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PREPARING FOR SERVICE 01 AND . . . EXPO 02

The first 12 trains out of the first series of 24 new Swiss ICN tilting trains (see Swiss Express Sept. 99, pages 40-43) are progressing towards completion about 4-5 months behind schedule. There have been problems. One of the main ones was vibration. This meant thicker and stiffer side panels had to be developed. Then there was the bankruptcy of the sub-contractor making the inside cladding panels. Finding a suitable alternative source, which had spare capacity, took a very long time. Also, the software of the tilt-

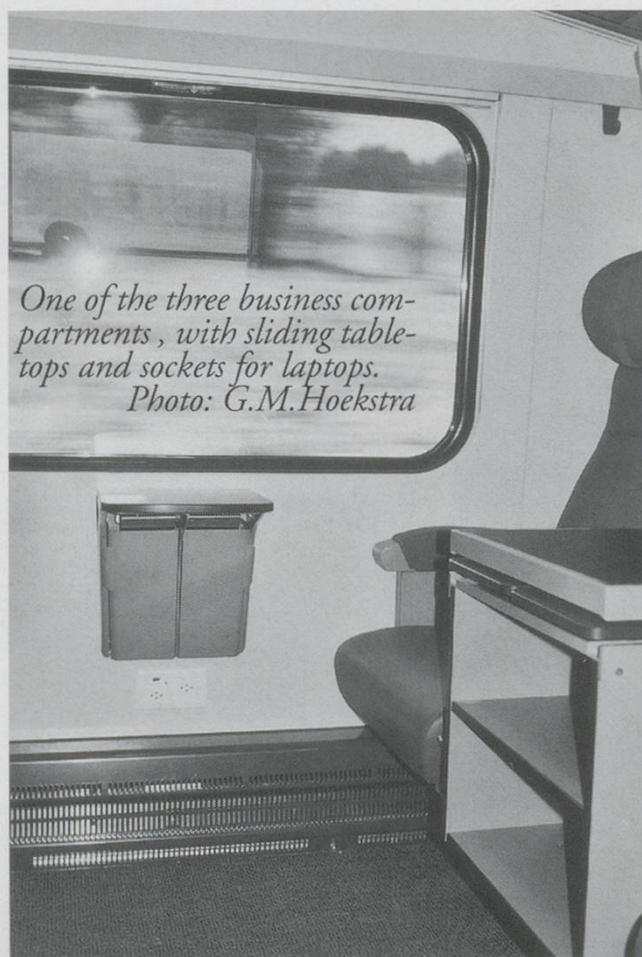


The really snazzy ICN-logo on the unofficial uniform of the driver. Photo: G.M.H

ing technology took some ironing out. Most of the problems are now solved. The sets will not be put into service, until everything has been proved to be working right. If not enough fully operational sets will be available on time, taking into account it will be necessary to run two sets coupled together (900 seats) to cope with demand on this line, the scheduled running between St. Gallen and Geneva will be temporarily curtailed to Zürich - Lausanne. This way connections at both ends still will be assured. A repeat of the Cisalpino saga (many problems during service running) is to be avoided. In mid February, the press was once again invited to test the first seven coach set, complete inside as well as outside, except for the restaurant car. This car will be completed later. On the outside the logo for the swiss national exhibition Expo, of which the SBB is an official sponsor, had been changed to 02. Just in case you have not heard: at the end of last year, it was decided to hold our national Expo a year later, in 2002, in order to have enough time to find more spon-

sors and to sort out the political, logistical and money problems. It seems to be on a more solid footing now. But back to our ICN. The riding, which I already liked on the first run a few

months ago, really is superb: one has the impression of floating through the landscape. True, we did not try it out on really sinuous track like on the Gotthard and Lötschberg lines (the 4-car test set did), but the sets were conceived for the line we tried them out on: Geneva- Zürich via Biel. The various delays during construction did have an advantage: there was time to make some changes in the interior design. The rather dark colours of the first version, have luckily been abandoned.



One of the three business compartments, with sliding table-tops and sockets for laptops. Photo: G.M.Hoekstra

The much lighter ceiling, in combination with the grey and red in first class and the blue and green in second class, make the new interior a lot more inviting. The design team even had a special uniform made for the driver with a snazzy ICN-logo on the back and which I managed to photograph. However, the head of passenger traffic of the SBB, Mr. Paul Blumenthal, made me promise to point out that nothing about the possibilities of special ICN uniforms for the train crew has been decided: Done! To prove there are now two seven-car sets running, two spectacular parallel runs were organised for the occasion: one between Renens and Lausanne on the three-track section there. The other one was between Aarau and Rapperswil, on the four-track section, thus allowing the stunts to take place without disturbing the normal timetabled traffic too much. It was exciting to see the run-pasts: first them past us, then we overtook them and so on several times, at full running speeds. I was in the cab during most of the Geneva - Lausanne run. There were a lot fewer

people on the train then and I even had the second seat in the cab. There were two press conferences, one in french in Lausanne and one in german in Zürich. We were told that more than 70,000 people had applied for the 5000 available tickets for the public preview rides during March and April. You could also charter the whole train during the testing period until the regular service starts, for only 40 Francs per kilometre, a bargain for a 450 seater train. The Zürich press conference was held in the privately owned and newly refurbished "Blue Saloon" ex-DB restaurant car. This saloon, with its very lavish interior decoration, is capable of running as a charter vehicle in 200 kmh (120 mph) Intercity trains. As the car was already standing in the station when we got there, it was difficult enough to get a good picture inside, but totally impossible to photograph the outside: all you could see was a lot of peoples backs. Inside you noticed one thing straight away: normal dining guests would not have had as many anoraks hanging around, as we journalists had.

Parallel run in the snow between Renens and Lausanne. Luckily we both have green signals...

Photo: George M. Hoekstra

