

Zeitschrift: Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal
Band: - (2016)
Heft: 127

Artikel: 1941-2016 75 years of Luzern Trolleybuses : Mario Gavazzi reports on the 'Trolleybus days' at the Swiss Transport Museum
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-854054>

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1941-2016 75 years of Luzern Trolleybuses




The old and the new. Photo: Mario Gavazzi

Mario Gavazzi reports on the 'Trolleybus Days' at the Swiss Transport Museum

From the 20th to 22nd May the Swiss Museum of Transport (Verkehrshaus) in Luzern opened its doors for some special guests - old trolleybuses showing the history of electric bus traction in Switzerland. The special exhibition also marked the 75th anniversary of the commencement of trolleybus services in Luzern. The first part of the original route between Allmend and the Bahnhof opened on 7th December 1941, with the second section following on 25th January 1942. The delay was due to equipment supply problems – remember the new project was taking place during the height of Switzerland's 'National Emergency' (WW2). One of the principal vehicles present was VBL (Verkehrsbetriebe de Stadt Luzern) trolleybus No.25, one of ten units built in 1950 and in service until 1974/5. No.25 survived being scrapped, as it became a winter "overhead wire protection vehicle". For the 75th anniversary, VBL and 'vbl historic' took on a restoration programme that finished "just in time" for the three Trolleybus Days in May!

Other "Oldtimer" trolleybuses present included: Winterthur No.101; Biel/Bienne No. 22; a veteran from Zürich/Neuchâtel owned by the association Retrobus-Léman, and trolleybus No.2 from Lausanne, one of three units built in 1932 for the opening of the first City trolleybus line between Lausanne Gare and Ouchy. A pioneering 'inter-urban' form of trolleybus did run from Fribourg Gare to Posieux and Farvagny between 1911 until 1932, but due to its complex power collection system it was replaced by motor buses. Lausanne No.2 actually operated the first trolleybus service in Luzern as it was loaned by its home system to stand-in for the four new machines that the VBL had ordered, but were delivered too late! Also present during the Trolleybus Days was the Verkehrshaus' own ex-Winterthur overhead-wires special car. In addition to the old vehicles there were information desks manned by organisations representing the bus industry including: Hess; Bellach; ABB; Kummler & Matter, and a number of others. There was also the opportunity to organise an information desk for the

association vbl.historic (www.vbl-historic.ch) that was manned together with staff from the VBL (www.vbl.ch). To introduce children to trolleybuses VBL and Verkehrshaus organised small playmobile-type vehicles that could be 'driven' by youngsters around the museum area, whilst an adult provided the motive power. These 'buses' are available every day!

A book about the history of 75-years of trolleybus operation in Luzern was published to coincide with the exhibition. This has been written by Roman Zai (Chairman/President of the Swiss Trolleybus Association, www.trolleybus.ch) and Sandro Flückiger. This interesting history book is illustrated with lots of old and current photographs and is available from the Verkehrsbetriebe Luzern, Tribtschenstrasse 65, CH-6002 Luzern, or via mail@vbl.ch. 

Editor's Note: *The Luzern trolleybus system is also one of the 12 operating systems featured in the Swiss Railways Society publication 'Swiss Tram & Trolleybus Systems' available through Society Sales.*

The first city trolleybus in Switzerland, No. 2 from Lausanne, helped out for the first weeks at Luzern in 1941, because the four new trolleybuses for VBL were delivered too late.

Photo: Mario Gavazzi

