

Zeitschrift: Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal
Herausgeber: Swiss Railways Society
Band: - (2003)
Heft: [3]

Artikel: Non Silentio ad Draconem. Part 2
Autor: Baker, David
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-855149>

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DAVID CONTINUES THE STORY OF THE TRAMS ON THE NORTHSIDE OF LAKE THUN



Interlaken West 1935.

The STJ Trams can be seen in the foreground partially hidden by trees. Apart from the actual trains the scene has not really changed that much during the past 70 odd years.

In 1939 the Authorities in Bern wished to extend the surfaced road from Beatenbucht to Interlaken, provided that the railway withdrew its tracks. A compensation of 80,000 francs was offered. At an Extraordinary General Meeting a two-thirds majority were in favour of giving up the line and running trains from Thun to Beatenbucht and motorbuses thereon to Interlaken.

However, the start of the Second World War came at the end of that years summer season, the army needed transport, petrol was rationed and again the railway suffered. Operations from Beatenbucht to Interlaken were halted on 18 December 1939, and the railway installation was immediately dismantled. The army took up the rails for use over the remaining tracks as replacements, particularly

between Hilterfingen and Oberhofen. The railway had lost a route length of 9386 metres, and the remaining length of 19,742 metres was to remain for only another twelve years.

On 12 June 1940 the licence was permanently changed. The military used the railway for their purposes as fuel was in short supply, this brought a new impetus to the operations and worn out tracks were replaced at several locations. The roadway between Beatenbucht and Interlaken was improved and a good dust free surface put down. This led to the start of a motorbus service on 15 August. The operation was leased out with licence to run eight return journeys per day for a two-year trial period.

Passenger numbers increased again after the war and passed one million in 1942, 1.37 million in 1943 and over 1.5 million in 1945, but

the outgoings were still greater than incomings. Beyond the improvements made by the military very little had been done to the installation. Officialdom stepped in again in 1946 when the Transport Department Inspectors called for a replacement of most of the buildings over a two-year period.

In 1947, as a result of a restriction in the power supplies, the electrical power usage had to be cut. This meant an annoying loss of the heating supplies, but the traffic was maintained at a reasonable level. The connection to the supply network was improved when the Bern Power Company established a new high-voltage substation at Oberhofen. The high-voltage cables were laid across the lake from the centre of Spiez.

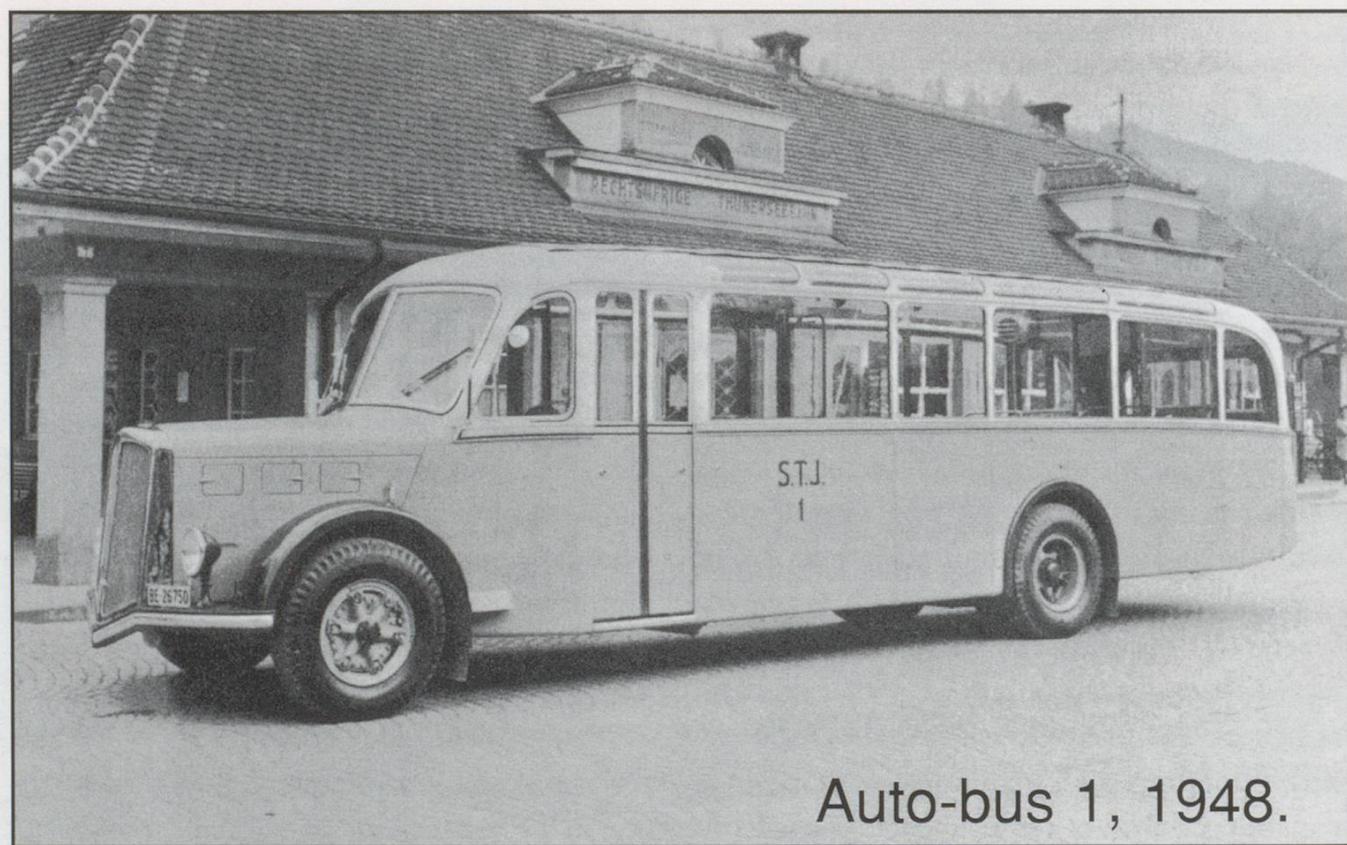
The two new motorbuses on order were still delayed and the order time had to be extended. They arrived in 1948 and were painted in the same yellow livery as the trains before being put into service.

During the year it was decided that the system should be adapted for trolley-bus operations to avoid conflict with the cars on the road

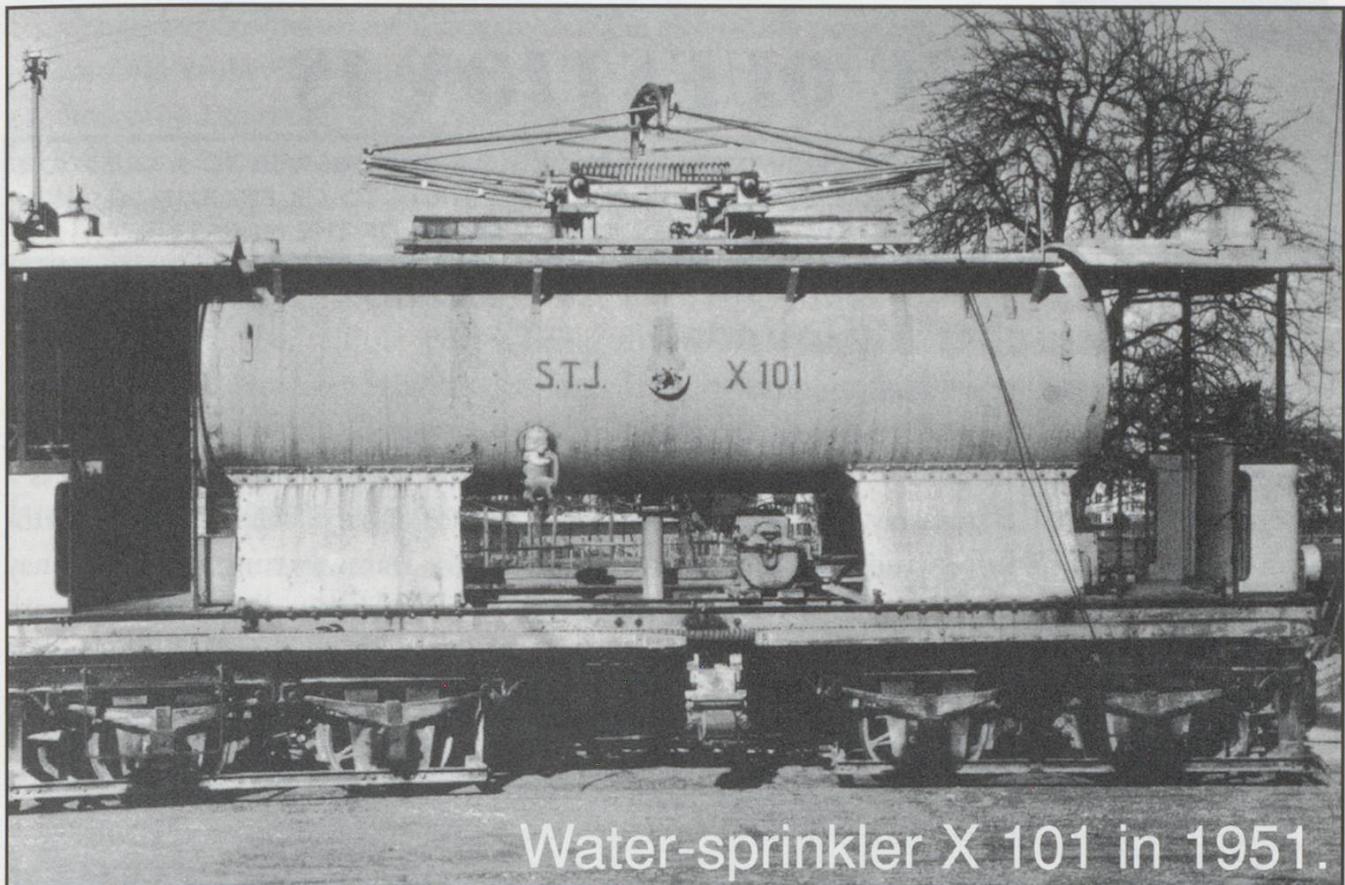
surface. This was seen to be the preferred solution. The only question was, how much would it cost? However, they were so certain of the future that training of the staff began quickly.

By 1949 land had been purchased for a new trolley-bus depot. It was agreed that the local Thun bus service vehicles would also use the facilities and a state grant of 900,000 francs was offered. Contributions from the Canton and others within the district brought the total up to the four million francs, which was considered necessary. Motorbus 3, meanwhile, was delivered and, along with trailer coach 21, was shown at the KABA exhibition in Thun. By the end of the year there were 4 motorbuses in service plus the trailer coach. Two buses were normally being utilised on the Interlaken to Beatenbucht route, with the others in reserve. Passengers were now coming back to the railway, but expenditure on track maintenance had shrunk to the absolute minimum in view of the coming changes.

In 1950 the STJ started to acquire the financial securities for the venture and took on a loan of one million francs from SUVAL.



Auto-bus 1, 1948.



Water-sprinkler X 101 in 1951.

Before commencement of operations they required the following equipment:

9 trolleybuses, 4 trailer coaches and two new substations in Merlingen and Schwäbis. Some conductor supports, etc. were in position, but the catenary style was different.

The third war in less than forty years caused problems again. The start of the Korean War immediately stopped the purchase of copper wire and by the time it was available again the price had increased tremendously. But, by 1952 the line had been adapted for trolleybuses between Thun and Beatenbucht and a further 13,371 metres of track was taken up.

7 trams, 9 coaches and 11 mixed goods, luggage and service vehicles were decommissioned. The changeover was deferred from 1 May 1952 until 18 August 1952, although the new rolling stock had been delivered much earlier. Through services were kept going by the Thun buses whilst the lines were rebuilt. Two fatal accidents occurred through electric shock during the final phase of the changeover.

The only remaining length of track from Steffisburg to Thun was still in use by the remaining trams, the standard of the rails being better than the old lakeside tracks. The route fell, at last, to motorbuses on 1 July 1958.

Following commencement of the trolleybus route the de-commissioned rolling stock was either broken up or sold off. Six of the motor coaches, Be 2/2s Nos. 3, 4, 6, 10, 12 and 14, were delivered to Innsbruck, Austria, where it was hoped to run the 1100 volt units on the 600 volt Innsbruck Street Railway and also on the 1200 volt network of the Igls and Solbad Hall line. Unfortunately, the attempt failed! The supervising authority stated that the voltage differences were not safe and would not grant a licence. The track sprinkler wagon went to the Toggenbahn as a reserve for winter use.

Translated and condensed by David Baker from:
Strassenbahn- und Überlandbahnen von Thun
and Berne (1969), Claude Jeanmaire .