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George Hoekstra

THE BOB, THE BOB, THE MOB & THE BLS - or how the "BOB" reached Spiez

Some additional information was provided by Andreas Häsler and Andy Micklethwaite and has been incorporated into the text



The two BOB's meet in Interlaken Ost. From left to right - BOB VT 105, BOB ABeh 4/4 312 and BOB ABeh 4/4 309. 10th Jan. 2000.

Photo: Andreas Häsler

No, the famous third rail, that would permit transit of metre gauge vehicles between Zweisimmen and Interlaken Ost has not yet been built. The BOB vehicle in question is an "Integral" type diesel railcar of the standard gauge private Bayrischen Oberland Bahn from Bavaria, Germany. The vicious storm "Lothar" which hit large parts of Europe on Boxing Day, did enormous damage to the forests in the Berner Oberland, as well as to many other parts of Switzerland. An estimated 10 million cubic metres of wood was felled in about an hour. In the Simmental, a lot of trees came down on to the catenary and power lines. As new posts will have to be cemented in repairs will take

weeks and the BLS did not want to wait that long to restore service. But as diesel powered vehicles are very rare in almost all-electric Switzerland they had to look abroad. Suitable stock was found in Bavaria. The units of five short-bodied cars, by the name of Integral, were specially built for this heavily graded set of lines from Munich to Lenggries, Tegernsee and Bayrischzell, by Jenbach of Austria last year but had been handed back to the builders due to severe technical problems. Numbered VT 101, 105, 108, 109 and 111 they are 53.4 m (178 ft) long and weigh only 74 tons. Power is supplied by three MAN diesel engines. Seating capacity is a hefty 162 in first and second class. The very wide



The "BOB" meets the MOB in Zweisimmen. 9th Jan. 2000.

Photo: Andreas Häsler

entry-platforms are handy for the many skiers and snow boarders using the Simmental line in Winter.

4 drivers from the BOB plus 'Integral' service people brought the railcars from München-Laim via Kempten - Lindau-Reutin - Bregenz to Spiez on December 30th, where instant test runs were made. The Swiss railway executive had quickly allowed the service as the buses substituted could not provide an adequate service. Only at the German-Austrian border did administrative problems stop the five dmu's for four hours.

From 04.30am, on Dec 31st, all five units started full service (only some six hours after they arrived at Spiez!). On the line from Spiez to Zweisimmen sets operated under multiple unit control in single, double and triple configuration according to demand.

I travelled on a Monday in early January and they really needed this capacity as many school ski-camps go to Lenk at this time of year. The ride is very smooth, with good acceleration. The howl of the diesel motors is unusual to our Swiss ears, but not so much as to be distracting. It was sad to see the ravages this storm has caused in this pretty valley. Some sites look like an air crash site with all the trees razed to the ground. Clean up next spring will be an enormous task next spring and the loss of avalanche protection is even more serious.

The head of operations of BLS was full of praise for the dmu's running quality and there have been no reports of failures during the 10 days of operation. Only criticism was that a complete rake comprises no smoking accommodation (!)



Two of the Bavarian Integral diesel units in Spiez, 360 foot long!

Photo: George M. Hoekstra.



The Bavarian Integral units roar (literally) past the picturesque halt of Spiezmoos Süd.

Photo: George M. Hoekstra



Inside the Bavarian railcars. I like the centre handrail post!

Photo: George M. Hoekstra.