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Realising ambitions in Bière!

Sam Dixon



THIS PAGE: BAM Ge 4/4 No 22 'La Venoge' on passenger service at Bière.

All photos: Sam Dixon

In September 2013, I achieved two long-standing ambitions by visiting Bière in Canton Vaud. The first was to quench my thirst in this appropriately named town! The information board at the station disappointingly makes it clear that the name did not originate from the beverage beloved of "our German-speaking fellow countrymen", and at the solitary hotel, newly reopened after refurbishment, just three commonly-found lagers were available on draught!

The town is located at the end of the 19km long metre-gauge BAM (Bière, Apples & Morges) line, operated by local public transport operator MBC (Transports de la région Morges-Bière-Cossonay). From the intermediate station of Apples, a branch runs 11km to L'Isle-Mont-la-Ville. Unusually for a Swiss metre-gauge operation the line is electrified at 15kV 16.7Hz – the same as the national SBB network. Modern 3-car units in smart apple-green and cream livery form most trains and two sets provide a better than hourly service on the 'main line' for much of the day, connecting at Morges cross-platform to SBB. On Friday and Saturday nights, a "Train Pyjama" departs Morges at 01.16hrs, with connections from

Geneva at 00.37hrs and Lausanne at 00.53. A number of local lines in Switzerland operate such services in a successful effort to encourage young revellers to leave their cars at home.

My second ambition was to ride the unique loco-hauled service that runs at 06.54 on weekdays from Bière to Morges. This is formed of 3-coaches hauled by one of the line's two Ge4/4 locomotives - built by SLM IN 1994 and similar to the Rhätische Bahn Ge4/4III class. There is no return passenger working to this service but the outward run collects commuters at every station and halt,



during its 30 minute journey to Morges, where it disgorge its full passenger load onto connecting SBB trains. On the day of my visit, No.22 'La Venoge' was in charge. After arrival at Morges and shunting the empty passenger coaches to the rear of the single metre-gauge platform, the Ge4/4III attached two empty standard-gauge wagons, that had been positioned onto metre-gauge transporter bogies a few minutes earlier by the BAM's standard-gauge TeIII tractor No.147. Each pair of standard-gauge wheels sits on its own little 4-wheel metre-gauge trolley, braked through the standard-gauge wagons brake-pipe, that is connected to the loco and buffered-up to high buffers on the loco, which also has centre-coupling for the metre-gauge coaches. All typically efficient!

After a BAM passenger train had come and gone, the short freight train departed up the line leaving the coaches behind. At this point, I had to leave for my plane home from nearby Genève, but the wagons presumably returned loaded later in the day and No.22 returned the coaches to Bière ready for the next morning. 



TOP: An SBB shunter manoeuvres standard gauge wagons onto metre gauge transporter wheels at Morges.

MIDDLE: Now on their transporter bogies, BAM 22 picks up the standard gauge wagons.

RIGHT: No 22 ready to depart with its load.

BOTTOM RIGHT: A general view of Morges station with its interchange between SBB and BAM.

BELOW: A close-up of the transporter system and coupling.

