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High Speed Trains to Switzerland; part 2 - TGV

Peter Marriott continues his review of Europe's prestige trains.

French Railway's (SNCF) TGV trains were some of the first European high speed trains. The initial high speed line (Ligne a Grande Vitesse) was the TGV Sud-Est route between Paris Lyon and Lyon. It was opened in stages between 1981 and 1983. It was later extended to Valence.

The current TGV domestic networks are; TGV Atlantique with 105 trainsets operating between Paris/Brest/Quimper/Toulouse and other destinations in west and south west France. TGV Sud Est uses 107 trains to cover the Paris/Lyon/Monaco/Grenoble lines and other destinations in south and east France. Finally the TGV Nord Europe sets utilise Paris/Lille/Calais/Boulogne routes and other destinations in northern France.

The TGV networks extend beyond the French borders with Atlantique extending into Spain, Sud Est to Switzerland and Italy and Nord Europe into Belgium. Additionally; Eurostar services operate between London/Paris/Brussels using the Nord

Europe lines with trains based on the TGV design. Thalys trainsets (again TGV based) are used on the Paris/Brussels/Amsterdam EuroCity services. The train liveries are; Sud Est - orange, Atlantique and Nord Europe - blue and silver, Eurostar - yellow and blue and finally Thalys - red and silver.

The main year round Paris/Swiss TGV destinations include Bern, Neuchatel, Lausanne and Geneva but in winter months the Paris/Brig TGV Neige operates for winter sports enthusiasts. Typical journey times are; Paris to Bern 4 hours 30 minutes and Paris to Lausanne 3 hours 45 minutes.

TGV trainsets comprise a power car at both ends and various numbers of intermediate trailer carriages. The Sud Est and Nord Europe sets have 8 trailers with 10 in the Atlantique sets compared with 18 on Eurostar "Three Capitals" units. The third generation TGV sets are TGV Duplex double deck sets which are being



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introduced on the Paris to Lyon services. These have a smoother aerodynamic shape and carry the grey/blue livery.

French Railways are endeavouring to promote Lille as the Eurostar connection for onward destinations following arrival from London. These include Amsterdam, Lyon, Bordeaux, the French Riviera, Cologne, Bern and Geneva. In fact over 100 million people live within a two hour rail journey of the modern Lille Europe station. A direct Lille/Switzerland TGV service is planned.

Work on the TGV Est European high speed line between Paris and Alsace is to commence in early 1998. This will reduce the Paris/Strasbourg journey time from 4 to 2 and a half hours. The Paris to Frankfurt time will reduce to 3 hours forty minutes. Other projects expected to be built include the TGV Aquitaine, Lyon/Turin and Rhone/Rhine.

For many years French Railways have been rather blinkered with regard to the expansion of their high speed network. They saw only more and more TGV routes but the advantages of tilt trains were not considered. This is now changing. The enormous cost of new lines is not reaping the

Previous page: A pair of TGV's awaiting departure.

Above: The author getting a drivers eye view of the controls and the track ahead.

Phots: Peter Marriott

return on capital they envisaged. A TGV unit is now being converted to test tilting mechanisms. Already three Italian Railways ETR 460 Pendolino units have been converted to operate the Lyon - Torino - Milan services.

The Swiss/Franco which manages the nine TGV units which operate the Paris/Lausanne/Bern services are intending to revise both the interior and exterior colours of these trains. The current orange/white livery may be replaced by blue and grey. From the end of September 1997 the Paris/Bern TGV services have been extended to Zurich.

More information about French Railways TGV times and prices can be obtained from The Rail Shop. For personal callers the address is 179 Piccadilly London W1. Switzerland Tourism will be able to provide information about those services which conclude and commence within Switzerland. Their address and contact numbers can be found on the inside front cover.