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Autor: Freezer, Cyril
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Orbe-Chavornay Centenary

by Cyril Freezer

Call it coincidence, call it serendipity, but there usually seems to be something of interest scheduled for the weeks we choose for our annual Swiss visit. This year we managed to arrive in Lausanne on 16 June, knowing that the Orbe-Chavornay was celebrating its centenary on the following three days.

As there is always something of interest to be seen at Lausanne Gare we arrived in good time on Saturday to catch the 08:50 local to Neuchâtel, only to discover an interesting array of stock on Voie 6, headed by 460 003-7 *Milieu du Monde* were preserved Ae3/6^{III} 10264, now restored to its original livery together with a first class observation coach. As it was parked immediately in front of the local to Geneve, it was clearly heading off somewhere and it seemed more than likely we would see more of it later.

We did. When we arrived at Chavornay 460 003-7 was busy shunting the stock on the

Above: Preserved Ae 3/6^{III} No.10264 at Chavornay, 18 June 1994.

Facing Page: Orbe Chavornay No.14 entering Orbe on 18 June 1994.

goods loop to produce a demonstration train. As 10264 was neatly sited for photography, Nick and I went forward, accompanied by the driver of the local who had the same idea, much to the amusement of the lady conductor, who clearly thought we were slightly touched in the head, but harmless with it.

We were then approached by an Orbe Chavornay official who asked if we were for Orbe. We replied in our best French, such as it is, and he made a brief remark which stretched our linguistic skills beyond their normal limit. We strolled through the subway and were prepared to spend the next 20 minutes or so waiting for the scheduled OC train studying the SBB offering only to be hurried up by the OC driver, who gestured to the waiting railcar 14 which was already well filled.

This was the second pleasant surprise of the day, the OC had thrown the timetable through the window and was running a shuttle



service. What's more it was free, for no-one checked tickets on our 10 minute trip up the line.

In addition to No 14's striking livery, it also had a fine selection of birds applied to the windows - flat plastic prints, not the real thing - and some exotic blooms on each dashboard and above the end doors. These, I think, were real.

At Le Grange we stopped for the park'n'ride service to Orbe and shortly after that pulled up in the station. The celebrations were getting under way. Every bit of motive power on the OC was set out for our inspection, recently repainted No.13 was laid on as a standby unit for shuttle trips to Le Grange, and its windows were decorated by silhouettes of ladies and gentlemen in 1890s headgear. It pulled out at 09:30, leaving the shed clear for an impromptu rehearsal by a local choir. No 12 has less elegant "passengers" on its windows, both railcars had notices concerning the OC's history along their sides.

If anyone believes the Swiss are a sober, industrious, humourless race, he has obviously never been to a Bahnhoffest - or whatever it is called in the Romande. The entire station

approach was filled with stalls, some providing refreshment, others interesting wares, most of which, according to Doris, were of good quality. At all events, she had a pleasant time inspecting the stock in trade whilst we studied the exhibits.

Now the OC has a fine modern railcar, the loco-hauled centre entrance coach No 26 (ex SBB 20-33 024) has become redundant. It has been converted into a buffet car, with tasteful etchings on its windows. What a 2.8 km line wants with a catering vehicle is one of those intriguing mysteries, but as Sir Arthur Heywood had one on his 15in gauge Duffield Bank Railway, who is to quibble. At least, being standard gauge, the OC car *La Thiolleyre* can run over SBB metals.

It was a fine, sunny, hot day, perfect for the celebrations. Someone had realised that the buffet car would get hot, and had thoughtfully arranged a hosepipe to trickle water over the roof. We sought shade in the model railway exhibition.

It was a fairly simple affair, just two layouts. One was a double track Gauge 1 circuit which was arranged for unidirectional running. A series of sidings in the centre were linked to



Above: Orbe-Chavornay Fe 2/2 No. 32 at Orbe.
 Below: The exotic flowers on No.14's bulkhead.

the double tracks by means of a swivelling "bridge", the most unusual fiddle yard I have ever seen. On our arrival we were treated to a demonstration of why, even with radio control, it is not a good idea to have two trains on one circuit, a freight train headed by an Aster "King" rammed the back of a pick-up goods behind an Aster pannier. Three wagons descended a metre to the floor.

The other display was a large LGB based metre gauge system which was assembled from modules built and owned by members of the club. Again, the Swiss sense of humour was to the fore, familiar designations had taken on a new meaning - TGV was now Tram de Gros de Vaud!

The Centenary celebrations were a joint affair with the Usine des Orbes, the classic link between the railway and the town's power station applied here, as ownership was in common until 1992. An exhibition of electrical gear was laid out in the goods shed while the power station was also open to the public.

Eventually, we caught the train back to Chavornay where, unlike the OC, the SBB were not arranging special connections to Neuchâtel. This gave us time to inspect some of the SBB's display and collect a couple of card cut-out models of the 460s.

Our return journey to Lausanne involved a stop at Neuchâtel for a trip to Boudry, followed by a boat trip on Lakes Neuchâtel and Morat to Murten, one of Nick's bright inspirations. Apart from the cool boat trip, we discovered a very charming town, well worth a special visit.

