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Travelling with You - 134 Years Young!

Boyd Misstear

Following publication of "A Chance Encounter" in SE Issue 116, which featured photographs of two L4CT2D Saurer PostAutos owned and lovingly cared for by Domenico Barenco and his colleagues of Barenco & Andreoli SA, Faido, Ticino, I have been able to do some follow-up research on the company. Domenico Barenco kindly provided some further background information on their company, which has a history that spans an impressive 134 years. Today the main activity of Barenco & Andreoli focuses on providing public transport services on behalf of PostAuto Ticino, using a modern fleet of various vehicles on the following lines: Faido - Osco - Predelp; Faido - Tengia - Freggio - Predelp; Lavorgo - Chironico; Lavorgo - Sober; Dalpe - Rhodes-Fiesso - Airolo; and Airolo - Bellinzona.

In addition, Barenco & Andreoli undertake a number of public transportation services including school bus runs, group and society outings and in recent years a particularly challenging route early each morning and late each night, to transport AlpTransit Gotthard railway tunnel construction workers on the stretch Pollegio-Faido-Sedrun, that has involved taking workers from the yard at Faido-Polengo to the front inside gallery, located some 350 metres deep in the bowels of the mountain. Those SRS members who were fortunate enough to take part in our 2011 Study Tour and travel by mini coach into the BLS Lötschberg Base Tunnel, will have a good understanding of what is involved when driving into a finished tunnel, let alone one under construction! As with small companies with rich family history, they have a number of diverse activities, one being responsible for spreading salt on certain routes. So how did Barenco & Andreoli come into existence? One must go back to the opening of the original Gotthard alpine railway crossing.

The Gotthard railway tunnel was built between 1871 and 1881 by the Swiss engineer Louis Favre, who along with over 200 workers that were killed during construction, failed to see its completion, having suffered a fatal heart attack inside the tunnel in 1879. The rail service connecting Faido, district capital of Leventina in the Italian-speaking Canton Ticino, was inaugurated on the 22nd May 1882. Local hotels offered travellers from Milan (now only four hours distant by express train), quality accommodation and chance to rest. An enterprising coachman named Peter Barenghi offered a connection for both passengers and goods from Faido Station to the Hotels. And in 1900 this coach service passed to his son Athanasius. At the request of the Municipality of

Faido this service was formalized on 1st October 1908 and so began a regular service between the station and village. The service was provided by a closed carriage with 7 seats and the annual payment amounted to some CHF 3,204. By 1911 mail was added and came with a number of rules "Istruzione per i mastri di posta". These included each postilion could not undertake more than five hours of continuous service; was entitled to at least 8 hours of uninterrupted rest within any 24 hour period, and provided with at least 17 days holiday per year. For passengers' comfort against the cold a sufficient number of foot warmers had to be provided, along with free fresh straw for the interior of cars! And, as an ancillary activity when horses were not needed for formal duties, Athanasius used them in winter to transport ice to the local hotels. This came from a nearby waterfall where it was formed by catching the freezing spray in purpose made wooden holders to form ice blocks.

Athanasius died in 1915 and his wife Luigina Barenco took over running the company until 1929, when the Brothers Barenco Company (they were Louis, Henry, Joseph and Mark) was founded. In 1925, during the reign of Luigina, Faido Municipality formally requested replacing horse traction with motorized transport, for which Luigina requested a compensation of CHF6,000. The vehicle purchased was a 1924 Diatto, able to carry seven people and Louis, being already in possession of a cantonal license, became the driver. Regular service commenced after the winter, on March 1st 1926 between Faido Borgo and Faido Station, an "epoch-making" event at the time. Other automotive services quickly followed. In 1938 the first Saurer PostAuto appears on the scene at Barenco's. Being able to own one was a source of pride for every company. It was a vehicle with 16 seats and was bought for CHF 38,000, a considerable sum at that time! Early in the twentieth century, in parallel with the above activity by the family Barenco, the family Andreoli began to provide transport of goods and people from Lavorgo to the surrounding mountain villages. Fast-forward to 2007 and a merger takes place between the two companies resulting in the creation of Barenco & Andreoli SA. The company now has at its disposal a modern garage, with a fully equipped workshop where they can perform any type of repair, a fleet of 20 vehicles, and some twenty-five employees. Any SRS member, with a knowledge of Italian, interested in gaining more information about the history and operations of this progressive company are welcome to email them at: barenco.bus@bluewin.ch 

Swiss Tips: Good ideas and information about Switzerland from travellers.

If you want a good, but cheap coffee, or a good value meal or snack wherever you are in Switzerland, don't neglect the restaurants in the Co-op and Manor stores. Many have long opening hours (especially in Zürich) and the Manor in Lugano is also open on Sundays from 1000 to 2200. It's not just coffee - there is beer and wine available too!

Editor's note: The restaurant in the Manor store at the north end of Zürich's Bahnhofstrasse must be the best value food outlet on that very expensive street. 