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SWISS RAILWAY FREIGHT

New Players on the Scene 2



A TX Logistik train hauled by a Siemens Taurus is pictured in Germany.

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As promised in the March issue, here are a few more annotated excerpts from the booklet written by Kurt Metz and published by VAP & Litra. Remember, the booklet was written in September 2004 and some things might already be different today, in this age of lightning fast changes. Changes, I sometimes feel, made purely for the sake of change – new boss, new broom and all that – but that, as they say, is another story...

RM Logistik + Güterverkehr: Crossrail. The Regionalverkehr Mittelland AG runs shuttle trains for swap-bodies and container traffic from their own hub at Wiler to terminals at Duisburg and Domodóssola under the name of Crossrail. Crossrail sees itself as a provider of unaccompanied combined traffic, or UKV as it is known in German. Traffic is mainly terminal-to-terminal and aimed at shippers. Crossrail owns a fleet of 300 carrier wagons. They will organise pick-ups direct from customers by rail as well as by road and transfer them to the Cargodrome Terminals in Wiler and Domodóssola and the Duisburg Intermodal Terminal (DIT). Crossrail have their own personnel in these terminals. Traction from Duisburg to Wiler is provided by RAG Bahn und Hafen GmbH (RBH), a subsidiary of Ruhrkohle AG, with rented BR 185 locomotives. The drivers are from MEV (see last month's article). RM, with their own Re 436 and their own drivers, provides the traction from Wiler to Domodóssola.

TX Logistik GmbH (Basel). This Company is a subsidiary of TX Logistik in Germany. Trenitalia Cargo holds 15% of the capital, with an option to increase their holding to 40%. Traffic is between Mannheim, Zürich and Melzo and consists mainly of ISO containers for sea traffic. In the first few months, TX Logistik ran their trains over the Gotthard in cooperation with RM. Since May 2004, TX Logistik has received a licence for rail transport through Switzerland. Trac-

tion is by rented multiple-system German locomotives mainly of the "Taurus" family. Drivers are from the MEV pool. New traffic includes new cars from Eisenach over the Gotthard to northern Italy. Previously these cars were transported by road, over the Brenner Pass. The transporters returned empty to Germany through the Gotthard road tunnel!

Wagon renting and leasing companies. All this traffic needs specialised wagons. Wagons used in international traffic must be built and maintained to UIC (Union Internationale des Chemins de Fer, the International Railway Association) standards. These are much more complicated and strict, as these wagons must be able to run safely in different trains running to different standards in different countries. In fact, the UIC-certified vehicle is the only piece of rolling stock, which can freely roll everywhere in Europe and some of the Near East and North Africa. As long as the track gauge remains 4 ft 8½ inches and the loading gauge is to UIC-Standard, that is – excluding Countries like Britain, Spain & Portugal, Russia and others. Initially the individual railway companies owned them. Over the years, they found it increasingly difficult to manage them. For a long time, a lot of standardised wagons were put in the so-called "Europ" Pool, managed jointly by the railways to avoid the costly returning of empties to the individual owning railway. But even this was too cumbersome and the older wagons needed replacing with more modern types. It is clear, that these specialised wagons are expensive. This, together with the vast number needed, meant the individual railways were no longer able to cope. Some of the shippers started owning the wagons themselves, the so-called "p" wagons. But even they had to give up. The Rules and Regulations, not to mention the Insurance, got too complicated for these firms, whose main business after all was something else! Then private, specialised companies stepped in, had the wagons built and rented them out, mostly directly to the shippers. A bit, but not quite, like the rolling stock for passenger traffic in Britain, which is owned by finance companies and leased to the train operators. In Britain, the actual owners are often American Trusts. This incidentally, is also the case with many of the SBB locomotives. In America, there are tax advantages to be had, so the leasing company can offer quite good terms on the financing. Anyway, back to our UIC-Standard freight wagons. They can be universally used, so the firms are able to rent them out to shippers all over Europe. Companies incorporated in Switzerland include:

AEE: owns 19,000 wagons of varied types, head office in Zug

Ermewa: owns 18,000, many tank wagons, head office in Geneva

Wascosa: 3,000 wagons, tank and gas, ATCS and special containers, head office in Zug

Mitrag: tank wagons and others, head office in Lugano

Rolmafer: tank wagons, head office in Zollikofen, Agency in Budapest/Hungary

One problem remains. All these specialised wagons need specialised maintenance. As the owners are essentially finance and renting companies, they do not have the facilities, and do not want to invest in them either. Many of the traditional railway companies have already been scaling down their own facilities, or would like to do so, and are looking for alternatives. The existing repair and maintenance facilities usually belong to the train operators, instead of the infrastructure owners. The infrastructure people are regarded, whether rightly or not, as more neutral. Thus many railway companies have been reluctant to give this work to what they regard as their competitors. But the market is changing. Many railway works, like those of the BLS in Spiez and Böningen, are now doing a lot of outside work. Also, many rolling stock manufactures, including some of the big names, have found maintenance contracts to be a lot more long-term and lucrative than one-off new manufacturing. More next time!