

Starring the SBB

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The 11th of October 2002 was a very special day for the SBB. Channel 1 of the national TV of the German speaking part of Switzerland, SF DRS 1, dedicated a full day's programming to the SBB.

From seven am till midnight, with a few short breaks for the news and weather, kids bedtime story and the early evening soap, almost all the railway related facets of the SBB were treated in bite-size spots of 3 – 7 min. each. In the main hall of the station of Zürich, a male and a female presenting team anchored the show. They conducted many interviews: the CEO, Mr. Weibel and the president of the railway union, Mr. Leuenberger, active as well as retired railway men and of course the passengers, all made their points.

There was a Märklin model railway to demonstrate some intricate railway workings, including a hump yard. The "real" hump yard at Muttenz was shown as well, naturally. Did you know there are both summer and winter humps? The winter one is higher, as the wagons roll less freely in winter, due to the lower temperatures. SBB Historic held an auction of surplus railway items, including a small Tm^{II} tractor. Guess who bought it: the president of the railway union – for his garden!

A special TV-train ran around from Rorschach to Chiasso, via Bern, Basel SBB, Aarau, Luzern and Zürich. It was mostly attached to regular service trains, but did run some sections on its own. It consisted of the SF DRS locomotive No. Re 460-056, with several cameras fitted to it, as well as special halogen lights for the live pictures from inside the Gotthard tunnel: a world first in live TV-broadcasting! Behind the loco and connected to it with many cables, was the SBB communications test car, which was crammed full of the transmission equipment necessary for contact with both the helicopter and the light aircraft. These then sent the TV signal to a satellite, which in turn relayed it to the studio in Zürich. Next came the "comfort" salon car No. 5085 8973 000-1, from which the VIPS were interviewed and where the train team, which mostly had to stay on board for the full 17 hours, could take snacks and a (non alcoholic) drink. The last car was a modern mark IV 2nd class car accessible to the general public and from which some of the passenger interviews were conducted.

Half a dozen roving reporters filmed short reports on items like the Securitrans Jail train, or the firms operating in the dungeons of Zürich main station: depots of some of the stores operating in the station, a huge

kitchen, which supplies most of the restaurants in the station and even a wine maker! A film team covered the replacement of a worn turnout with a prefabricated one brought on site on one of the new carrier wagons, which can tilt the turnout on its side for transport, so it fits within the railway gauge profile. The whole operation, with a normal intensive service on the running tracks beside it, took less than half a day, including replacement of the ballast!

Another team covered the Zürich main signalling centre, responsible for about a third of the country: things like making sure passengers of a late arriving international train made connections. Or coping with a suicide: relieving the driver, coordinating with the police, helping passengers with connections. Organizing the transfer of passengers from a failed Cisalpino set to a relief train on the opposite side of the platform. Then a cable fell down from a building-crane and shorted out the current of four tracks in the station of Schlieren, blocking all trains from Zürich to Bern and Basel! No panic, after making sure that some of the tracks were safe for running through, the drivers of the main line trains were called on the radio-phone and advised to coast through the station with the pantograph down – under normal conditions, a train can coast for at least two miles. S-Bahn trains were terminated and turned around at neighbouring stations. Some main line trains made extra stops at these stations to carry the through passengers. Other reporters covered the two historical trains: one with the steam loco A 3/5 No. 705 and a set of historical commuter stock, the other with Crocodile Ce 6/8^{III} No. 14305 pulling a rake of beautifully restored old freight cars. And much, much more.

The booklet for the SBB staff which listed the instructions for the assembly, preparation, staffing and route running, as well as the various station announcements to be made for the special and adapted trains, consisted of no less than 52 pages. At the end of the day, the rolling list of credits mentioned the names of 200 people and organizations – this must be a record in itself.

A two-hour compilation video will be available from November - remember, the spoken language will be "schwitzerdütsch"- from: TV Club Schweizer Versandzentrum, 6160 Entlebuch. Internet: www.sfdrs.ch/tvclub.