Zeitschrift: Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal
Herausgeber: Swiss Railways Society
Band: - (2013)
Heft: 116

Artikel: A chance encounter
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DOI: https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-854247

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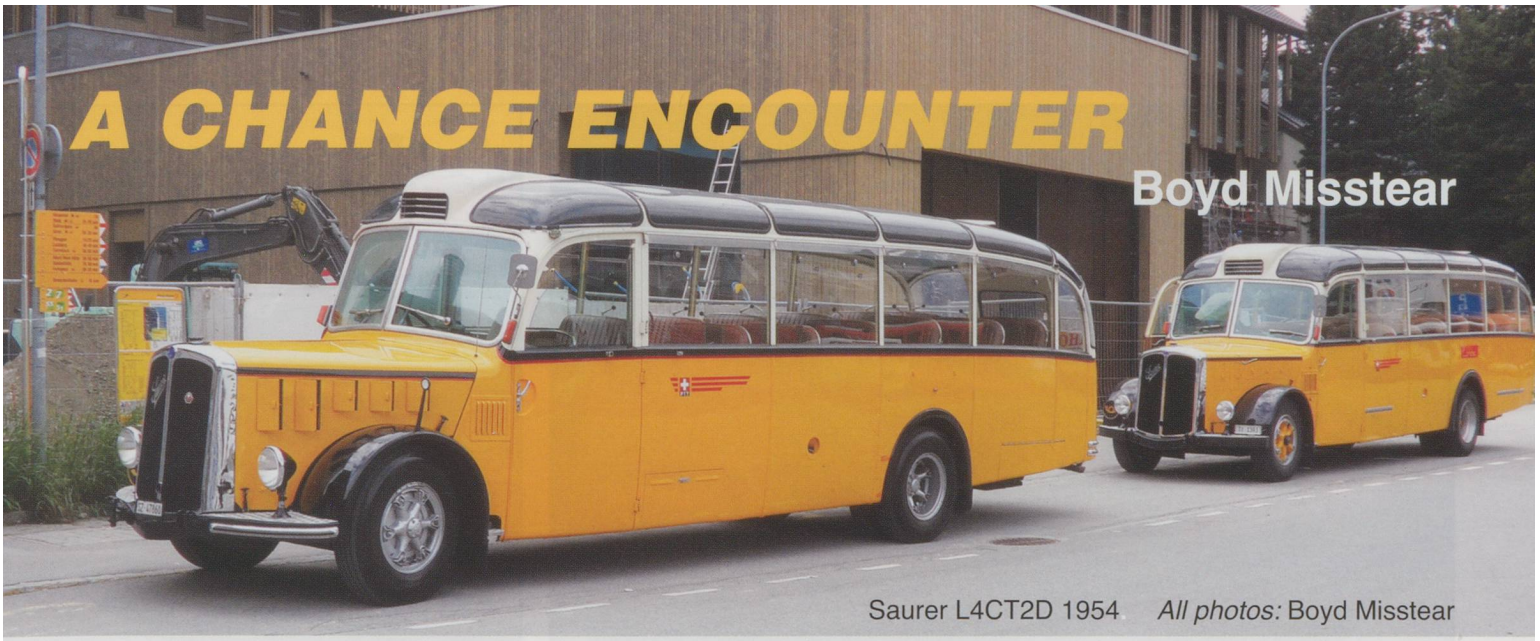
A CHANCE ENCOUNTER

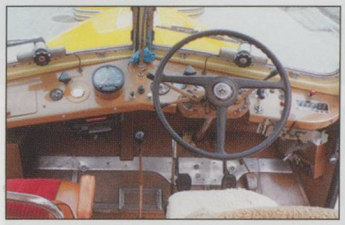
Boyd Misstear



Saurer L4CT2D 1954 *All photos:* Boyd Misstear

As so often happens in life, a chance meeting triggers an interest. In this instance, while alighting from a Matterhorn Gotthard Bahn InterRegio service in Andermatt in July 2013, I happened upon two preserved PostAutos. Approaching one of the drivers I asked if I could take some photographs. While regretfully neither of us could communicate coherently in a common tongue, he was very helpful, and I spent a few minutes being shown over one of the two vehicles – both classic 1954 Saurer Autopostale Alpenwagen L4CT2Ds. These are part of the fleet of Barenco & Andreoli of Faido, a company who have celebrated 133 years of service 1880-2005 under their motto "In viaggio con voi" – "travelling with you". The right-hand driving position was adopted in this generation of PostAutos to help drivers accurately assess how close to the edge of (then un-barriered) mountain roads they were travelling. Compared to current vehicles there is a cozy closeness between the upholstered seats, and on a warm summer's day they were exuding the distinctive rich aroma of fine leather. Apart from the Saurers owned by the Faido company, there are many others preserved and available for hire in Switzerland details of which can be found through the Saurer Old Timer Club (**www.saurerold-timer.ch**).

Returning home I did a little research on the history of the Saurer company that made many things other than vehicles. I was surprised to discover their lineage was in some ways like that of the current day Finnish company Nokia, recently part purchased by Microsoft, that we associate only with mobile phone manufacturing. Nokia is also a very successful telecommunications equipment manufacturer with a digital map and navigation services subsidiary called Navteq. Franz Saurer was born the son of a farmer in Veringendorf (then in the Principality of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen) and at the age of 15 moved to Switzerland, training as a blacksmith and locksmith. In 1853 he established a foundry at St. Georgen near St. Gallen and in 1862 moved to Arbon



Saurer L4CT2D, controls and interior.

on Lake Constance. The original production was centred on castings for textile machinery. Between 1869 and 1931 a number of embroidery machine loom inventions were developed, these warranting a full story themselves. In 1888 the first Saurer kerosene engine for stationary applications appeared; followed in 1896 by kerosene engines for automobiles; then a truck with a petrol engine in 1903; and first buses and passenger cars in 1904. It was in 1908 Saurer produced the first diesel engine for motor cars. 1919 saw the opening of regular postal coach services on some Alpine roads with Saurer coaches. The company went on to develop trolley buses and railway diesel engines (1942), vehicles with under floor engines and the first articulated bus for Zurich (1955), as well as aircraft engines under licenses from Hispano-Suiza and Gnôme of Rhone. Between the turn of the century and WW2, the Saurer brand became very well known with subsidiary companies in many countries. Gradually these subsidiary Saurer organizations were taken over, by Steyr-Daimler-Puch in Austria, by Armstrong Whitworth in the UK, and by MAN in Germany. In 1911 in the USA, the Saurer Motor Truck Company merged with the Mack Brothers Motor Car Company of Allentown Pennsylvania headed by J.M. Mack – the origin of the Mack trucks seen on the US Interstate System. At the company's peak in 1959 it employed more than 4,000. However, declining sales in the early 1980s saw the last commercial Saurer-badged truck delivered in 1983, and four years later in 1987 the final model 10DM supplied to the Swiss Army. Today the company name lives on in the 2013 re-established Saurer Group focused again on its origins - the world of textiles.