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NESPRESSO EXPRESS

Don Gatehouse looks at the Vaud Coffee Train



SBB Cargo branded Re4/4" (Class 420) pairing 420 160 & 420 268 add a splash of colour to the front of the Avenches-Chavornay van train seen near Ependes in March 2009.

All photos: Don Gatehouse

We start with a question: "What word links the film star George Clooney with SBB Cargo, the freight division of Swiss Federal Railways?" The answer is Nespresso, the brand name of the Vevey based Nestlé Group's premier coffee capsules, the sales of which have enjoyed massive growth globally during the last decade or so. The Nespresso story began in 1976, when Nestlé invented, patented and introduced their innovative system, albeit with little initial success. By the 1990's, sales were growing and by 2001 the Nespresso Production Centre at Orbe, near Chavornay in Canton Vaud was operational, providing a production capacity of three billion capsules annually. Being rail connected, a sizeable proportion of both green coffee

beans imported via Antwerp and finished products for export, were handled via SBB freight services from and to Lausanne Triage Yard and beyond. Through the next decade the concept of the capsule-plus-machine coffee service became one of the fastest growing segments of the global coffee market, and demand for the Nespresso product was achieving up to 30% annual growth. By 2009 Nestlé had inaugurated its second Nespresso Production and Distribution Centre at Avenches; also in Canton Vaud some 50 kms to the east of the Orbe site, thus more than doubling their overall production capacity. The Avenches site was also rail connected and as well as incoming and outgoing rail freight via Payerne and Lausanne Triage, Nespresso identified a need for a dedicated direct link between the two production sites. So, following an appropriate tender process a contract was awarded to SBB Cargo for the provision of a daily van train and the 'Nespresso Express' commenced operations.

The diesel locomotive that on weekdays has earlier worked the morning freight service from Payerne, is used to draw the set of 'Transwaggon' branded vans out from the Nespresso siding to the north of Avenches station. The vans are then collected by the SBB Cargo electric motive power that has arrived from Payerne. Train 68266 is

The Orbe - Chavornay Travys' Em 3/3 shunter positions a brace of 'Transwaggon' branded vans ready for the afternoon Nespresso departure from Chavornay on 6th September 2011.



timed to depart at 09:16 and initially running north to Kerzers, the Chavornay bound train will continue westbound via Neuchâtel and then south via Yverdon-les-Bains.

Upon arrival at Chavornay (10:48) the SBB Cargo traction is uncoupled and stabled and the vans are then collected and shunted by a Travys diesel locomotive that will propel the vans onto the Orbe branch to be positioned for servicing. The returning vans are marshalled next to the station building at Chavornay and as soon as the brace of northbound ICN services has cleared, the return working Train 68267 will set off for Avenches (at 13:02). Upon arrival in the loop opposite Avenches station (14:41), the final change of motive power is completed to enable the vans to be propelled north to the Nespresso reception siding. The timings illustrated were taken from the SBB Graphic Charts published in December 2012. The collection and delivery of the vans at each end of the process is handled as part of the shunting duties of the respective operators and the main line power makes use of the locomotive that has earlier worked the regional freight service to Payerne and will later take the evening regional freight back to Lausanne Triage Yard.

Nespresso have reported continued sales growth that reached CHF3 billion in 2011, growing by 20% during that fiscal year. With their state of the art facility at Avenches finally developed to the maximum intended size by November 2012, Nespresso announced a further CHF300m project whereby a third production centre will be built in Romont, in the neighbouring canton of Fribourg. This third site should be operational by 2015 so just maybe there will be scope for another 'Nespresso Express' service in due course? "George, do you fancy another coffee? Nespresso, naturally." 



TOP: On a dull, wet Sunday in October 2012, SBB Cargo Re4/4" 11258 heads north through Neuchâtel with the Chavornay to Avenches Nespresso vans.

BELOW: SBB Cargo shunting locomotive 18818 propels the rake of vans towards the Nespresso Production & Distribution Centre at Avenches in October 2010.

Swiss Tip Good ideas and information about Switzerland from travellers.

Visiting the Verkehrshaus, the Transport Museum in Luzern? If you arrive at the main station you can get there in three different ways. Firstly, is by the frequent trolleybuses on Lines 6 and 8 from over on the left outside the main entrance. Secondly you can continue by train. This is special, for not only is there a fairly new station 'Luzern-Verkehrshaus' just a 6 min. trip away, but it is on the original Gotthardbahn main line from Luzern to Küssnacht and Immensee. The main line trains now mostly use the old Nordost-Bahn line, slightly further north via Rotkreuz, but you can take a Voralpen-Express, going to St Gallen, with SOB coaches and usually headed by a Cl.446 or Cl.456. These are hourly at xx.40, with a local at xx.06. Finally in high summer (check - the timetables are complex), there is a ship leaving at xx.12, and normally at 09.12 and 11.12 it is a stately paddle steamer. The first stop is 'Verkehrshaus-Lido'. The SwissPass is valid on all options. After a day at the museum, it's nice to return on the ship - sailing times are in the Museum lobby. 