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BIFOUDRE TO BLONAY

Beat Feller recounts the traveller's tale of a double-barrelled wagon

One of the operational historic vehicles of the metre-gauge Blonay – Chamby (BC) Museum Railway is the former Genève Tramway (CGTE) freight motorcar No.151. During its working life the best-remembered duty of No.151 had been to haul a standard gauge double-barrelled wine wagon (a Bifoudre) on a metre gauge transporter bogies through the city streets making deliveries to wine merchants. Summer 2010 marked the centenary of No.151 and for this occasion the B-C sought to recreate this operation. A suitable wagon (P520267) had already been restored to running condition by CFF Historic and the 10264 Society - but how to get this unique standard-gauge wagon to the metre-gauge B-C?


The GoldenPass - Montreux-Oberland Bernois railway (MOB) agreed to help. It now only uses transporter bogies (Rollschemel) at the eastern end of its route so its Zweisimmen Dépôt arranged for two of these (plus drawbar) to be loaded onto a flat wagon and sent to Chamby where this was later shunted down to the nearby B-C museum at Chaulin for volunteers to attach towing-hooks at both ends of No.151. Now only the wine wagon was missing.

During the afternoon of Tuesday 15th June another MOB driver and I took special-liveried GoldenPass GDe No.6003 from Montreux to Chaulin and hauled the flat wagon via Blonay to Vevey where the Bifoudre was waiting for us on the unique mixed-gauge turntable. Having unloaded the transporter bogies using the electric crane we hand-pushed the Bifoudre onto a length of 4-rail mixed gauge track then lifted it, one axle at a time, onto the transporter bogies. Finally the special wagon was locked to the bogies and everything was interconnected with carefully arranged air brake piping. As this was believed to be the first-ever mixed gauge move over the CEV/MVR and B-C route it was programmed to take place after the last scheduled train of the day.

Returning to Vevey after dinner we set-off around 23.00, travelling at between 5 and 20kph whilst a very careful watch was kept by colleagues aboard the train that our oversize load

stayed clear of all close structures, the overhead, and the tunnel below Clies, as we passed. Due to our slow speed it was considered safest to transfer the many level crossings from automatic to remote control, hence avoiding prolonged road closures. Approaching each crossing we radioed the Blonay controller to lower the barriers whilst the automatic train-stop system on our loco was put out of use as we would be ignoring red signals. No problems, until as we ran into Blonay a nasty scratching sound was heard as the low body of the leading transporter bogie ploughed through some over-height tarmac paving laid between the rails.

Setting aside the derail, we moved on to the B-C line and continued up to Chaulin. At about 01.30 we shunted the wine barrel wagon back into the Museum Yard, coupled it with the drawbar to CGTE 151, then we departed to Chamby. As GoldenPass drivers are trained in operating the local control panels, we let ourselves out onto the main line and ran gently down to Montreux where we caught-up with some sleep before boarding the first train home to Zweisimmen.

Three weeks later, after the parades and ceremonies on the B-C for centenarian No.151, the Bifoudre was returned to the CFF standard-gauge tracks via the turntable at Vevey with the reverse move starting from Blonay at 03.50, this time using MOB GDe No.6001. Those of us involved had found it all a memorable experience. 

Editor's Note. Swiss SRS Member Beat Feller is a driver on the MOB. He thanks Alan Snowden for his help in preparing this article.

Double-barrel wagon and CGTE No 151 on the Blonay Chamby Museum Railway.

BOTTOM PHOTO: Daniel Monti
BOTH PHOTOS: from the Beat Feller Collection

