

The Centovalli in the snow

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The gas turbine had an axial compressor driving shaft and turbine. A turbine speed of 5,200 rpm, gave a generator output of 2,000 hp. Starting tractive effort was 13,000 Kg.

Everything was an experiment. Operation was complicated, with starting up taking several minutes, switching over from diesel oil to heavy fuel oil when well warmed up. Before attempting to move a heavy train the driver also had to select a high rotational speed, taking some time to run up. There was an auxiliary diesel engine, which an assistant had to supervise. Adventurous is the report, that on a long downhill stretch, the turbine could be stopped, and the diesel started to provide lights, brakes etc, and power so that the turbine could be started again when needed. The auxiliary diesel was also enough for light running. To add to the fun, the performance of the turbine depended on altitude and outside temperature, so surprises could occur. Failures were mostly through handling errors and overheating, but with special training, attached to Basel depot, and with BBC supervision, some impressive performances were put up. Between 1943 and 1944, some 50,000 km was run without failures. In 1947 No.1101 ran some 50,000 km on express trains between Basel, Zürich, Bern and Luzern. The engine would indeed 'go'. Some failures were not the fault of the

turbine; cracks arose in the main and bogie frames, but SBB's acute motive power shortage after the war kept her hard at work. Later came two important proving trials, on the SNCF between Basel and Paris Est, and on DB between München, Würzburg and Nürnberg - for a month working an '01 Pacific' duty.

But Paddington? Well, the GWR was impressed and in 1946 ordered a 2,500hp gas turbine from BBC. This later became BR No.18000, and ran for some 10-years. In 1958, as a student in London, I would see, or more often hear, No.18000 in Paddington. I little thought that only a few years later I would see, in Genève, the last relic of Switzerland's own gas turbine. For in 1954, after its few years of service, severe overheating damaged the turbine irreparably and No.1101 was set aside, but in 1958 it was retrieved to become the experimental multi-current electric No.10851. If No.10851 was something of an embarrassment No.1101, despite its idiosyncrasies, was relatively successful. She ran 410,000 km as a gas turbine. There are few pictures, but she was a real presence. To see what was left of her was why I had asked to visit Geneva shed in 1966, and I found No.10851 there. I saw her once more, out of service (as so often) outside the shops at Yverdon. 

THE CENTOVALLI IN THE SNOW

Regular Swiss contributor **Christian Ammann** visited the Centovalli line in early March when much snow was still in evidence. He kindly sent us some images, mainly taken in Santa Maria Maggiore, but also at Dissimo-Folsogno and Olgia. At the former he saw some of the older stock on local trains, the spaceship like panorama stock, plus the old unit permanently on the plinth at the station. 