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MONT BLANC RAILWAY CENTENARY

Kälti



The Mont Blanc Railway auto-trains wait at St Gervais, where they make connection with the SNCF standard gauge train in the opposite platform, June 1996.

ALL PHOTOS: Kälti

The continuation of the Swiss Martigny-Châtelard railway from the Frontière station into France to reach Chamonix and St Gervais celebrated its centenary in July 2008 and SNCF pulled out all the stops to help publicise its recent investment in the line. M. Guillaume Pépy, the high profile chairman of SNCF, joined in the celebrations of a railway originally built by the French Paris-Lyons-Méditerranée (PLM) main line company in order to build up the winter sports traffic to the Chamonix area. Realising construction and operation would be a challenge the PLM chose metre-gauge and electrification from the outset. Its unusual feature, which continues to this day, is that in France the trains get their power from a third rail, while in Switzerland the through services use overhead wires, although there are also sections of third-rail operation. The Swiss also have sections of Riggerbach rack on their original line as it climbs out of the Rhône valley whereas the 100-year old line in France is purely traction. Articles in the March 2008 edition of *Swiss Express* described recent trips over the line.



The old and new order on the Martigny-Châtelard Railway at Le Châtelard, August 1998.

Whilst protected in some places, the third rail (carrying 800v) is uncovered alongside the boards of the level crossing, June 1996.

