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THE 'CLASSIC' EXPERIENCE

Paul Hagger



"Crocodile" 13302 hauls the Swiss Classic Train on the Arbon Classics weekend in May 2012.
Photo: Baumann Media

Many people are aware of the arrival on to the Swiss Railways scene of the 'Swiss Classic Train' owned by British industrialist Andrew Cook. The carriages, originally intended to run with his American-built, ex-SNCF, 'Mikado' 141R568 steam loco, are now increasingly being seen across the length and breadth of the Swiss railway network – and beyond - behind a variety of electric traction. The full story of how this unique project came to fruition is best read in Andrew Cook's book 'Coal, Steam and Comfort' published by Platform 5. The carriages when bought were in varying states of decrepitude. Six "Type B" carriages were found in a carriage graveyard in Tübingen, Southern Germany, the rest came from within Switzerland including one 'Gepäckwagen', targeted to be the candidate for conversion to the Kitchen Car. The process of gutting the carriages and restoring them was undertaken at the Slovakian works of České Velenice. The complete train comprises a Pullman carriage, three first class carriages, a restaurant car (Speisewagen), a fully equipped

kitchen car (with a diesel generator for 'hotel power'), a bar car, two second class carriages and a first/baggage composite. All coaches are in a dark green livery, except for the Speisewagen that is finished in a very striking red. This ensemble was finally launched to the industry and press in June 2009 at events in Basel and Zürich.

Since then it has enjoyed a spectacular first run in December 2009 from Zürich to Brig behind 141R568, changing to the BLS's veteran Ae 6/8 No.205 for the climb over the all-electric Lötschberg, and return the following day. It has been into Italy behind heritage Italian electric traction, including around Lago Maggiore, and also to Titano around Lago Como. It has been into Germany to Augsburg behind German steam loco No.41018, returning behind a V100 diesel, as well as two appearances at the biennial Arbon Classics event by the Bodensee. Its 2012 appearance here included haulage behind Crocodile No.13302. In the autumn of 2012 'Mikado' 141R568 hauled, what will probably prove to be, the last unassisted climb over the Gotthard, taking three of the Swiss Classic Train carriages as well as its support vehicle, an ex-SNCF La Poste coach. The weather was excellent and the train made an unforgettable sight as it powered up from Erstfeld to the tunnel entrance. Here it was recombined with the rest of the formation to enable an electric locomotive to push the train through the tunnel. At the recent 'Grosses BLS-Eisenbahnfest', held at the end of June to celebrate 100 years of that company, people coming on-board the shuttle from Frutigen to Kandersteg were unanimous in their approval of the train, which is inspired by the golden age of travel before ICNs, Flirts, and double-deck trains became the norm. ■

TEE Classics 10034 hauls two Swiss Classic Train coaches at Laufelfingen on the "Old Hauenstein" line. Photo: Daniel Wägeli
141R568 leads the PTT support coach and three Swiss Classic Train carriages on the ascent of the Gotthard.

Photo: Keith Satterly

