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A HUMBLE SERVANT

Bryan Stone



ALL PHOTOS: *Bryan Stone*

No. 16515 Ee3/3 II, ex SNCF, Basel, in background No. 16513.

There were, from first visits to Switzerland, two sounds which captivated. One was that bell, now vanished except on museum railways and in the Verkehrshaus, rung as trains entered the section; the other, which will also soon disappear, the rumm-rumm-rumm of the side-rods of those Ee3/3 shunters. Once they were everywhere; in Basel at 05.30 re-marshalling the night train from Oostende or Calais; in Vallorbe with the restaurant car; in Zürich; Geneva; Romanshorn; Luzern; Chiasso. Today they are the last rod-drive - and the oldest - locomotives in general service in Switzerland. The 138 once owned by SBB (along with some on private lines) had been reduced to 61 standard 15KV examples, plus 12 multi-voltage ones for Geneva, Chiasso and Basel, by the start of 2009. Older visitors may remember BLS 'first' 401 which gleamed, but did little else, in Spiez. Some were sold

by SBB, for example to EBT and the PTT. The four Ee3/3 II survivors at Basel were built for SNCF for inter-line freight and bought back by SBB as shunters when SNCF produced its fearsome inflammable 20200 series, now also gone. These four Ee3/3 II, which I see every day near my Basel home, will disappear this summer. As there are new smaller tractors on order even the standard varieties of the class will not last much longer.

Remember also that there is much less work for engines such as these. Wagonload freight is shunted by Am843 diesels and although some strengthening and dividing of passenger rakes still happens, all those international, Wagon-Lits, and other through coaches have vanished. Standard trains, including many multiple units, have displaced the trains made up in the yard or at the platform, and post and parcels vans

have disappeared too. It's all very rational, but the Ee3/3s were happy little engines, their 'V' on one headlight to say which end was 'vorn' (front), galloping round the yards, a shunter hanging on the step, reversing, blowing off the brakes, straining on 10 heavyweight coaches.

They were introduced to avoid steam shunting at electrified stations, and first reports highlighted the tonnes of coal saved, reflecting the post-WW1 fuel shortage. The first were Nos.16301/16302, built in 1923 by SLM with a carrying axle because of excess weight. Really half a small Crocodile, they were tested against 'Tigerli' E3/3 No 8405 with dynamometer car. Sixteen Ee3/3s with end cabs (Nos. 16311-16326) followed in 1926. Another batch (Nos. 16331-16376) was introduced between 1930 and 1942. The three oldest Ee3/3s in service today are nearly 70 years old and their steeply sloping long 'hood' identifies them.

In 1947 seventy steam shunters still worked daily, but two batches of improved Ee3/3s (Nos.16381-16430) swept most aside. Completed by 1956 this build are today's main survivors. Nos.16501-6, now withdrawn, were the first 15/25KV engines for Basel, followed by the SNCF series mentioned which SBB numbered Nos.16511-8. Finally, eight of the 10 Ee3/3 IV, 4-voltage engines numbered 934-551 to 560, remain in Chiasso and Geneva.

The message is clear: get out and find them while you can. Disappearing fast now, they are electrical and railway history, and so indelibly part of our Swiss rail adventure.

1. 16451 at Bern, 2005 (1956 series).
2. Ee3/3 IV in Geneva.
3. 16319 at Bellinzona, (1st series, 1926-built now all withdrawn).
4. 16340 in Neuchâtel 1996. This was the last 'single platform' engine, (2nd series withdrawn 2008).
5. 16505 Ee3/3 II in Basel (2-voltage engine, 1965 series, all withdrawn).

