

Swiss rail freight news : Alpine Cargo : Ron Smith looks at a new name in Swiss rail freight

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SWISS RAIL FREIGHT NEWS

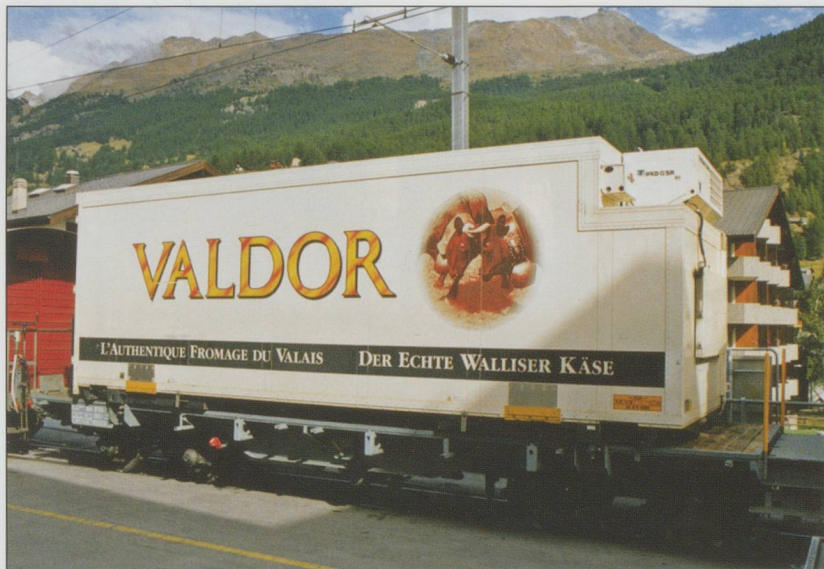
ALPINE CARGO

Ron Smith looks at a new name in Swiss rail freight



Alpine Cargo is a joint venture between the Matterhorn Gotthard Bahn (MGB) and Planzer Transport AG, a major Swiss road haulage company, which has been put together to serve Zermatt. This community is famous for being car-free, with the majority of deliveries of just about everything being brought up the valley from Visp by rail. However, currently the MGB does not carry everything so the restricted road access from Täsch to Zermatt still sees a significant amount of specialist road transport that has the potential to damage the local environment. Zermatt is not a small mountain village and it needs a lot of supplies as it has a resident population of 6,000. With some 130 hotels and over 2,500 rental apartments it can host many thousands of visitors at busy times. The opening of the Lötschberg Base Tunnel turned Visp from another stop on the Rhône Valley line into a major rail interchange. The MGB realised that their core competence is in passenger transport and looked for a partner to develop a freight interchange and attract more freight onto rail. Planzer is a major logistics company whose operations are currently split 60% rail/40% road. It is a family-owned company and is part of the consortium that took over Cargo Domizil from SBB and turned it into profit. It has a broad customer base, plus the IT and 'track-and-trace' systems that are increasingly demanded by customers, which the MGB did not have. Planzer also works with several other major players in the field so could bring 'clout' to the new operation. Alpine Cargo is set-up as a neutral transport company so that Planzer's competitors would not have problems co-operating with it, and it is a dedicated organisation focussed on rail freight to and from Zermatt (although the vast majority of goods go only one way – up to Zermatt, for onward delivery around the town by electric vehicles, or on the Gornergratt Bahn). Alpine Cargo started in July 2011 with a base volume of 40,000t per annum. Of this 12,000t is heating oil from a terminal at Gamsen, near Visp to a 125,000l capacity storage facility in Zermatt. There is a cool chamber at Zermatt for chilled and frozen produce, with one opening at Visp in 2014, along with investment in 'rollschemmel', to handle standard gauge wagons, and low-deck

wagons for containers and bulky loads. Everything from the containers to parcels will be carried on up to 38 trains a week, that have ample capacity to provide just-in-time deliveries and grow through targeting deliveries from the drinks industry, etc. Following this investment it is predicted that *Alpine Cargo* will break into profit in 2016. By enhancing the trans-shipment facilities at Visp *Alpine Cargo* sees the potential to eat into the road market share, possibly doubling the volume it carries, whilst improving customer service, protecting the fragile Alpine environment, and boosting the MGB's profitability. 



All photos: Ron Smith

Holcim

Ron Smith

One of the largest internal customers for SBB Cargo is Holcim, one of Switzerland's industrial success stories. The company was founded in 1912 at Holderbank (AG) some 7km south of Brugg, and today it is a multinational producer of cement, concrete and aggregates. Its name, Holcim, is an abbreviation of "Holderbank" and "Ciment". The statistics are impressive. Holcim has three giant factories in Switzerland at Untervaz (GR), Siggenthal (AG) and Eclépens (VD) producing 2.6m tonnes of cement per annum; it has twenty gravel pits and quarries producing 56m tonnes of aggregates per annum; and forty ready-mix concrete plants producing 1.5m cubic metres of concrete per annum. It has terminals at Samedan (GR), Landquart (GR), Giubiasco (TI), Vernier (GE) and Münchenstein (BL), plus eighteen sidings in various other locations throughout the country. Holcim operate 900 wagons, of which it owns 550. These transport 2.9m tonnes per annum, and cover 380m tonne kilometres. The modal split is 48% by road, 28% by rail to terminals for road delivery to the end customer, and 19% by rail direct to the end customer's sidings. The rail use is split 50/50 between wagonload and block trains. The wagonload traffic includes bagged cement, gypsum and alternative fuels, with block trains conveying cement, sand and gravel, slag, shale, and fuel. Holcim believe in owning rail wagons as they then have independent utility of them; control their maintenance, and as the wagons are specific to them and their goods, they can optimise the payloads and achieve maximum utilisation of the fleet. They also control the "last mile" shunting as much as possible.

Locomotives at the Holcim works at Untervaz.

All photos: Ron Smith

