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40 years of MOB Panorama cars - and a revolution

Bryan Stone

Ge6/6 No 2001 at Lenk on an early demonstration of the first Panoramic trains. No. 2001 was originally built for the '*Golden Mountain Pullman*', but was used for freight and heavy duties when the GMP was abandoned. *All photos:* Bryan Stone

Georges Oberson, General Manager of the MOB, invited your Swiss News Editor to Gstaad on Friday 20th May to celebrate 40 years of Panoramic cars. It was an unusually impressive event. Various railcars were exhibited at the station; speeches; music; decorations; an Apéro, and a lively programme including 40 dancers from MOB personnel (plus two Alphorn players who are MOB train drivers) kept us enthralled. After the formal opening, there was a 24-hour party in the station yard for staff and locals alike, with on Saturday (the public day) an ex-Swiss Air Force 'dH Hunter' flypast and special train and 'Oldtimer' PostAuto trips.

Our intrepid Swiss reporter with Georges Oberson, the CEO of the MOB.

What was there to celebrate? To understand better, go back to the MOB in 1976. It was 75 years old, and sadly looking the part. It had just produced car As 110, the world's first metre-gauge panoramic luxury car. It was folly, of course. Who would ride such a vehicle? The MOB was poor, with rudimentary resources and stations, primitive track, and with open platform cars and wooden seats. It ran local trains between Montreux, Zweisimmen and Lenk to a sparse and frugal timetable. There were a few newer railcars, the 3000 and 4000 series, but trains still mostly stopped everywhere and carried mail, parcels and milk churns. Trains often hauled freight cars and mixed trains were still in the timetable.

The MOB engineers, with the vision of their young CEO Edgar Styger, overthrew the conventional wisdom of building railcars from the chassis up. The rigidity, strength of body-work, side and roof windows and seating were worked up from new integral construction parameters, though the bogies were second-hand. The first Panoramic coach, As 110 still in service and exhibited in Gstaad, was 16.25 m long. This was daring, given the curves; later Panoramic coaches would be 17.3 m long. They led in technical change. The MOB was a vacuum brake railway. The first Panoramic coaches had both vacuum and air brakes. Soon complete Panoramic rakes would be air-braked throughout, and better equipped for higher speeds, control, and safety on the formidable gradients of the main line, including a long 1 in 14 above Montreux. It was an exercise in creative thinking. It was not enough to simply modernise the old MOB, if new business was to come. A new product was needed for a totally

As 101 at Gstaad, 20.05.2016.

different, prospective market - that of organised tours, and group travel for a discriminating clientele. The gamble worked. The cars were filled, not easy at first, and a family of Panoramic coaches grew up, with twenty-five in service today. The Panoramic trains dominate today's MOB and its timetable.

There had been an earlier luxury train, the '*Golden Mountain Pullman*' in 1929-31, but this was a disastrous failure. It fell victim to the Depression; two coaches rebuilt on underframes of 1913 remain - Nos.A101 and A102. Beautifully fitted out with plush seating, woodwork and brass they today run (with three more 1st and 2nd Class coaches) in the MOB's regular 'Classic Pullman' trains, also in the timetable. Coach A101 was also exhibited at Gstaad; but that is a separate venture.

The '*Goldenpass Express*' title for the Gstaad event had a further purpose. Against the backdrop of the original Panoramic coach, Georges Oberson and BLS CEO Bernard Guillemon unveiled the new name of the MOB-BLS trains to run direct between Montreux and Interlaken, from 2018. These will have a change of gauge on route, with wheel shift on the axles, using a gauge-change installation now being built in Zweisimmen (SE has reported on this). Sixteen new panoramic cars are to be built, and eleven existing cars modified. This will ensure three train sets operating regularly on the line, with a three-hour journey time.

1. No. 3002 at Chamby showing the old MOB. **2.** A 3000 Class at Gstaad some years previosly, with Panoramic cars. The headboard for the '*Alpenpanoramic Express*', a very early public use of Panoramics. **3.** '*Golden Pass Classic*' (Pullman replicas) leaving Gstaad. **4.** The band provides some entertainment. **5.** Unveiling the new coaches. **6.** MOB Train drivers display their other talents.