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Are you sitting comfortably?

Jason Sargerson



1. SBB, Mark IV Stock, 2nd Class.

Photos: Jason Sargerson taken in July and August 2017

I am quite interested in the seats we sit in on the trains we use in Switzerland. This is written from an ordinary passengers' point of view who is of average build and height. If you are a large or tall person you may disagree with my opinions. I usually travel 2nd Class although sometimes I treat myself to a 1st Class pass, so there is a mix of seats

discussed here. To me, it is not just the seat that is on offer but the environment with the seat, including the windows and tables. One key feature in Switzerland is that windows normally match seat spacing, but unfortunately in some of the newer stock this is not always the case. I find small tables are a distinct advantage over those that extend between the seats, as they allow easy access for all four passengers in a seat bay.

The first seat, ① is in the SBB Mark IV 2nd Class coach. I am quite comfortable in this type of seat for a long journey such as from Genève to Brig (2.5 hours). It has good leg support; a reasonable angle for the back; headrests that you can actually use; a small table and a window matching the seat. I often have to clean the window of finger marks and smudges though. One disadvantage is that the armrests are fixed. There is also plenty of room for heavy luggage under or between the seats. Seat ② is the SBB Class 560 2nd Class coach. These trains run in the Rhône Valley from St Gingolph to Brig and are intended for shorter



2. SBB, Class 560 Domino, 2nd Class.

journeys. The seats are very similar to the Mark IV coach. The windows are smaller than the Mark IV, but overall this is a solid comfortable seat.

Seat ③ is in the SBB Class 523 2nd Class coach. These are the usual FLIRT units used for shorter journeys across Switzerland. The seats are not as substantial as the older seats and the back support is less forgiving, so more uncomfortable on a longer journey. The armrests are fixed and slope downward for some reason. The windows are large and there is room for luggage under the seat. Seat ④ is a SBB Class 511 1st Class coach in a double-deck train used for longer journeys. The seats are in 2+2 arrangement – the same as 2nd Class – so I am not sure what the advantage of paying for 1st Class travel is in these trains. Maybe this is a way forward, keeping the same number of seats and dispensing with 1st Class and calling it ‘Quiet Class’ instead! The seats are comfortable, but slightly smaller than their equivalent on a single-deck train. There is room for luggage; the windows are smaller; the armrests are movable and you have to be careful standing up in the window seat, to not bang your head.

Seat ⑤ is a SOB Class 526 1st Class coach. This is a FLIRT unit, similar to Class 523, used for shorter journeys on the SOB network. Here again the seats are in a 2+2 formation. For some reason the seat base is short, being uncomfortable for me, so definitely not comfortable for a tall person. On these FLIRTS the armrests are movable and there are the standard large windows plus room for luggage. Seat ⑥ is in an MGB 1st Class coach. This is a substantial, comfortable, seat. There are opening windows, but less room for luggage. One disadvantage was that the 1st Class area was only part of the coach and not separated properly from the noise in the 2nd Class section. It was also confusing to



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3. SBB, Class 523, 2nd Class.

4. SBB, Class 511, 1st Class.

5. SOB, Class 526, 1st Class



passengers, as several passengers assumed it was second class, however the ever-efficient Swiss on-train staff would soon disabuse them of this thought. The armrests are very solid; you wouldn't want to bang your knees on these.

Seat ⑦ is in an RhB 1st Class coach. This is also a substantial and comfortable seat similar to those used on the MGB, also these coaches are all 1st Class so there is no passenger confusion. Again the armrests are solid and there is some room for luggage. There are only small tables between the seats, so allowing access to the window. Seat ⑧ is in a new RhB ADZ 1st Class coach. These seats are part leather, part cloth so should be more hard-wearing than the 1st Class cloth seats used in the RhB's older rolling stock, however there is less comfort for the back in this type of seat. There is room for luggage and the armrests are movable. Windows do not open unfortunately, but where they do – for example in the similar Allegra units – the larger tables get in the way.

My short and subjective survey of Swiss train seating may not prove anything, but it does show that across the network passenger comfort is generally good whatever class you chose to pay for. I hope to continue my survey in the coming year. ■

6. MGB, 1st Class Coach

7. RhB, 1st Class Coach

8. RhB, ADZ Gliederzug, 1st Class