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An American in Switzerland

Mario Gavazzi reports on the 70th Anniversary of a unique vehicle.

A Twin Coach Model 44-S-DT in just-delivered condition at Luzern Bahnhof bus terminal in 1948. Mario Gavazzi collection



Twin Coach Model 38-S-DT No.76 in April 2012 at Luzern's Lido bus terminal where it was being used in a video.

Photo: Mario Gavazzi

In 1948 Luzern's public transport operator, Verkehrsbetriebe der Stadt Luzern (VBL), was in urgent need of new vehicles to replace the elderly buses that had seen them through Switzerland's National Emergency (WW2). Normally they would have ordered vehicles from Swiss manufacturers but at the time there was a three-year delay on deliveries. VBL decided to look to an alternative supply source and ordered five vehicles from the Twin Coach Company of Kent, Ohio, USA. These were Twin Coach Type 44-S-DT two-axle buses of (to European eyes) a modern monologue design that were delivered in just three-months from the company's Buffalo, NY, factory. The company, who used the Twin Coach name, as some of their larger vehicles incorporated two engines, closed in 1955. Luzern's small fleet was used on services to Horw, Meggen, Ebikon-Perlen and around the city.

When delivered these vehicles attracted a lot of interest in Europe with transport organisations and others visiting Luzern to study, photograph, and ride on them. Another Swiss organisation, Titan AG of Zürich, bought two similar but shorter, Type 38-S-DT models the same year. These were to be demonstrator vehicles as Titan attempted to interest other European operators in Twin Coach's products. This venture



Photo from Stichting Veteran Autobussen and shows VBL No.73 in Maarse and Kroon livery.

was not very successful and apart from the Swiss examples only eleven other Twin Coach vehicles were sold in Europe - ten of these being operated by the Dutch company Maarse and Kroon of Aalsmeer, and one in Portugal. The Dutch buses were all scrapped when the operator went out of business in the early 1970s. On their withdrawal in 1973 four of VBL's original buses were also scrapped, but one (No. 73) was sold to Dutch bus museum 'Stichting Veteran Autobussen' who have preserved it in the colours of Maarse and Kroon. In 1953 Titan AG sold its two buses to the VBL, which allocated them Nos.75 and 76 and kept them in service until 1975. On retirement from service in Luzern No.75 went to Hungary, where it was used as a camping site office before undergoing renovation in Budapest. No.76 stayed in Switzerland and in 1983 was rebuilt with the help of sponsors and became a museum bus used for charter tours in Luzern. Now thanks to the association 'vbl historic' this bus is being renovated at the Weinbergli Depot in Luzern with the intention that it should return to circulation in 2018 to commemorate its 70th birthday.

Editor's note: Titan AG is still selling vehicles. It is now a BMW MINI dealership in Zürich. 🇨🇭