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Ferrovia Monte Generoso

Peter Deacon revisits this recently reopened line

Crowded summit station – Loco No.2 "A rose among thorns"?

All photos: Peter Deacon – June 18th 2017.

I have some "history" with the Ferrovia Monte Generoso (FMG). I first travelled on it in 2002, during the halcyon exchange rate days of CHF2.45 to the pound (!), when spending a one-night stop in Lugano to travel the line to Chiasso, before heading north over the Gotthard to Luzern. I was on the first morning trip which was, of course, very crowded, and accordingly inimical to photography. However I was, perhaps not surprisingly, the only passenger on the first return down and gleefully accepted the driver's offer to sit next to him in the cab, from where I readily made up for the lack of photos on the ascent. My next visit was in the still

halcyon days of 2005, when my wife insisted that we began our Swiss peregrination in Lugano before heading to Luzern, Zürich and St. Gallen for my regular track "gricing". On this occasion I turned up in time for the pier train, and was furious to discover that, unknown to me, the steam loco had gone up that morning, and there was no reason I couldn't have caught it, had I but known. That meant either that it owed me, or I owed it!


Upon checking the website early in 2017 I learnt of the FMG's scheduled re-opening (actually on the 8th April) following a 2-year closure to facilitate the reconstruction of the summit station and hotel complex, and e-mailed to ask about steam runs. A splendidly cordial exchange followed, informing me that the first run was planned for 18th June. This was ideal, as it fitted in with our annual 'Great Escape' – we live close to Ascot Racecourse and try to be as far as possible from it during the annual Royal Week. I reserved a seat, naturally. I will not bore with all the details of changed plans due to a major Medical Conference (Lugano), a cabin crew strike (BA later called off), and the breakdown of the bag drop computer (at Heathrow Terminal 5), save to say our eventual flight to Zürich was the fourth onto which we were checked! However, we found our way to our favourite Lugano hotel on the 17th June via the Gotthard Base Tunnel, of course, and on my way back from the new line to Stabio I stopped off at Capolago and picked up my cherished ticket.

On the great day itself I was there in time before boarding

Final stretch to summit, with new station, hotel, etc. in sight.



for photos of the loco and coach, and I was fortunate to be in my favourite position – in a corner at the rear of the open, windowless coach, with its waist-high doors, right next to the chimney. This, in order to savour the noise, and to be able to take pictures of the line and the scenery with the loco in the corner of each photo. Loco No.2, is a 0-4-2T, Type H2/3, Works No.604, built in 1890 by (perhaps naturally) SLM Fabrik of Winterthur. It was of that design where the cylinders lie alongside the middle of the boiler, with forward-facing piston rods which drive the connecting rods by a rocking arm pivoted in front of the boiler about where the cylinders would be on a normally laid-out loco. I had wondered if I might meet, on the run, other UK or Swiss-based members of SRS? However, I was not surprised to see no one else from the UK, but astonished that I apparently appeared to be the only serious ‘*Eisenbahnfreunde*’, or railway enthusiast! All the other passengers appeared to be local ‘ordinary tourists’ including a party of about a dozen Italian-speaking, generously proportioned ‘mamas’, who would have looked most out of place on such a trip in the UK. I don’t know if they were a choir or a church group but at intervals they burst into song, although whether into sacred or secular songs I did not have the Italian to tell! Fortunately they were not loud enough to drown out the “music” of the loco’s beat, and furthermore, the part of the coach where I had chosen to be was the least crowded section, although there was a younger couple that spoke some English; useful in Ticino where my experience is that fewer people speak English than is the case in Switzerland’s German-speaking Cantons.

We were followed up the line by FMG’s Thm2/3 No.1, a rack-equipped diesel loco that was propelling two wagons, one with a large water tank on it, presumably to deal with any lineside fires, also perhaps to top up the loco if one of the supplies failed. I am sure our run was the first by No.2 for some time, because at both water stops on the ascent the driver marked with green spray paint on a stone the best place to stop to accommodate the hoses. The first stop was at a station named as S. Nicolao in the Schweers and Wall ‘*Eisenbahnatlas Schweiz*’ and the timetable, but with no name shown on the rather rundown station building. At Bellavista, the location of our second stop, we ran past, stopped and then dropped back to the supply point. I’m not sure why, although we might have run onto a loop or siding, and I recall we crossed one of the normal electric units. As we approached the top, we stopped again, but this time so that the fireman could scramble up a rather steep bank to extinguish a small grass fire with a broom, until the water-train arrived. Once at the top I adjourned to the café, where I was delighted to find draught ‘Eichhof’ beer, as well as some splendid wurst! I was able to position myself for the descent by the same door as on the ascent for yet more photos. The descent did not, of course, require water stops and we made good time down. At the bottom, I made sure to go around all the crew, shaking their hands and thanking them in English, German, French and what little Italian I possess. All in all, a wonderful day and one I will not easily forget, especially as I think that I can claim to be the first from the UK to “do” the steam run after the line’s re-opening. 



1. Arrived at 2nd water stop at Bellavista; water truck just appearing.
2. General view of both trains there.
3. Close-up of Loco No.2 at Bellavista.
4. Nearly back to Capolago and approaching the bridge over SBB mainline.