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CISALPINO

Sylvain Meillasson



*ETR 610,
Sylvain Meillasson.*

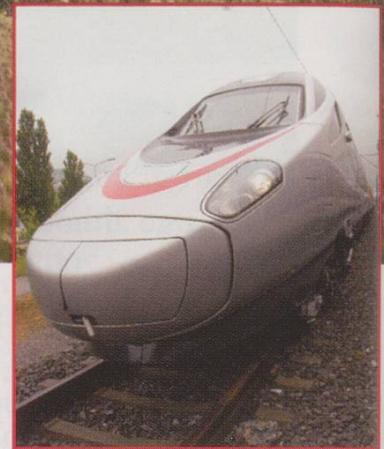
ETR 610 on test, Armin Schmutz.

One of the successes of open access and greater cross-border co-operation are the Cisalpino services. The idea, like all brilliant ideas, was simple. Swiss Federal Railways (SBB) and Italian Railways (FS) decided in 1993 to establish a joint venture company with a simple mission statement – to develop high quality cross border train services. Operations started in September 1996 with a pair of trains on routes from Geneva and Basel to Milan. Zürich to Milan started in January 1997. In 1998 services from Zürich to Stuttgart and Florence and Geneva to Venice also started. Growth has been constant ever since with a 6.9% increase in passengers in 2007.

In 2008 Cisalpino operated nine sets of ETR 470 tilting trains, which were built and are maintained in Italy. Each of these “Pendolinos” has three first class coaches, a restaurant car, and five second class carriages. The gastronomy, to a very high standard, has won awards, and is exclusively Italian food. The current success and growth of these services has exceeded the capacity of the trains. In 2004 Cisalpino took on lease

a number of conventional coaches – five 1st class from SBB; ten 1st and thirty 2nd class from FS; plus a number of restaurant and baggage cars. These coaches were extensively modernised to match the high standards of the ETR 470s and painted in the same blue and grey colour scheme but they are hauled by conventional locomotives which involve traction changes at the border. These sets operate the Zürich to Venice and Zürich to La Spezia via Genoa.

Fourteen ETR 610 “Pendolino” sets, costing some €325m are on order and when these new trains are delivered all Gotthard and Simplon route services between Switzerland and Italy will go over to Cisalpino operation, then Roma will join the network with the trip from Zurich taking just seven hours. The new ETR 610 seven coach sets (including a restaurant car) offer 431 seats and are to be known as CIS2. They have already operated at 275kph in the Lötschberg base tunnel, and 280kph on the new high-speed line in Italy, showing



remarkable stability and silence. The first new train was shown to the press at Zürich on 5th June 2007. If Alstom had delivered 9 of the 14 sets in time, they were scheduled to start in service with the December 2008 timetable change, although this was not to be the case. They will operate on the Zürich to Milan service in multiple, due to the high level of passenger take-up on this route, and singly between Geneva and Basle to Milan.

In contrast to the original ETR 470s, which need a lot of work to improve their reliability (a quarter of all delays are caused by their unreliability) the ETR 610s have been designed with Swiss practicality allied to the Italian design, to ensure a robustness of operation. Maintenance will be shared between Geneva and Milan, with the original ETR 470 units being maintained at Basel and Milan. With their installed power, together with new high speed lines in Switzerland and Italy, the new sets will reduce journey times by 30min to Venice, 40min to Florence, 40min between Basel and Milan and 45mins between Geneva and Milan. The units can cross the Gotthard even with one pair of motors isolated, which will greatly help alleviate any down time.

The dedication of a separate company, with a clear focus, and motivated and dedicated staff works well. It comes across

when you are on board – and there is even a frequent traveller programme! Send in your receipts for the tickets, and on-board restaurant car receipts, and you accumulate points on your account. The success of Cisalpino proves what we have always known, provide a fast, frequent, reliable, clean, high-quality train service and rail is unbeatable, proved by a 6.9% increase in passengers in 2007.

Armin Schmutz reports on the progress of the ETR610s

Testing of Cisalpino ETR 610 continued in Switzerland during 2008 with ETR 610 001 being observed on the new NBS line between Mattstetten – Rothrist in September. Several runs were made originating in Ostermundigen (close to Berne) then joining the main line near Wankdorf and on to Olten and Zofingen from where the Cisalpino returned to Ostermundigen. On the new line section the train was operating under ETCS. Out of Berne, as well as from Olten, three passenger trains are scheduled within a few minutes and then the line is open for about 20 minutes. The Cisalpino sets followed behind the last passenger train at distance using the time window for a brake test between Km16.233 and Km18.051 (Gleitschutz – Messfahrten).

Unfortunately the ETR 610s were not ready for service at the schedule change in December 2008 despite the fact that they are overdue by over one year. Alstom is to pay Cisalpino a fine of CHF60m (representing the price of two units) due to the commissioning delays but this is not helping the operator's stock shortages that are due to refurbishment work on the ETR 470 fleet which commenced last September.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

See 'Notepad' on page 46.

ETR 610 on test, Armin Schmutz.

