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New Life for an Old Lady


Mario Gavazzi

NOB E3/3 No.456 at Hochdorf.

Photos: Mario Gavazzi on 6th August 2016.

On Saturday 6th August a special train moved from Oensingen to Olten, then on to Emmenbrücke on the edge of Luzern, before reversing to travel up the SBB's Seetalbahn to Hochdorf. The unusual working, headed by Ae 1042 041-0, an ex-ÖBB (Österreichische Bundesbahnen) engine now operated by Widmer Rail Services, was to deliver a second steam locomotive to the preservation association Verein Historische Seethalbahn (VHS) www.historische-seethalbahn.ch for future use on their special trains. The "new" loco was a very old lady, Nordostbahn (NOB) E3/3 No.456, that was built in 1894 by the Schweiz Lokomotiv und Maschinenfabrik (SLM) at Winterthur as their Works Number 900. No.456 was one of nine similar engines ordered by the NOB to work local services and which were taken into the SBB fleet, where she became No.8554, on the nationalisation of the NOB in 1902. This engine worked in this role until the 1930s when, with the spread of electrification, it was sold by SBB to a private network at Sébeillon, near Lausanne. It moved again in 1949 to the Von Moos Eisenwerk at Emmenbrücke where as their No.5 it was engaged for some 24 years in moving freight wagons between the SBB station and sidings, to the industrial network that served the steelworks site. An article on the current rail operations of this important industrial location appeared in the September 2016 edition of *Swiss Express*. As part of the loco's work here it also ventured onto the tracks of Luzern Tramway's Line 2 until trolleybuses replaced this route in 1959. In 1973 time was up for No.5 and she was replaced by a diesel that took her number. This then appeared to be the end of her working life, as having been bought by a private individual she was moved to Dietikon, near Zürich, to become a static 'historic monument'. Then in 2008 the VHS acquired the old lady and engaged Herr Pascal Troller as project and fundraising manager with a brief of undertaking a full restoration of the locomotive, with the work being entrusted to the "Dampfgruppe Oensingen-Balsthal-Bahn" team. Eight years later the project was completed and in June 2016 this beautiful little engine, a first class document and monument of railway and industrial history, was ready for the move to its new home at the old depot, now known as 'Remise', at Hochdorf. This is

an appropriate location for its new lease of life, as the loco's former base at Emmenbrücke was for many years the junction where the Seetalbahn joined the main SBB network.

Each year the VHS organises the Remisenfest (Depot Festival) at their base in Hochdorf and the 2016 event on the 3rd/4th September highlighted the inauguration back into service of No.456. The second highlight at Hochdorf was the arrival of the old 'Seethal Krokodil' De 4/4 No.15301. One of three units built in 1925 to a special loading gauge to enable them to work on the Seethalbahn that was (and partly still is) a roadside tramway with restricted clearances, this engine had also been resident in the Balsthal area where it too underwent restoration. Although still owned by the Oensingen-Balsthal-Bahn (OeBB) this loco has come 'back-to-its-roots' and will be domiciled at Hochdorf. As well as these two historic engines 'coming home' the 'Remisenfest' also played host to privately owned ex-SBB 'Krokodil' No.13302 that had brought a special train in from Rapperswil, and to Dampfbahn Bern's Ed3/4 No.51 that arrived with an historic train from Konolfingen. The VHS, under the chairmanship of Marcel Anderhub, is to be congratulated for being an important element in the Swiss railway preservation scene and for organising such a great event at Hochdorf, its base on the SBB's increasingly busy regional railway between Luzern and Lenzburg. This line has been featured in a *Swiss Express*, and once ran further north from Lenzburg to Wildegg. 

Ex-NOB No.456 and ex-SBB 'Seethal-Krokodil' De4/4 No.15301 near the VHS depot.

