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More on the 'Odd Man Out'



John Jesson writes –

The 'Odd Man Out' article by Ron Smith in the September 'Swiss Express' about BLS De4/5 No.796 was very interesting. Like Ron, I cannot think of any other examples of asymmetrical wheel arrangements, although I have a nagging feeling that there was another somewhere in the world. In its later life No.796 had several differences from the five other examples of this design. When the new body was built for No.796, it had bigger cab windows, also windows in the angled cab corners. The others retained their smaller windows and solid cab corners. Additionally, No.796 had one less window in the body side (above the 2-axle bogie on one side), whereas the others, when rebuilt, retained this window. I think that No.796 was the only one of the class to be fitted with roof-mounted braking resistors and secondary suspension. Originally, each of the class had two pantographs, each with a single contact strip. Later, quite possibly during the rebuilding in the 1940's, they were replaced with a single pantograph with double contact strips. However, No.796 retained its second pantograph when rebuilt. I photographed it in 1969 with two pantographs, while a photograph in the

Stoltz book on BLS rolling stock taken in 1978 shows it with only one. Quite clearly, the vehicle now at Biasca is No.796 (it has the larger cab windows and the windows in the cab angles, and it has the secondary suspension), but it has regained its second pantograph and, curiously, they seem to have only a single contact strip. It also seems to have lost the roof-mounted braking resistors. I wonder when these alterations were done. I have a couple of pictures of the class. One, taken in 1969, shows No.796 leaving Spiez with a train to Zweisimmen, the other is of No.794 working a train from Interlaken towards Spiez just after departing from Därligen in June 1974. Incidentally, the grounds through which the railway runs are owned by the Hotel du Lac and crossing between the hotel and the lakeside required a great deal of care, especially as the line towards Spiez was bordered by hedges and electric trains are both quick and quiet.

And from Ron Smith –

I am becoming convinced that British Rail's twenty 'Metrovic' Co-Bos, and the BLS De4/5s, are the only machines with odd axle numbers in their bogies. The BR locos were a failure and were all withdrawn within 10-years of

their 1958 debut, but at least the BLS examples lasted over 40-years. I was told that odd-numbered axle bogies are a common thing in Japan but although I have traced Japanese locos with, for example, Bo-2-Bo arrangements, where the centre axles are unpowered, that is not the same thing as having a spare carrying axle in the middle of a bogie, or totally different bogies at either end of the machine. I await with interest any member coming up with more information on such oddities. 

