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"Höfner Narrenfahrt".

Mario Gavazzi reports on a very special carnival train




Meeting of the Narrenfahrt at Arth-Goldau with SOB-Voralpen-Express, operated by 'special guest' NPZ-RBDe 207 from Oensingen-Balsthal-Bahn.
All photos: Mario Gavazzi

Do you know what carnival is? Of course you have heard of it. Very well known is the carnival in Venezia, or in Germany those at Mainz, Köln, München, etc., or the Rio de Janeiro one. Many regions in Switzerland also know this tradition. In the catholic Cantons the carnival season generally begins in January and, depending on the calendar, ends in February on the Dienstag (Tuesday) before "Aschermittwoch" - Shrove Tuesday and Ash Wednesday in Britain. It is then that carnival begins in several protestant Cantons like Basel Stadt or Schaffhausen. Carnival is a happening normally confined to individual towns and villages, but there is one important exception for people who love trains. The carnival committee of Wollerau, located on the Zürichsee in the Höfe district of Canton Schwyz between Samstagern and Pfäffikon, organises the start of the celebrations with a special train – the "Höfner Narrenfahrt" - Höfner Fools Ride! This is organised by SOB and the carnival committee, and from year to year its composition changes with usually a mix of SBB and SOB coaches. This year the composition was very colourful! Some ex-SBB-Bpm51 coaches (refitted as Bm), one NPZ-A, and two ex-SNCF luggage coaches, acquired years ago by the SBB to carry cycles. These were used as "Bar Coaches", whilst the train was hauled by Re 456 111-4 of M-Rail AG.

So what is the "Höfner Narrenfahrt"? It is a 41-year-old Ready for the 41st edition of "Höfner Narrenfahrt" at Wollerau.

'tradition' where a special chartered train sets off from Wollerau on a route, and perhaps to a destination, unknown to the participants the majority of whom are dressed up in suitably crazy, silly, mad, weird costumes that befit the carnival season. This year's Fools Ride was on the 6th January and was special as it also commemorated 100 years of the Wollerau Carnival Committee. The fully-booked composition 'cruised' non-stop to Rapperswil-Uster- Zürich-Dietikon-Othmarsingen-Wohlen-Rotkreuz-Arth/Goldau and back to Wollerau with some 600 people on board. These were very happy guests! Maybe they drink lots of cups of tea? Perhaps not! When the train returned to Wollerau the participants continued with the carnival inauguration/celebration in the village, with dancing, drinking, and merry-making the whole evening and night until late Sunday morning. The carnival inauguration then continued in the village during the next night.

The old tradition of Carnival and the newer "Höfner Narrenfahrt" is like the well known film, shown on all Swiss TV channels on the evening of Sylvester (New Year's Eve), called "Dinner for One". In it the butler James regularly asks the grand old lady: "The same procedure as last year?" and the answer is "The same procedure as every year James"! So we will welcome the "Höfner Narrenfahrt" in early 2019 when everyone can enjoy happy and lucky carnival days. 

A very colourful train at Pfäffikon.

