

Swiss liveries - some observations

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The subject of railway liveries can be highly controversial, being at best a personal, subjective view, and at its worst is reflected in the recent affair of the GWR City of Truro restoration. This is a personal view and it would be interesting to hear other peoples views.

These thoughts have been triggered by my first view 'in the flesh' of the new SBB red livery on a recent (May '85) visit to Switzerland. I am pleased to report that my worst fears, resulting from a few pictures of ex-works locomotives, were not realised. Maybe it was a slight weathering or a more natural light and setting giving a more matt appearance, but I found it quite presentable, especially contrasted with the dark green coaching stock, although it will take some time before I am used to it.

The old green livery could seem drab, especially on the Ae 4/7's but it seemed to suit the Re 4/4^{II}s, especially in ex-works condition. I also feel that the smaller locomotives were suited to their brown livery which reflected their lowly status. I hope SBB is not making a mistake by associating the humble station pilot with main line express locomotives in the mind of the public.

In contrast, I congratulate SBB on the livery chosen for the Mark IV coach; but I wonder if it was chosen with a green locomotive in mind ?

SBB has experimented with different liveries on the prototype pendelzugs which are running with appropriately painted mark II intermediate trailers. The two - tone green livery is excellent except for the bright red doors and front end. The yellow doors on the blue - liveried unit are not quite so bad. Do people have that much trouble finding the doors and, if so, why not extend one colour the whole height, as on the mark IV's ?

In the wider sphere I am wondering whether the range of liveries, one of the attractions of Swiss railways, may be narrowing. The SBB seems to be following the Rhatische Bahn livery; commonly managed groups are using one livery, eg Biel - Tauffelen - Ins, Oberaargau - Jura Bahn and Solothurn - Niederbipp Bahn; the new pendelzugs delivered to the EBT group are all red and it is quite possible that, following the complete merging of SZB and VBW, a common livery will be used.

The use of a common design of rolling stock by several companies can lead to a cost reduction - this is often specified as a condition of subsidy - and the enthusiast must accept this as part of the survival of many lines, but why must the liveries also be identical? This is noticeable on the metre gauge two-car units in use by the VBW, SZB, SSIF, FLP (Ponte Tresa). There was a time when it seemed Switzerland would be swamped by this orange and white livery. The Aigle - Sepey - Diablerets and Sudostbahn have railcars painted in this livery and many operators received batches of buses and trolleybuses, of a common pattern, in this livery. It appears Bern may be giving a lead in the right direction. The SVB experimented with several liveries on its bus and trolleybus fleet and has returned, due to the force of public opinion, to its original colours. I hope other operators learn from this experiment.

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