SwissPost - yellow in motion : Don Gatehouse provides an illustrated review

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No.11309 working the 50816 Ostermundigen to Härkingen containers.   *All photos:* Don Gatehouse

When visiting Switzerland I have often seen and photographed one of the trains of yellow containers or vans that convey the Swiss post. My natural curiosity led me to devote some time to understanding better the network structure served by these trains. SwissPost provides an informative web site and when linked with the published SBB Graphic Charts and a spot of further selective browsing, provides a good measure of background.

SwissPost is wholly owned by the Swiss Confederation and is provided with interest-free endowment capital. That said, additional equity must be provided in the form of reserves with an appropriate level of retained earnings being generated from the day-to-day business operations. To add to the business challenges, the Swiss Parliament approved the gradual controlled opening-up of the postal market that would increase competition in the parcels sector from 2004, and then in letter mail two years later. Letter mail has had to adapt to changing volumes during the era of significant growth of electronic mail and payments systems. The parcels sector has had to adapt to the demands of e-commerce in a very competitive market, where the speed of delivery has become an ever more important factor.

At the end of the 1990s, SwissPost had opened new rail-served parcels hubs at Daillens, Härkingen and Frauenfeld. Since then, each of these centres has seen further significant investment and development to not only meet the growing demands in this sector but also to address the increased demand for faster delivery times. Early in the new millennium, Project REMA (Re-engineering Mail-Processing) was progressed to modernize the letter sorting process, reduce overall costs, boost productivity and create a national platform to enable SwissPost to offer new innovative products to meet the market needs. The autumn of 2007 saw the first of three new highly automated mail sorting centres commence operations at Zürich Mülligen. The other two centres opened in 2008 at Härkingen and Eclépens and these were followed by the opening of six new regional sub-centres at Genève, Basel, Cadenazzo, Ostermundigen (Bern), Kriens (Luzern) and Gossau (SG).

To complete the new Post Mail network, centres at Sion and Chur are now used to process undelivered/returned items and provide video coding for items that could not be handled through the automated systems elsewhere. As this phased implementation was rolled out, the network of former regional sorting centres was closed down.

As part of the overall strategy to improve the efficiency of the rail logistics associated with the letters and parcels business needs, SwissPost sourced complete 'mail trains' from Swiss Federal Railways. This effectively eliminated the buying of individual 'train kilometres' travelled when many passenger trains were used to carry the mail. SwissPost is now one of SBB Cargo's largest clients in

No.11349 at Dangel with the 50921 Postal from Härkingen to Cadenazzo.

Switzerland and operates more than 50 parcels and 15 letter mail services daily. Not only are there a number of inter-hub trunk services but the various sub-centres and other key locations are in turn linked to their appropriate hub centre. Within the Swiss train designation codes, inter-hub container trains moving parcels will be found in the range 50700-50749, other parcels network services will be in the range 50750-50899, and the dedicated mail trains use 50900-50949. So, with knowledge of the SwissPost network, and by reference to the SBB Graphic Charts, it was not too difficult to trace examples of daylight workings that could be photographed as the selection of images illustrate. Even the RhB metre gauge system handles SwissPost containers within its freight train network and observers of the Filisur web cam will know that the weekdays RE1144, 13:02 St. Moritz to Chur has a SwissPost container wagon or two attached to the rear.

So, with a little effort, it is possible to know where to be and when to capture an example of 'Yellow in Motion' in Switzerland. 🇨🇭

LEFT: No.420160 at Cossonay with 50782 from Brig via Sion to Daillens.

BELOW: No.11306 at Ependes with the Zurich Mülligen Geneva via Eclépens Postal, 50912.

LEFT: No.11652 and 11366 at Wassen Wattingen with the Ticino Postal 50828 from Cadenazzo

BELOW: RhB No.703 passes Susch with Postal containers for Scuol Tarasp.

SWISS POST ✚

Yellow in motion.