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SBB 150th Celebrations - Lausanne Triage 14-15 June 97 by Roger Kemp

I was able, with some juggling of annual leave, to attend this event with my wife. It was billed as one of the high points of this anniversary year and did not disappoint. My wife and I travelled by Eurostar/TGV to Lausanne on the Thursday which allowed us one day to have a look at the preparations before the big day itself. We had to travel back on the Sunday so we could only attend this event on the first day which I gather was the favoured day by the foreign legion of railway enthusiasts. Our first sight of celebrations was at the French-Swiss border at Vallorbe where a local exhibition was in full swing and I was able to catch a glimpse of the SNCF "Mikado" 141R as well as the Re 460 Jubilee locomotive of the SBB in its chrome livery - this makes photography almost impossible if the sun is in the wrong place due to the amount of reflection generated!

On Friday I spent a considerable amount of time at Lausanne station in the hope of seeing some of the "exhibits" on their way to the marshalling yard at Lausanne Triage located at Denges-

Preverenges where the exhibition and parade was to take place the following day. The long wait was not in vain. The Spanische Brotli Bahn passed through the station in mid-afternoon, presumably on a test run to see if it could stand up to the rigours of the weekend. An SBB Ae 3/6 based at Olten also passed through. In addition it was possible to see some of the Re 460s being prepared by being given a good wash, namely "Zugkraft Aargau", "Pepsi" and "AdTranz".

The all-important weather forecast for Saturday was not encouraging. We were promised a bright start but that heavy and thundery showers would soon develop and remain for the rest of the day, not clearing until evening. This did not deter us and we duly made our way to Platform 3 at Lausanne station to board the first shuttle train to Denges-Preverenges due to depart at 09.15. We exchanged our tickets for a security badge which was effectively a key ring with the anniversary logo with a safety pin attached. This meant that after the festivities we would have a little souvenir



from the SBB to take home.

The special train to the depot was composed of 15 InterCity coaches with an Re 4/4 coupled both front and back. Despite its length, there was still standing room only for the more tardy arrivals. Looking at the scene on the platforms it was obvious who the real enthusiasts were. They had come equipped with umbrellas anoraks, and sensible walking shoes. This contrasted sharply with some people who were wearing fashion clothing and totally inappropriate footwear, unsuited to clambering over railway tracks in what was, after all, a railway depot. What also struck me was the different nationalities attending this event. Apart from the British enthusiasts, I noted many Germans, Belgians, French, Italians and Americans as well as the Swiss themselves.

The journey from Lausanne took about 10 minutes. We left at 09.15 following the main Lausanne - Geneva line, passed through Renens before taking a branch line just before Preverenges which took us over the main line and brought us down into the vastness of Denges marshalling yard. The scene which greeted us was awe-inspiring. There, in the vastness of Denges yard lay the whole of Swiss railway history assembled before our eyes. From the early steam locomotives to the latest Cisalpino tilting train - it was all here. Before stopping, the

Previous page: Spanisch Brotli Bahn approaching Lausanne station.

Above: SBB Ae8/14 in the exhibition.

Photos: Author.

train passed a rake of blue pre war Rheingold coaches which had just arrived from Koln and which was due to disembark its passengers after our train had been cleared. We came to a halt at the extreme side of the yard and disembarked with the aid of step ladders thoughtfully provided as the camber at this point was quite severe. The depot itself was spotlessly clean and it was noticeable that the weeds which proliferate so many of our own sidings were not present here. The timetable of events meant that the exhibition of trains was open until 13.00 hrs with the parade taking place at 13.30, lasting about two hours after which time the exhibition remained open until 19.00 hrs.

Bearing in mind the weather forecast and knowing that modern cameras do not like rain very much it was a case of obtaining some decent pictures before the weather closed in completely. The SBB had obligingly arranged the motive power in a sequence which meant that the old steam locomotives were located on one side of the yard, the older electrics further in and the most modern exhibits nearest the



Above: EBT Be 4/4 at the exhibition.

Photo: Author.

refreshment hall (more usually a locomotive shed). This meant that finding particular locomotives of personal interest was much easier than it might have been. We therefore devoted the first part of the day to visiting as many of the rarer exhibits as possible and taking photographs before the vast human mass rendered this impossible. This required much dexterity as well as being careful not to fall over various pointwork and other railway paraphernalia used for day to day operations.

It was also noticeable that the staff took a relaxed view of so many people clambering over the trackwork - albeit that overhead catenary meant that there were no health or safety risks that are associated with third rail current. As predicted in advance, there were numerous exhibits to suit all interests and there was an opportunity to visit the driver's cab of many of these locomotives, many of which had been specially prepared for the occasion. I made a note of what I think was the total complement and apologise in advance if I have missed something other members may have seen.

The list of those exhibits which took part in the parade is at the end of the article.

As can be seen from the list, the SBB had pulled out all the stops to ensure that any locomotive or railcar which was railworthy would

participate in the exhibition. There was therefore something for everyone. The most popular attractions seemed to be the Spanisch Brotli Bahn, the Crocodiles, the mighty Ae 8/14 prototype and the Re 460 Jubilee locomotive. This last item had some controversy attached as I understand that the original intention was to apply a gold livery. This plan was hurriedly dropped following the adverse publicity accorded to Swiss banks at the start of 1997. The result was a livery from which it is almost impossible to pick out the SBB logo.

The crowds built up very quickly as the shuttle service from Lausanne cranked fully into action and the chance of taking good photographs of the motive power on view gradually diminished. Having obtained some reasonable efforts, and looking upward at an increasingly black sky, we decided that it was a good time to repair to the makeshift canteen for some refreshment whereupon a cloudburst, delivered in true Swiss fashion, hit the yard. Fortunately for us, we were indoors at the time enjoying a cup of tea but many poor, unfortunate bedraggled and frustrated souls were caught out. It was fitting that at the



time of the first thunderclap the full SBB Orchestra who were playing in the hall struck up Johann Strauss's "Thunder and Lightning Polka" to much amusement. It somehow summed up the occasion, festive, and not overburdened with officialdom.

Despite the weather, the parade started on time following a crescendo of whistles, horns and anything else the assembled hardware could muster. The steam locomotives were the first to pass, led by the Spanish Brotli Bahn. These were followed in historical sequence by the electric and diesel locomotives. In spite of the adverse conditions, vantage points were at a premium as the grandstand seats had been sold long ago. The whole parade route was in fact 4-5 deep throughout its length. As for photographs, I was indebted to my wife for loyally remaining under a rain soaked umbrella desperately trying to obtain photographs of some famous locomotives. This task was complicated by the unavailability of buying extra film, except in the form of instant disposable cameras and an element of selection was necessary. I had already exhausted my film at this point. The crowds were huge and I estimate that about 150,000 people attended this first day and the task of taking photographs of the parade was not eased by the plethora of video cameras and media complete with tripods and

Above: RAe 4/8, Double Red Arrow, in the exhibition
Photo: Author.

other hardware which took up valuable viewing space.

Once under way, the locomotives left the marshalling area and passed around a semi-circular loop which left them returning via the track which had been used for the shuttle trains. In the end the best position that we found was at the point where the marshalls flagged off each locomotive at the start of their circuit. It was an experience to see first the famous Crocodiles cranking into gear under their own power and travelling around the circuit as was the sight of the mighty Ae 8/14, now rarely seen and which showed itself as the monster locomotive it is. The contrast between locomotives of this period and more modern units could not have been more apparent. The older machines have a uniqueness of design which cannot be captured by the most modern traction which is uniformly designed to make the best use of aerodynamics. The BLS made an important contribution to the parade with the famous Ae6/8 No.205 making a now rare appearance as well as the pre war Ae4/4 and at the latter end of the parade Re 465 No. 14 which is one of a series owned by the



Above: BLS Ae6/8 205 at the exhibition.

Photo: Author.

SBB but leased to the BLS. (This is distinct from units 001-008 which are wholly owned by the BLS).

Once all the locomotives and railcars had passed, the TGV, ICE and Cisalpino sets followed each other directly, which historically was not correct, as the only TGV on view was one of the original Sud-Est versions with triple voltage to allow working into Lausanne/Bern. (set 112 "Lausanne"). This set was built in the early 1980s compared with the early 1990s for the ICE and Cisalpino units. I gather that it had been expected that an SNCF Thalys set to be used on the Paris/Bruxelles/Amsterdam/Koln route from the end of 1997, would make an appearance but it was not to be seen. Following passage of the high speed trains the Re 460 Jubilee Locomotive brought up the end of the parade hauling a coach of the new double-deck Schindler IC stock. Following this, the steam locomotives made a reverse pass directly behind each other, followed immediately by the high speed trains to provide a perfect finale contrast and end the display which had lasted just over 2 hours.

Before returning to Lausanne, there was still time to investigate the various marquees that had been set up. These included the model manufacturer HAG who were taking orders for the Jubilee Locomotive. Also in evidence was the

sales arm of the SBB, who were taking orders for the official video of the event; the Furka Oberalp Bahn advertising their attractions and an AdTranz stand, reflecting their involvement in the building of the Re 460. Other representatives of the railway industry also had a presence here. Eventually our return train arrived and despite enduring conditions similar to the Victoria Line in the rush hour, nobody minded. Everyone had their own special memory to cherish of what had been a wonderful railway experience organised superbly. It was with regret that we left Lausanne the following day as I would have quite gladly spent another day at the exhibition, but somehow I think it might have detracted from the immediate impact of the previous day. I suspect it will be a long time before such an event will be organised again and if it is, I imagine many of the older locomotives will have been scrapped. This was therefore a unique opportunity to view a panorama of Swiss railway history at close quarters. Even though this was a whistle stop visit the memories will linger for a long time to come.