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100 YEARS OF POSTAUTO

- Celebrations and Stamps

The biggest Swiss transport event of 2006 will be the 100th anniversary of the postal coach service. The yellow vehicles with their special "ta-tue-ta-too" horns, are quintessential Swiss institutions.

On 1st June 1906, a service from Bern to Detligen was opened, operated with three 14-seater coaches. The petrol-engined coaches were very thirsty and breakdowns were quite frequent. The service certainly was revolutionary, but economically the service was a disaster. So much so, that the service from Bern to Papiermühle, which also was opened in 1906, reverted back to coach and horse operation in 1909. Automobile technology was clearly not ready for a postal service quite yet! The breakthrough came after the First World War. Development of heavy motor engines had taken a giant leap during the war, and quite a few new services were opened with new bodies on ex-army trucks. The horses held their own in the mountains for quite a while: the last horse-drawn service was only abandoned in 1961 (Cresta-Juf, in the Grisons). I will not dwell on the history anymore, as there are books, and two notable exhibitions, for anyone interested. The Museum of Communication in Bern (Helvetiastrasse, 16) will hold a special exhibitions from the 2nd June until the 3rd September, and the Swiss Transport Museum in Luzern will hold another one from the 8th June till the 20th August.

Today, the modern *PostAuto Schweiz AG* is a shareholder company, with the Swiss Confederacy as sole shareholder. Its operations are supplemented by a number of local contractors who use the same uniform and vehicle livery. PostAuto is Switzerland's biggest Public Transport operator carrying 100 million passengers a year. The coaches travel over 56 million miles a year. Put into perspective, that is six times around the world every day! The network covers more than 10,000 miles, around two thirds

covered by *PostAuto Schweiz AG* and the rest by the contractors. The transformation from a company with employees that had civil service status to a modern shareholder company has been both painful and successful. Innovation has also been a reason for its success. The *PubliCar* system in rural areas is a huge success.

To commemorate its Jubilee, there will be a national Festival on the 13th May in Aarberg, with a parade of old-timers and the unveiling of a *PostAuto* Re 460. In the regions, there will be several local festivals during the whole year. As these are organised locally, I unfortunately have no details. But check on:

www.postauto.ch/jubilaem

(in German with link to French/Italian versions). This site also has details of some good value excursions.

Also, on 3rd March, the Swiss Postal Service issued three special stamps to commemorate the 100 years of the postal coach services. As I am writing this in mid February, they have not yet been officially issued. However, as this edition of *Swiss Express* will come out after 3rd March, I was given special permission to receive a CD-ROM with the images from the philatelic service of Swiss Post. A big thank-you to them! There will be three stamps: 85c for a 2nd class letter, showing a modern postal coach; SFr 1 for a 1st class letter, showing a small school bus for rural services; and SFr 1.30 for a letter to Europe, showing a modern high-capacity "bendy" postal coach. At the presentation of the new stamps Elsa Baxter, head of the Philatelic Service, said there were some noticeable differences between the stamps, created by the artist Daniel Dreier from Bern, and the real things. A stamp weighs 0.1 gram; a postal coach easily 13 tons - 130 million times as much! The cheapest stamp is 85c; the coach depicted on it costs 350,000 Francs - more than 400,000 times as much! So get your bargain!



UPPER: At the presentation for the press in the Museum of Communication they had arranged a contrast for us: one of the new "bendy" articulated buses and a Berna old timer, brought in especially from Eastern Switzerland, hidden inside a tarpaulin-covered lorry! George Hoekstra.

MIDDLE: The commemorative stamps, courtesy of Swiss Post. Collectors can buy online at www.post.ch/philashop

RIGHT: View of the inside of the articulated bus. A lot of people can be transported by one driver – not as many as on a train, agreed, but a bus can bring people closer to where they want to go. Long distance train and local distribution by connecting PostAuto or tram – that is what integrated transport is all about. George Hoekstra



LOWER: Today's PostAuto – coaches for regional services posing in the integrated transport station at Chur. © Swiss Post

