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Work in progress in the main hall of the MOB's Chernex Works - Ge 4/4 8001 "Gstaad", steeple-cab shunter and 7000-series GTW railcar set. ALL PHOTOS: Le Vaudois taken on 24th July 2009

During a visit to Montreux early last summer I was fortunate to be taken round Chernex Works by M. Jean-Marc Forclaz, the MOB's Technical Manager – and the mastermind behind the development of the "change-gauge" bogies designed to allow through trains on both metre and standard gauge lines (see June 2009 *Swiss Express*). The works have, over the years, carried out a variety of projects including major rebuilding of rolling stock. Daily maintenance of the trains is handled at Montreux and Zweisimmen Dépôts but for anything more complicated the vehicle is taken to Chernex. Recently they have also modernised the old 5000-series automotrice sets into the streamlined three car units, covered in pictures of bears, which operate local services to Lenk and over the northern part of the main line. This work involved fitting out the body shells of the low floor driving trailers (including all the electrics) and adapting the old 5000 power car (coupled

in the centre) to match.

At the time of my visit the works were strangely quiet. A dozen members of staff were working at Lausanne on a routine maintenance contract the MOB has with TSOL, regarding the m1 Metro from Renans to Flon which serves Lausanne University. Other members of staff were on holiday, but this did not mean that the projects were at a standstill.

In the main works I was shown two new body shells the railway has constructed from scratch to provide a further two-car train for the 800mm gauge rack line to Rochers-de-Naye. Four Bhe 4/8 units were delivered by SLM in the 1983/1991 period but for operational convenience the MVR-mtgn wanted a fifth set. Manufacturers, who now set up production lines, were not really interested in building a one-off train to an obsolete (but very successful) design and quoted multi-million franc price tags. So M. Forclaz's team reckoned they had the skills

and facilities to build the two cars themselves for a figure under CHF3m. To prevent the need for a full new safety case being presented, the changes from the original build are minimal – just that the forward doors have been made wider so they will easily accommodate a passenger in a wheelchair. Certainly the workmanship on the body shells had been carried out to a very high standard.

In another part of the works the two cars from the Vevey-Chardonne-Mont Pèlerin funicular were having a major refurbishment while the line itself was closed for maintenance. As reported in the last issue of *Swiss Express*, the bodies were completed to schedule and with the track refurbishment complete, services resumed on the funicular, as planned, on 25th September. No over-running engineering work here!

Bodies of funicular cars are not so easy to transport as normal rail-borne vehicles and it was interesting to see that the works had mounted them temporarily on “rollbocke”. The MOB has twenty five of these bogies but they are, sadly, seldom needed now for transporting standard gauge wagons over the metre gauge tracks, so M. Forclaz sees them as de-luxe bogies for use in the works.

A bonus of an official visit to Chernex Works is the opportunity it offers to explore the vehicles in the yard and I was not disappointed. They included the two small shunters, which I had seen being reconstructed last year. M. Forclaz explained that they had a very low speed and so would be restricted to use within station limits. Apparently the Swiss equivalent of the H&SE have suggested that using electric vehicles for shunting in stations can be dangerous – and are encouraging railways to use diesels instead. One wonders about the green credentials of this policy.

I was able to photograph several wagons, including some of my favourite publicity vans, but the most interesting part of the “outside” visit was the chance to climb into

the driver’s cab of a Golden Pass panoramic coach which had been brought into the works for maintenance. I now have even more admiration for the MOB’s drivers working in such claustrophobic conditions – though I was assured that they enjoy a very efficient air-conditioning system when the trains are in use. However, the cabs are definitely not designed for the more portly drivers, but they probably lose a lot of weight due to the high temperature! I was reminded of the occasion when Winnie-the-Pooh became stuck in Rabbit’s hole.

My sincere thanks to Jean-Marc Forclaz for showing me around the works, as well as for demonstrating the models of the change-gauge bogies, and to Doriane Kohli of the company’s marketing department for arranging my MOB visits.



TOP: New MTGN railcar under construction at Chernex Works.

BOTTOM: Refurbished station/yard shunter Tm 5 outside Chernex Works.