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NEW TRAINS FOR THE CENTOVALLI

Keith Scotland



New SSIF ABPe 12/12 panoramic unit No 83 "Maserà" at Isella Olga. ALL PHOTOS: Keith Scotland

The Centovalli (One Hundred Valleys) Line runs for some 50km from Domodossola, Italy, to Locarno in Canton Ticino through wonderfully scenic pre-alpine country. It is jointly owned by the Swiss Ferrovie autolinee regionali ticinesi (FART) and the Italian Società Subalpina di Imprese Ferroviarie (SSIF). Although two-thirds of the line is in Italy Swiss Passes are accepted and it is well worth a trip. Due to the nature of the landscape the road network in the area is poor and there are no competing bus services so the line, opened in 1923, serves the local communities with a frequent stopping service. It also has a growing importance as a tourist railway. The line is unique in that both its termini are located in subterranean stations adjacent to the main line facilities in the two towns. The tunnel at Locarno replaced street running, a

cause of traffic congestion, in 1990.

The metre gauge 1350V dc trains are of a variety of types, owned roughly 2:1 – SSIF/FART, and have a common numbering system. To cope with growing demand especially from tourists, as well as to provide them with a better experience, new trains have been acquired, whilst three of the four existing ABe8/8 units dating from 1959 have been modernised. Following their rebuild with panoramic windows, air conditioning, etc they now carry 100 passengers in some style and have been well received by Centovalli customers, who consider them better than the stylish ABe 4/6 units that date from 1993.

The new panoramic units are unique and were ordered following an EU-compliant tender process. This was required due to SSIF being Italian, so although



FART was not subject to the EU rules they would have had little choice but to go along with their partners in this instance. The resulting ABPe 12/12 3-car units – all the axles are powered - were assembled in Italy by Officine Ferroviarie Veronesi with components principally Skoda. To cope with the demanding 50m radius curves and the high

specification, the new sets have quite short coaches having angular sides; they have air conditioning and non-opening windows and a small driver's cab to maximise internal space and give passengers good forward visibility. Unfortunately they do have restricted luggage space. They are also EU Person Mobility Reduced (PMR)

legislation compliant. Following their introduction it was decided to introduce a fourth un-powered trailer coach into each set, making them



TOP: *Historic BCFe 4/4 No 17 owned by FART at Camedo TI 30 07 08.*

MIDDLE: *Historic Centovalli tram style unit preserved at Santa Maria Maggiore.*

LEFT: *SSIF ABe 4/6 No 62 Re waits at its namesake station.*

ABPe 12/16, increasing their capacity to 200 people. The first two 3-car units were delivered in April 2007 followed by the third unit and the three trailers in October 2007.

The basic 3-car units are formed with MP1 (Motrice Pilot 1) a driving motor coach with first class compartment and PMR toilet, at the Domodossola end, then M1 trailer motor coach with a standard toilet, and MP2 driving motor coach at the Locarno end. The MP 1 & 2 coaches weigh 32 tonnes whilst the intermediate M1 coach weighs 30.5 tonnes. Together the units develop 1020 kw/122kn which gives them very good acceleration and sufficient power to counter the quite severe gradient profile of the line. These new trains, with comfortable seating, panoramic views and excellent suspension are proving very popular.



TOP: New SSIF ABPe 12/12 panoramic unit No 81 'Domodossola' at Marone.

MIDDLE: New SSIF ABPe 12/12 panoramic unit No 82 departs Camedo.

RIGHT: SSIF ABe 4/6 No. 64 "Druogno" sits alongside FART ABe 8/8.