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Andy Micklethwaite

SCREENSAVERS FOR THE PC

In the early days of computers, it was easy to burn an image into a monitor screen by leaving the monitor on, with that unchanging image. To combat this problem, screensaver programs were devised, which constantly changed the image on the screen when there was no other activity. Modern monitors are not as susceptible to this problem, and modern computers go into a stand-by mode which turns off the monitor, meaning that screensavers are no longer essential to protect monitors, but they can provide entertainment. After installing one of the programs reviewed below, I was left wondering how anyone would do much work with such a program installed! This article pertains to PCs as the title suggests, not Mac and RiscOS systems.

Manfred and Martin Meyer, from Nürnberg, have now released version 3 of their MM Railway Screensaver. Some members of the Society are already familiar with the Meyer's products - version 2 had Swiss content, and a free-ware version was produced for the Swiss 150th celebrations a few years ago. For those unfamiliar with the product, when the screensaver activates, a number of trains move across the screen, the user can tune the number and speed of the trains to suit their computer. Version 3 has some significant improvements. There are over 800 locomotives and more than 2000 images of rolling stock, from a variety of countries - Germany has almost complete coverage; some countries bordering on Germany have extensive coverage (France, Switzerland, Austria); other European countries, including Britain, plus Taiwan, Japan and North America are also included. However, if you don't find the content exactly to your liking, you can choose exactly what you want to see. Even better, you can add your own engines and railcars - instructions are included. I have modified a number of images, and scanned in some more to increase the range of Swiss trains. It is interesting to see just how few good side-on photographs are published (side-on views are needed to scan to produce the images); almost all published photographs are 3/4 views. In days past Swiss Express has published side-on line drawings - I found and scanned the Wengernalpbahn railcar 131, but you have then to convert to a bitmap and colour and detail the image. If you like trams and buses, there are a number of both, German of course, but one of the highlights is undoubtedly the snowploughs! There are some niggles - some double-headed combinations are inappropriate, some of the British engine-train pairings are wrong - but these criticisms are minor, and the program provides hours of enjoyment.

Bemo have a similar screensaver called Railsaver Suisse, written by Stefan Dringenberg, who is a regular contributor to some of the Swiss Egroups on the Internet. The images of the trains are larger (despite the prototype being smaller!) but there is only one image displayed at a time, and fewer user options to adjust. Nevertheless, there are 250 images from the RhB, and over 150 other Swiss narrow gauge images. For fans of the narrow gauge, this is an excellent program.

The RhB also have a screensaver downloadable from their web-site. This displays a number of images of trains in their scenic environment, with a few interior images which I personally find less attractive. However there are user-selectable options, and you can turn off images you don't like, and change the many and varied ways the images change. To me, the program does not provide the long-term interest of the others, but would be a useful crowd-pleaser on a society stand at an exhibition.

All being well, most notably my precarious state of health, I will have these screensavers on show at the AGM, along with the SBB electronic timetable (the current one, ending May 2001) and a selection of images from the Internet. I hope to be able to offer them to members, so saving download time (a small charge will be made to cover the cost of media). But please email me at least a week before the AGM if you are interested so I know how many floppies or CD-Rs to bring, at:

<andymick@poboxes.com>

SUMMARY OF SCREENSAVERS MENTIONED

Name	*Requires*	*Size/Media*	*Cost*
MM Railway S/S	Win9x	2.8MB/CD	Up to 35DM Trial vrsn. free
SBB150 S/S	Win3.x or Win9x	145KB/FD	Free
Railsaver Suisse	Win9x + >Pentium 751	43MB/CD	TBA
RhB S/S	Win9x	2.3MB/CD	Free

ABOVE: *SBB Brünig HGe 4/4 101962-9 at Brienz on a ballast train ex. Interlaken. 12/09/2000*
BELOW: *101968-6 hauling Std. Gauge cement wagons. 2 miles E. of Brienz. Dest. unknown. 14/9/2000.*
Both photos: Chris Milner

ABOVE: *SBB Brünig line De 110 004-9 prepares to leave Meiringen for Interlaken in June 1999.*
Photo: Malcolm Bulpitt

BELOW: *SBB Brünig line Panoramic train near Meiringen.* *Photo: Courtesy STS*