

Story of a survivor : Jean-François Andrist recounts the story of LEB loco No.5

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Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal**

Band (Jahr): - **(2015)**

Heft 122

PDF erstellt am: **22.07.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-853970>

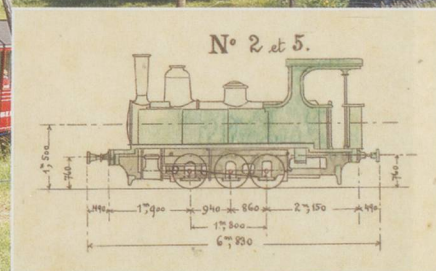
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Story of a Survivor



Jean-François Andrist recounts the story of LEB loco No.5

ABOVE: LEB 5 and BAM 6 in 2001.


Photo: Reto Steiner

INSET: Old drawing of Nos 2 & 5.

Following the opening of the metre-gauge railway from Lausanne to Echallens (LE) in 1873 it was decided in 1888 to extend the line another 7.6km to Bercher. This section was built by the Central Vaudois Company (CV), but was to be operated by the LE and they needed more motive power for the longer line. Due to sections of the route near Lausanne having gradients of 40% (1 in 25), the operators were looking for a type of loco that could operate heavy (by the standards of the day) trains, and was available quickly, commercially. They found such an engine in the catalogue of la Société Alsacienne de Constructions Mécaniques (SACM) and ordered a "Type 85" that arrived that year as G3/3 No.2. Although it had a factory in France at Belfort (Alstom today) SACM also had plants at Mulhouse and Strasbourg-Graffenstaden, areas that had become part of Germany in 1871 after the Franco-Prussian war. With the successful arrival of No.2, a sister loco was ordered from SACM and No.5 was delivered in September 1890 from the Strasbourg works. These two engines then proceeded to work the bulk of the trains on the line, including conveying milk to one of the first factories in the Nestlé group, which was located at Bercher and produced condensed milk. The LE and the CV merged in 1913 to form the Lausanne-Echallens-Bercher (LEB) that today is an essential component of Lausanne's transport system and is now part of Transports Lausannois.

Although working hard (or perhaps because of doing so) loco No. 5 was not without its problems and visited the workshops of the Jura-Simplon in 1895 and the SLM in 1897 with boiler problems, and had its boiler refurbished in 1902. In 1903 her wheels were re-profiled to allow her to run on the Tramway Lausannois' new channelled tramway tracks inset in the highway surface that the LE then had to use from Montétan into their Lausanne terminus at La Chauderon. In 1907 No.5 emerged unscathed from a fire at Le Chauderon dépôt only to be faced with another boiler overhaul in 1908 followed by major overhauls and replacement parts in 1915, 1917 and 1919. All this maintenance work was unsurprising as this small loco was averaging 20,000km/year, and often had to help out with double-heading heavier trains that her newer colleagues could not handle single-handedly. Some relief came in 1920 when the LEB obtained some Mallet-type engines from the Yverdon-Ste Croix, and with the closure of Nestlé's Bercher plant in 1921. However, the LEB continued to maintain No.5, and had some modifications undertaken at SBB's Yverdon works in 1930, but her usefulness had now become marginal and she only ran

2376km/year on average between 1931 and 1934. In that year No.5 was sold for CHF5,000 to Energie Ouest Suisse to work on the construction site of the Dixence dam, now submerged under the waters contained behind the later Great Dixence Dam. So after travelling 743,639km in the service of the LEB (not bad going on a line only 24km long!), she was taken apart at Echallens in April 1934 and sent to the Valais to be reassembled and work on the project until 1935. Even then there is a record of a boiler inspection earlier that year whilst she was still on site, plus a note that a mandatory second water level indicator was missing. This would remain so until last winter's overhaul by the Blonay-Chamby!

After lying idle for six years No.5 was sold in 1941 to the Hilti construction company in Austria's Vorarlberg where she was reportedly used for road works and building dykes in the Tyrol's Inn Valley. Following another period of inactivity her next move was to be set on a plinth in Feldkirch, again in the Vorarlberg. In 1968, as the Blonay-Chamby Museum Railway (B-C) was being set-up a member, Reinhard Scholz, heard about the loco and contacted Hilti about acquiring it, but they noted that the machine was by then owned by the municipality. As Feldkirch wished to keep an engine on its plinth so the idea materialised that if No.5 was returned to the Suisse Romande a replacement engine would be found to do an exchange. This eventually took place in October 1973 when the LEB engine returned 'home' and an industrial machine from the Erzberg mine went to Feldkirch. After restoration work No.5 entered service on the B-C in 1985 and continued to operate until 2005. By this time another review of the locomotive is due and it was decided that serious work was needed on the thermal part of the machine, which still has its original 1890 boiler, and some associated parts that were installed in 1915. After consultation with ASIT (the Swiss supervisory body for boilers, etc.) this work was entrusted to a specialist workshop in Aargau, to be followed on December 2014 by an inspection supervised by ASIT's Chief Inspector who gave it the 'all clear' with no restrictions. An excellent Christmas present for all involved. Following mechanical renovation work over the past winter No. 5 will return to service during the B-C's Whitsun Festival that will take place between 23rd and 25th May. Here this 125 year old veteran will again operate with the LEB's G3/3 No.8, dating from 1910, which will travel from Echallens for the occasion. 

Jean-François Andrist is the President of the Blonay-Chamby Museum Railway.

More photographs on page 27.