

Steamed up about Montreux

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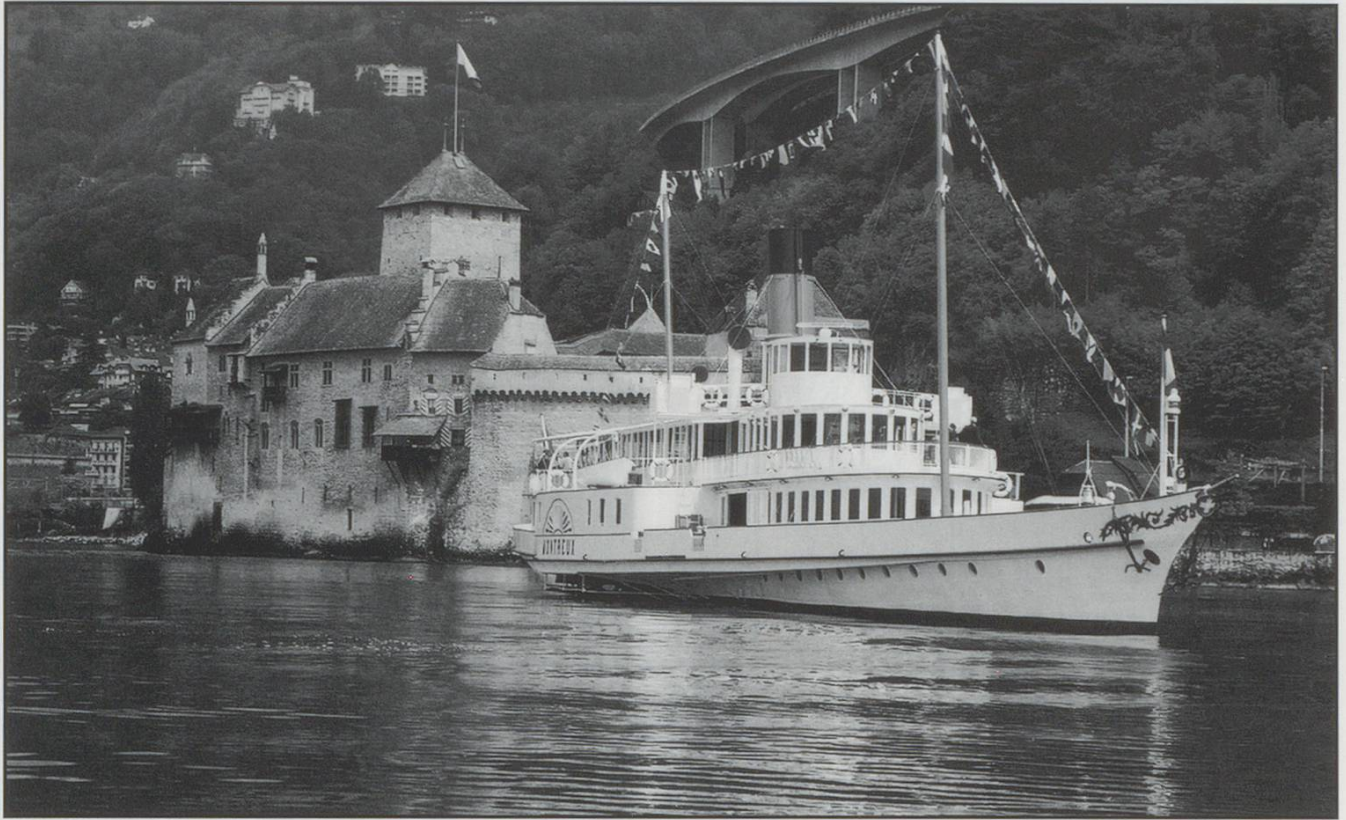
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DS Montreux poses by Chateau Chillon. 22/05/01.

Photo: DS

One of the pleasures of Switzerland are undoubtedly the lakes and the boats plying back and forth. A lovely way to spend a hot summer afternoon or evening. Lac Léman, Genfersee, or as we probably know it Lake Geneva, is one of the largest. La Compagnie Générale de Navigation sur le lac Léman is the major boat operator and recently they have restored to full steam working order their oldest paddle steamer, *Montreux*.

I was fortunate in being invited to a press launch in May 2001, during which CGN actually provided a launch, excuse the pun, to enable views to be taken from the lake, close up and with *Montreux*, following our instructions. It was a fantastic experience and pictures taken during this journey illustrate this article.

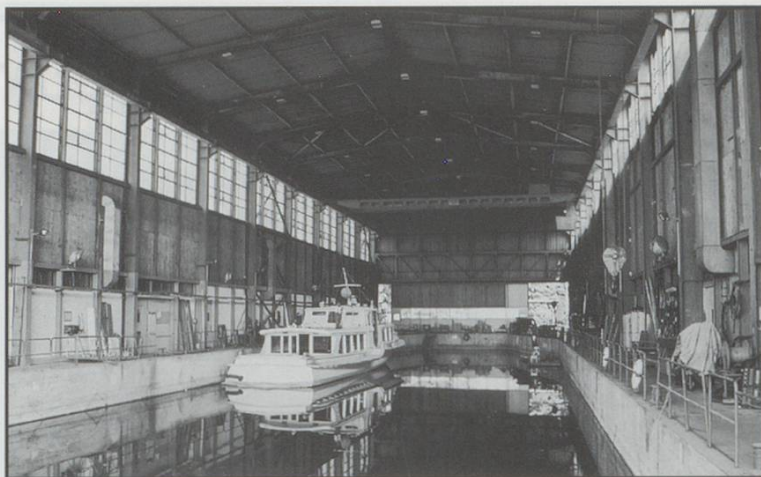
As I walked into CGN's Lausanne docks I could not help but be impressed by the array of facilities available. There is an enormous covered dock for heavy maintenance and overhauls. Outside is a state of the art dry dock for

emergencies which takes only 30 minutes to raise and empty. Following a short tour round the dock area the party joined the *Montreux*, the main reason for the visit.

HISTORY OF "MONTREUX"

In 1902 CGN ordered two saloon boats which for their time were technically bang up to date. The two boats, *Montreux* and *General Dufour* were started in 1903 and delivered in April 1904 ready for service on 12th May 1904.

In 1922 the top deck was equipped with a permanent roof allowing passengers to use it in inclement weather. In 1931 the upper deck smoking areas were replaced by elegant glass conservatory-like saloons front and back. During the war the *Montreux* was laid up and for eight years (1939-1947) major repairs and improvements were made prior to its return to service.



The main overhaul dock at CGN, Lausanne. 22/05/01. Photo: DS

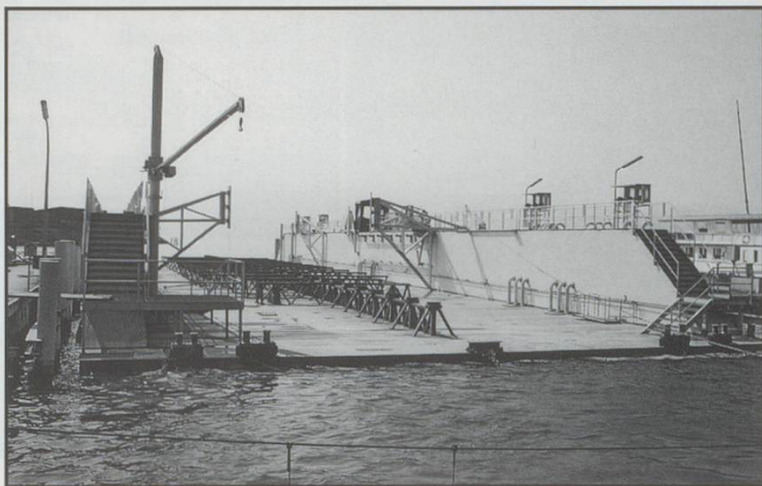
The new dry dock mentioned in the text. It came about partly by accident in that the old dock was due a major overhaul and was damaged badly just before repairs were due to start. Remember this dock only takes 30 minutes to raise and empty. Lausanne. 22/05/01. Photo: DS

In 1958 the poor state of the steam boilers led to their replacement by diesel-electric power. *Montreux* was returned to service in 1962. In 1967 a lot of work was done to the hull, quickly followed by a general modernisation to bring passenger accommodation and equipment up to modern standards including a retaining sanitary system.

Since 1904 *Montreux* has covered more than 1,648,000 km and it is now the oldest boat in CGN service. It is also believed that it is the first and so far only boat in the world to have been converted from diesel to steam.

After practically a century of operation and despite the improvements made over the years CGN deemed a complete renovation to be essential and work commenced in October 1998. New engines were just the start. There followed the complete renewal of equipment, steering, electrics, kitchen, bridge etc. Heating has also been installed for the first time allowing operation into the Autumn. The *Belle Époque* saloon has been refitted following a grant of SFr 375,000 from "Pro-Patria".

The aim of the restoration has been to recreate the original internal and external aesthetics of the boat, albeit to modern standards. Having said that, the original panelling was removed in the 1960s and was subsequently lost. An intensive search is now on to recover them together with original plans and furniture.



THE FUTURE

Luc-Antoine Baehni, a CGN Director, explained that the steam engines were now oil powered. Only one extra person is required to crew an oil/steam vessel as against four-five for a coal/steam combination; the economics are difficult to argue with. Conversion and overhaul required 42,000 man-hours to complete.

Montreux is seen as primarily a private hire and charter vessel. A half day charter costs from SFr 10,000. CGN are already booked for many days in 2002, on one occasion by five people. Having seen it at first hand I can understand why.

The voyage along Lac Léman was topped by the experience of photographing the vessel from the launch and many rolls of film were expended as we passed and for a few seconds halted by Château de Chillon.

Many thanks are due to the staff and directors at CGN for providing such a fine opportunity to be a part of a significant addition to the attractions on (literally!) Lac Léman.



The new staircase leading up to the Belle Époque saloon. If ever glamour was needed in Swiss Express this is it. The picture needed someone gorgeous and glamorous and somehow your average transport journalist just didn't fit the bill. My wife should have been there, she would have been perfect. 22/05/01.

Photo: DS

Poetry in motion. The Montreux's engines power round propelling the paddles and boat forward. One man controls it all. 22/05/01.

Photo: DS



The launch from which many of the photographs were taken. 22/05/01. Photo: DS

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TECHNICAL DATA

Built 1904

Power regime

1904-1958 Steam. 2 cylinder compound. Superheated

1962-1998 Diesel-electric. 8 cylinders, in line

2001 Oil powered steam. 2 cylinder simple. Superheated

Length 68.5 m

Width 7.2 m 14.2 amidships (over paddle housing)

No. of pax 750 **Power output** 650kW

Max. Speed 28 km per hour (51 revolutions per minute)

Pressure 17 bar **Oil capacity** 18,000 litres

