special type.
- q - universal electric heating connections.
- s - maximum speed 100 km/h.
- ss - maximum speed 120 km/h
- kk - load weight between 20t and 25t.
- b - at least 12m load length and 70cu.m. volume.
- i - sliding sides.
- v - 1000v electric heating connections.
- w - movable handbrake spindle and handrails.
- x - load shock protection.
- y - thermal insulation.

The K4 type was produced as an HO model by Röwa and later added to the Roco range after their takeover of the Röwa moulds in 1976. It is



no longer listed in the Roco catalogue. A model of the K4 is also listed by Lima, but I have yet to find it, so am unable to comment on its accuracy. Most people will be aware of the Roco model of the Hbis van, which has appeared in a seemingly endless variety of liveries, not all of them confirmed as prototypical, and not all of them produced by Roco. Märklin have recently hopped on the bandwagon with their own version of the Hbis but, having already far too many of this type of van, I have not succumbed to the temptation of adding any from the Märklin stable - yet!

Röwa were probably the first mass-producer to realise the importance of scale accuracy. Their models were consistently good, and the K4 van is no exception. Apart from its height, hardly noticeable in a freight consist, the dimensions of the model are very close to the prototype. The moulding of both body and chassis is very good. Not only do the bodyside sliding doors open, but the four ventilators on each side open as well. Opening doors usually mean overscale top and bottom runners, but this is not the case here, as the top runner is, if anything, underscale. On the chassis, the correct roller-bearing axleboxes are depicted, and the brake blocks line up with the wheel treads. Only three things can be "criticised": the moulded end-stop for the sliding

Above: The Hbis family are easily found, and in all sorts of obvious and not-so-obvious variations. This is a basic Hbis with corrugated sides and roof, without frills. It was also quite clean, a somewhat rarer phenomenon, when photographed in a downpour at Arth-Goldau in September 1994

door is rather obvious, the two grabrails on opposing corners of the body are moulded as part of the body and are too thick, and the inscriptions, although to scale, are very faint. These last are, though, very complete, apart from the works location which should be printed on each end. The number carried is 21 85 120 3 729-0, which is correct. Apart from replacing the plastic grabrails, all I have done to my model is to dirty it, to hide the plastic sheen which is otherwise so noticeable.

To the enthusiast familiar with modern Swiss railway, the Hbis van is as "Swiss" as holey cheese and cuckoo clocks. Roco have made models of both the earlier styles - smooth and ribbed sides with ribbed roof. The overall dimensions of the model are very close to scale and the moulding is very good. The bodysides (doors) do not open, so there are no overscale runners to spoil the appearance. The handrails at the end with the balcony are moulded from commendable thin nylon. This is most resilient to damage, but is virtually unrepairable if you do



manage to break it. The two grabrails mounted on the body corners adjacent to the balcony come as separate mouldings and are also reasonably thin. The model, like the prototype, has a very long wheelbase and, in order to negotiate toy radius curves and poor trackwork, each axle is mounted in a yoke which has some freedom of movement to swivel and rock. The axleboxes and brake blocks are part of the yoke, but not the springs, which are moulded as part of the chassis. This is completely unnoticeable, allows the model to easily take sharp curves, and the brake blocks are in line with the wheel treads all the time.

Inscriptions. This is where things could get really complicated. I have a couple of the ribbed side vans. Both carry the older style of lettering without the red SBB bar. The vans seem to have been renumbered during their life, as one of the vehicles carries a number I cannot trace. This is 21 85 211 8 328-3. The other is 21 85 225 0 788-6. To wade through my entire collection of Hbis vans would be a labour indeed, but I have checked half-a dozen or so. Some have numbers in the 21 85 211 series, others in the 21 85 235 series. What all have in common is that the computer check number is correct. On the original, plain, vans, the inscriptions are nicely printed, as are most of the others. Two things missing on all vehicles are the brake classification marks on the corners and the works location. I have done only one thing to my collection - painted the

Above: The main variation of the Hbis has flat sides which have proved very popular with companies who want to advertise their environmental friendliness by using rail transport. This is one such example, photographed in September 1994 at its home at Bülach.

grabrails and end sections of the handrail moulding yellow. It is really surprising what such a simple job can achieve.

Table 1 Comparative sizes of models and prototype

	1:1	1:87	Röwa	Roco
Length over buffers	10580	121.6	121.2	
	14610	167.9		168.2
Length over headstocks	9340	107.4	107.6	
	13370	153.7		153.8
Length over body	9340	107.4	107.6	
	13030*	149.8		148.7
Width	2805*	32.2	32.4	
	3018	34.7		34.6
Height	3986	45.8	46.6	
	4067	46.7		46.5
Wheelbase	5700	65.5	65.9	
	8000	92.0		92.0
Wheel diameter	1000	11.5	11.0	
	920	10.6		11.0
Buffer height	1060	12.2	12.2	
	1060	12.2		12.0

*Estimated from drawing

ERRATUM

Several lines were missed out in the article in the June issue about Swiss goods vans.

On p.14, 1st column, about 2/3 of the way down the column, the sentence "The AKU, under different catalogue numbers.", should read "The AKU model has roller bearing axleboxes, pronounced roof ribs, horizontal rivet lines on the doors, with small handrails and straight-down vent cover bars. All the inscriptions are very well printed. Several different vehicle numbers are available from AKU, under different catalogue numbers."