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Back from Berlin

Robin Sherwood



The wagons on their way home. Photo: Urs Berger

Some 17km east of Basel SBB on the Bötzingen line is Rheinfelden. The town's most visible feature from the train is the huge Feldschlösschen Brewery built in the mock-baronial style. Time was that a large private fleet of tank wagons and box vans in the company livery carried beer out into the whole of Switzerland. There were also several types of small container used for distributing the company's products along with rubber-tired trailers that were carried on flat cars to unloading points where they took to the streets. A small exchange yard on the south side of the main line still serves the Feldschlösschen premises with a branch running alongside a road from the station up to the brewery that retained its own extensive network of tracks. Two steam shunting engines, for many years an ex-SBB E3/3 No.8481 (SLM, 1907) and industrial E2/2 (New – Krauss, Munich, 1907), shunted and worked transfer freights up and down the branch. Today the steam locomotives have been replaced by a diesel shunter that still handles a volume of rail freight - but there are no more Feldschlösschen wagons.

Urs Berger, of the railway museum in Füll near Laufenburg, has long studied Swiss brewery rolling stock and over the years has rescued some interesting survivals from what was once a considerable and varied fleet. He was however very surprised to be told that a Feldschlösschen box van was standing at Eiken-Erkner station, on Berlin's S-Bahn line S3. A visit in January 2014 confirmed that in fact two such wagons, from a batch built by Meyer in Rheinfelden in 1964, were at the Erkner Plasta chemical works. This establishment was in what was until 1989 East Berlin, and once part of the former DDR, and its main claim to fame was that it was where the bodywork for the (in)famous Trabant – 'Trabi' – cars was once made. The vans had been sold to Erkner Plasta by Genève tank wagon dealer Rexwal in 2000, and delivered by rail from Rheinfelden. Although they were still in use for internal movements around the works, they were no longer authorized to run on DB rails.

Herr Berger secured first refusal on these wagons, which were to be withdrawn in Summer 2014. The chemical

company offered them free to the museum, but without the DB authorisation they had to be transported by road to Switzerland. Raising funds for the project and planning the exercise took some 6 months, but eventually on the 11th February last the two box vans were repatriated to their former home country and delivered back to their builder, Meyer in Rheinfelden. The company no longer builds wagons, but will restore these two. In the end there was one snag occurring on the whole trip. At the Swiss frontier the customs agents held them back, together with their road transport, for a whole day because they could not believe that the two wagons were a free gift to the museum! ☝



The wagons are unloaded from their road transport.

Photo: Urs Berger

The brewery E2/2 working in the 70s. Photo: Robin Sherwood

