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Autor: Tompkins, Doug
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DB diesels in Switzerland

Doug Tompkins recounts the story of the DB diesels that worked for the SBB

Photos: by Alan Kemp from Doug Tompkins collection



Am 4/4 No.18467 (ex 220 077-2) and Am 4/4 No.18461 (ex 220 013-7) at Biel Matt yard on 13/10/1996.

In the mid-1980s the SBB looked for cheap motive power to work on both scheduled passenger and engineers' trains on routes where, because of maintenance work, the overhead catenary was to be switched off. In October 1986 an agreement with the Liechtenstein based company Jelka-Establishment was signed for the supply of seven ex Deutsche Bundesbahn (DB) V200.0 diesel-hydraulic locomotives 220 013, 014, 015, 016, 017, 053 and 077 built in 1968 by MaK in Kiel (220 013 to 017), and Krauss-Maffei in München (220 053 and 077). The locomotives received the new SBB class number Am4/4 and re-numbered 18461 to 18467. It was arranged for them to undergo the extensive modification work required to work on the SBB at the Viechtach (Bavaria) works of the Regentalbahn. This included: improvement work on the bodywork and the load bearing structure of the frame, including a repaint into SBB livery; overhauled bogies; removal of the train heating supply boiler; installation of two pre-heating units and generator for the engine cooling water; exhaust silencers; soundproofing of engine compartments and driving cabs and the preparation for later installation of SBB components; installation of the Swiss train protection system Integra, and the replacement of the horns with SBB whistles. The locos, two 1,100hp Maybach MD650 engines and two Voith LT306R hydraulic transmissions were overhauled at DB Ausbesserungswerk Nürnberg. The soundproofing measures were carried out by the SBB at Biel, under the guidance of a specialist Swiss company, and these reduced external noise levels of 92dB (A) down to 79dB (A).

The work at Viechtach began in 1986 and the first locomotive to move to Switzerland was Am4/4 18462 (ex 220 014) in August 1987. The work at Biel was all completed by the end of November 1987. Test runs proved successful and crew and maintenance personnel training began in February 1988. Two Am4/4 locomotives (18462 and 18463) were used at the head of heavy night trains from February to May 1988 (such as the D220/221 'Simplon Express' from Belgrade to Paris) including hauling the train locomotive, a Class Re6/6, which ran with lowered pantographs. With the delivery of further ex DB 220s from the summer of 1988 they were also deployed at the head of passenger services on the 1,500Vdc line between Genève & La Plaine. All maintenance work on the Am4/4s was carried out at Bern, with allocations of the locomotives being at Biel, Brig and Genève and they were to be seen working engineers' trains and breakdown services in

the whole of western Switzerland. The delivery of new diesel locomotives of Class 841 to SBB enabled the Am4/4s to be removed from service and the first member to be withdrawn from stock (and later scrapped) was 18462 (ex 220 014) on 28 February 1994. The remaining six Am4/4s remained in SBB service until 30 November 1996, and numbers 18465 and 18466 worked their last engineers' trains in October 1996 at Nyon.

The six remaining locomotives all returned to Germany and found homes with various organisations. Nos.18465 (220 017) and 18467 (220 077) went to the Historischer Schienenverkehr GmbH at Seddin near Berlin in 1997 and then moved to Classic Train Tours AG, Gelsenkirchen-Bismarck in 2000. These were to be used on nostalgic passenger trains across Europe, although the work needed on them was not completed until May 2005. The other four (and numerous spares) went to Gesellschaft zur Erhaltung des Schienenverkehrs e.V. (GES) in 1997 and were stationed at the Württembergische Staatseisenbahnen, Eisenbahnmuseum Kornwestheim e.V. Nos.18463 (220 015) and 18464 (220 016) stayed there whilst No.18461 (220 013) moved to Betriebsgesellschaft (EBG), Altenbeken, and No.18466 (220 053) moved to the Eisenbahnen und Verkehrsbetriebe Elbe-Weser, Bremervörde (EVB). This loco had its Maybach engines removed and replaced by two Caterpillar D3508 8-cylinder 800kW engines and the transmission replaced by equipment from Gmeinder. The loco was then deployed on container trains between Hamburg and Bremervörde, later renumbered V417.01, and remained in service with EVB until the delivery of new Vossloh/MaK diesel locomotives. Sold to the Brohtalbahn in 2006 it is now numbered D9, sports a green and grey livery, and works freight/engineers' trains.

This episode was not the first time that an ex-DB V200 had been used in Switzerland. In the autumn of 1984 the BLS hired in Class 221 No.221 149, a 2,700hp variant, that retained its DB livery and was used to haul trains over the Lötschberg, where maintenance work necessitated the switching off of the overhead catenary. BLS had an option to hire in up to 15 Class 221s but did not take it up.

References include: Eisenbahn Journal Sonder-Ausgabe 1/2005 'V200'; Bahn Extra 6/2008 'V200 der DB'; and 'Die Baureihe V200 Die erste Großdiesellokomotive der Deutschen Bundesbahn'. 