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EC "ALBERT EINSTEIN" (Prague - Zürich) by Ron Smith

This is the name given to a pair of Euro-City, trains, number 166 from Prague to Zurich, and no. 167 Zurich to Prague, which run once per day. I had travelled from Luzern to Prague with everything superbly arranged by Ffestiniog Travel, who had organised a hotel in Prague as well. This made it a package and therefore very reasonable. The outward journey had been spent in mist, sleep and the dark, but I was aware of several reversals so I was determined to take notes on the return to Zurich.

I arrived at Prague Hlavni Nadrazi at 07.20 hrs., just in time to see the stock being shunted into platform 2, so I did not have to consult the departure board. Each train set consists of 5 SBB open seconds, a Czech dining buffet car, and 2 SBB firsts, one open, one compartments. The platform was a stramash of groups of back packing Germans and Americans. Being an E.C. train reservations are necessary, and I squeezed my way onto my coach which was next but one to the dining car. It was packed with bags, rucksacks and young dozy people. I made my

way to the tail end coach of the train that was almost empty, and set up camp. As I did so a man came through the coach and deposited a small packet and a card on the table. The card said that he was deaf and dumb, was not begging, but asked for help. The packet contained a cheap broth. I gave it back to him with a coin as he passed again and settled down.

Czech Railways (CD) electric loco 363068 set off promptly at 07.47hrs and eased us over the crossings into the tunnel and on past the decay and sprawl of suburban Prague. We trundled along a weed infested and poorly drained main line to Plzen. We arrived on time at 09.22hrs. We waited here a long time, during which, through the windows of an adjacent carriage, a CD maroon BO-BO hood diesel ran past towing a smart short old wooden green 3rd class coach, a steam tank engine, and another old coach. Quite a mystery. We finally departed at 09.43 hrs. instead of booked time of 09.32 hrs. now behind double headed diesels 754019 and 754028, over the single track towards



Domazlice. After this stop a pair of men came through checking passports as we approached the border at Furth Im Wald, where we arrived at 10.51 hrs., seven minutes late.

I would have liked to get off to photograph the CD single rail car, the Deutsche Bahn (DB) red twin D.M.U., and a couple of locos, but thought it not wise in view of the heavy security presence. Another passport check was followed by a German team who checked them yet again. A plain clothed couple was passing along the offside checking underneath the carriages, while on the platform side groups of heavy men in black leather jerkins carrying pistols were carefully checking the few scruffy civilians who had disembarked. By now the two CD diesels had been replaced with a red DB class 218 diesel and we eventually departed at 11.00hrs. four minutes late. The schedule allows 2hrs 57 mins. for the 196 kms across the Czech Republic, so it is quite a stately trundle.

Now with DB personnel in charge (other than the Czech buffet crew who work hard throughout the entire journey we stopped at Cham for one minute, still four minutes down. Here I managed to snap a cream single rail car in the bay with the legend

Previous page: 218 215-2 + 217 017-3 on "Albert Einstein" at Schwandorf, 11.51am, 9.10.98

Above: 218 471-1 + 218 227 on "Albert Einstein" in Munich, 13.46, 9/10/98

ALL Photos: Author

"Regental Bahnbetrieb GMBH" in blue on its side. The only number I could see on it was VT09.

Continuing on mostly single track we ran into Schwandorf, where our first reversal took place. A pair of DB BO-BOs coupled on, red 217017 and blue/ivory 218215. We were off again at 11.55 hrs., five minutes late. Taking the other fork back out, we passed a plinthead steamroller with rail wheels at either end of it, on a short length of track at the entrance to the freight yard. An intriguing machine.

We next approached Regensburg, preceded by industrial sprawl. From some distance away could be seen a tall straight chimney, pouring steam across the sky. This is the "Sudzucker" sugar factory which has its own fan of sidings and we passed a small centre cab diesel shunter in its yard, with a huge number 8 painted on it. We crossed the wide Danube with barges tied up to a quay, and on one side a new quay development



Above: 218 455 propelled connecting train to Basel at Lindau, 16.20, 9/10/98

with large rail mounted cranes straddling two rail tracks. Arrival at 12.22hrs. was still four minutes late.

The station was busy, crowded platforms looked like bank holidays in the U.K. in the 1950's. Plenty of activity as our diesels uncouple, and a blue and ivory 111 electric comes on at the other end for our second reversal. For me, one of the characteristics of this train is the manvy people who join and alight en route - it is a busy train. We depart on time at 12.25 hrs.

Progress has gradually speeded up, and now under the wires we speed past the marshalling yard and on towards Munich. A DB lady passes through collecting rubbish, wiping tables and replenishing the loos. Outside the autumn colours in the forests are marvellous. Landshutt is left at 13.01hrs. on time, after more passengers act off and on. There are many electric locos on the depot, of all colours.

The countryside is flat, with huge fields as we speed on to Munich. As we pass a field of tall maize, two young deer stand close together in the shelter of the plantation, watching the train

nervously. Now colourful EMU's are appearing on either side as we speed through the increasingly dense urban sprawl, and slide into the large Munich Hauptbahnhof.

This is a hive of activity. ICE sets glide around, an OBB 1044 attaches itself to a rake of DB coaches, while OBB red coaches are in the sidings. Passengers ebb and flow, and our 111 electric disappears. Yet another reversal! A red pair of diesels 218471 and 218227 couple on. On time at 13.56 hrs. we are off again. We pass smart new ICE washing and servicing buildings, and in the yard a diminutive "Kof" shunter tows a rollende landstrasse wagon with a cement mixer lorry on it. The lorry has a delivery boom on it and must be useful for placing cement just where it is needed. Here we cross the Eastbound "Albert Einstein". Its pair of red 218s pass us coming down off a flyover as we burrow underneath.

On the Munich outskirts we slow to a crawl over rebuilding work going on at a road / rail

bridge, and our diesels are audibly working hard to accelerate again up the gradient. We pass a road sign of the inverted triangle type, but green, with the black silhouette of a buzzard on it. Next to an untidy stand of trees.

The countryside is prettier now, with small rolling hills and smaller fields. On time we roll into Kempten, departing again at 15.17hrs. In the yard are three blue centre cab Bo-Bo diesels with their numbers painted out, presumably condemned. Now the hills are larger, and cloud topped mountains are appearing in the distance. The line twists and turns more.

We slow for single line working and extensive rebuilding of track and bridges at Immenstadt. We then curve around the beautiful lake Alpsee. The surface is like glass and perfectly reflects the hillside across the lake with the multi-coloured trees. The mountains are closer, the houses have large overhanging roofs and balconies, and the cattle are the placid Simmental. We pass the "Allgauer Alpenwasser" mineral water factory, and slow as we wind our way up the attractive valley, the diesels working hard again.

After an hour of this pleasant alpine scenery, we pass DB semaphore signals and skirt the beautiful, clear Bodensee lake and run into Lindau at 16.19hrs. In a siding are two old bogie coaches with the name "Modellbahngruppe Lindau" painted on the sides, obviously the headquarters of the local model railway club.

Here at Lindau SBB Re4/4¹¹ number 11199 waits with an SBB coach to attach, for our fourth and last reversal. In the adjacent platform DB diesel 218455 waits to propel a three coach push pull train from Ulm which is making a connection to Basel DB station. It departs promptly at 16.28hrs. while we go at 16.29hrs.

It is just a few minutes hop around the lake to Bregenz in Austria. On the right are lake motor ships, very similar to the familiar ones on the Vierwaldstättersee at Luzern. In the station there is OBB stock forming a cross platform connection to Wien with a 1044 electric at the front. After just two minutes we are away again at 16.40hrs. with another leather jacketed team checking passports. There is obviously a suspicion with a fellow passenger, and the officer calls up on his mobile phone and reads out all the details from the Czech man's papers. He finally decides that everything is in order. He gives the

passport a mighty whack with his automatic rubber stamp and marches off to catch up with his colleagues.

We cross the broad Bregenzer Ache river with a striking large flat rock formation in it, before curving sharply off to the right and entering Switzerland. Lustenau is where we cross to left-hand running, passing an OBB EMU in the station. At 16.52hrs. we drift down into St. Margrethen over the wide grey Rhein river, via a girder bridge. The huge Migros Markt beside the track proves that we are once more in Switzerland. Now there are real mountains around us.

Now that we have the SBB crew aboard there is yet another ticket inspection as we pass along lake Bodensee to St. Gallen. Despite a leisurely run, St. Gallen is left at 17.20hrs. with quite an influx of passengers.

In Zurich I have only four minutes to catch the next available train to Luzern I move to the dining car which is now near the front of the train, to give myself a start when we arrive. I take the opportunity to have a glass of Earl Grey tea. This is widely available in the Czech Republic, and even in the buffet cars, real luxury!

It is relaxing to be back amongst familiar Swiss features, such as narrow gauge rolling stock at Rorschach, and at Wil, and to see different rolling stock from the private companies. Winterthur was left at 18.00 hrs. exactly, according to schedule, and we run on into the subterranean gloom of Zurich Flughafen. Then we have the final run into the Hauptbahnhof, arriving at 18.26hrs. for my dash across to the 18.30hrs to Luzern.

For me this was a fascinating journey. All those different locos and crews and changes of direction - and yet the coaches worked, the electric's worked, and the tickets worked. How the revenue is split between the different railways I cannot imagine. Most of all my admiration is for the Czech crew in the buffet car who were working constantly for over 12 hours, add the set up and clear down time on top of that, and they would do the same tomorrow on the return journey. They also ran two passes of the trolley service, not bad for a crew of just three men.



Above: 217 017-3 + 218 215-2 backing onto "Albert Einstein" at Schwandorf, 11.51, 9/10/98. Note the exhaust stacks to avoid damage when running under wires
 Below: VT09 at Cham, Regental Bahnbetrieb GmbH

Photos: Author

