Zeitschrift: Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal

Herausgeber: Swiss Railways Society

Band: 5 (1997-1999)

Heft: 1

Rubrik: Book review

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MAILBAG

Dear Sir,

It is great trepidation that I feel I must put pen to paper and dare to make a comment on the Chairman's notes in the 4/12 December 1996 Journal, which I feel were LACKING to say the least.

Most of us realise that the previous journal was not up to 'par', but as the Chaieman correctly pointed out on occasions these unfortunate things happen, and all committees suffer from "a few that do a lot and a lot that do very little". I am sure that most of us have experienced these problems, but sadly I feel the Chairman gave far too much credance and too many column inches to the anger of one member who, if he feels so strongly, should remove himself from our society. None of us want unnecessary nastiness within our friendly ranks.

More importantly, the Chairman made no mention of the resignation of our Membership Secretary, B Hemming Esq., not a word of thanks etc. on behalf of us all, comments which should have been normal in such circumstances. Instead we got a quick, curt one-liner from the Secretary! (If he knew, then the Chair must have known too.) The Society has now lost two major players within as many years, for whatever reasons. Good volunteers are not easily found, a thought that should focus the minds of the rest of the Committee!

Lastly, as the Chair omitted to convey festive greetings to us all, please allow me as an ordinary member of the Society, to wish you all a very happy Swiss-railwaying New Year and safe journeys, and that includes the anonymous 'whinger' who so angered our Chairman. I feel that he/she hit a raw nerve, but "it" should have been treated with the contempt "it" deserved.

J. A. Davis
Welwyn, Hertfordshire.

Book Review

"The Swiss Railway Saga - 150 Years of Swiss Trains" published by AS Verlag and Buchkonzept, Zürich, ISBN 3-905111-16-0. 328 pps.Available from Swiss Book Service, 1 The Orchard, Idmiston, Salisbury, SP4 OAT and Midland Counties Publications, Unit 3, Maizefield, Hinckley, Leics, LE10 1YF. Robert Spark Railway Literature, address in ad.

This is a "coffee table" size book beautifully produced and printed as can be expected from this publisher. It is profusely illustrated, where possible in colour, and I was particularly interested in the archive pictures most of which were new to me. This may be because one of the main contributors was Hans Wismann recently retired from the post of Archivist at the Luzern Transport Museum.

It is very difficult to encompass in a single volume 150 years of history. The team of contributors have provided the accredited author, Hans Peter Treichler, with material which strikes a reasonable balance between readability and technical detail which helps to make this a useful reference source. It is probably not surprising that the book tends to focus on the activities of the "Big Three", the Federal Railways, the BLS and the Rhätische Bahn.

The author has had the courage to look at current trends, NEAT with very clear diagrams of the tunnels, the travel market and the changing roles of the railway employees. Particularly brave is a section concerning the merits of road and rail relative to the environment which will strike a sympathetic chord with many readers. A diagram which clearly shows various combinations of road/rail transport could find wide use.

I have a great respect for translators and this must have been a mammoth task to cover it in the short timescale but it is a pity that it was not checked by a 'mother tongue' reader as it is rather quaint in places. At least reference should have been made to "Lexique Général des termes Ferroviaires" by the UIC which provides rail terms in six European languages.

Whatever shortcomings there are, they do not detract from the fact that this book should be in the collection of anyone who has a regard for Switzerland and its railways. It would make a wonderful birthday or Christmas present.

AJP