

On Sept. 13, while Jim O and I were in Switzerland, I took a side trip from Basel up to Freiburg, Germany to see the Hupac rolling highway operation there. I arrived at the Freiburg railroad station around noon, and after consulting a city map at the Deutchesbahn info counter and a meandering walk about 20 mins. north from the station, I estimate I arrived at the Hupac facility about 12:40. It is readily visible from an overhead road bridge (Kaiserwaldstrasse, or some such thing), but hard to figure how to get to. I had to go through a parking lot, down a residential alley, and up some steps to reach the area without trespassing on the truck roadways.

When I did reach the facility, a train was sitting on track 3 just having completed loading.



It consisted of 17 tractor-trailers on individual flatcars permanently affixed as a single platform, plus one passenger car, already occupied by the trucks' drivers. After a Swiss electric locomotive coupled on,



the train departed at 1:32.



There are 3 tracks in the Hupac terminal, and this first train left from track 3. Another empty equipment set sat on track 2, and track 1 was empty at the time of my arrival.

Next I observed the arrival of a loaded train from Navarro, Italy at 1:40 on track 1. The passenger car was uncoupled, a portable ramp positioned,



the drivers walked to their rigs,



and unloading commenced at 1:47.



At 2:03 the last of the 17 trucks had paraded forward to the unloading end.



The drivers chock and unchock their own trucks, with minimum supervision or involvement of Hupac employees.

About 2:20 a new set of equipment was spotted on track 3, so now all 3 tracks were full of empty sets ready to load. At 2:32 loading began of the trainset on track 2.



Loading finished at 3:02.



I left about 3:15 to return to the bahnhof for a 4 o'clock departure, so do not know what time this loaded train on track 2 left, but a locomotive was standing by to be coupled on.

My visit was facilitated by advance e-mail correspondence with Hupac's rolling highway manager Simone Croci-Torti, but everyone at the site was friendly and I had no trouble walking around and taking all the photos I wanted. The Italian truck drivers were a riot -- all mugging for the camera and wanting their pictures taken.



My initial conclusions from the visit are:

1. It works! This is important. The trucks load and unload with no difficulty and in reasonable time, around the clock, day in a day out.

2. It is significant that Hupac has conceived and designed this equipment/ service/terminal package. The equipment is different from anything else operating today, with some significant design elements that permit its decks to be low enough to accommodate large trucks without interfering with the overhead catenary and to permit loading the 17-car block from either end with only a small portable ramp.

3. This does not mean it is the way we would want to do it in the U.S. Swiss railroads are completely scheduled, so no doubt Hupac has specific times blocked for its trains. This can explain why a loaded train would have to sit so long before leaving. Trucks had to wait a long time in general to load. There was a lot of queuing up. All the trucks were weighed and measured before loading.



Drivers had to go into the terminal office and complete paperwork.



The sleeping car was primitive, converted from a European style coach with sections. One of the seats in each section had been removed and replaced by a bunk bed,



so presumably each section accommodates two drivers. The passenger car was not air-conditioned. It was a warm sunny day when I visited, and the car had been sitting in the yard, so the first thing drivers did when they boarded was open all the windows. The drivers boarding and leaving the trains carried their own pillows and bedrolls in addition to their grips.

The trains are turned once in route so they arrive with the trucks ready to drive off. Jim O thinks they are turned in Basel on this route. He photographed the train I saw depart Freiburg at 1:32 in Olten, Switzerland, well south of Basel, at 5:25 the same afternoon.



The trucks were facing forward on the train as opposed to facing backwards when they left Freiburg. The sleeping car was on the head end instead of the rear. This makes it easy for the locomotive to remove it when the train arrives and unloading begins, as I had seen.

Significantly, it does work and trains are loaded and unloaded around the clock. I doubt, though, if U.S. truckers would tolerate the delay in loading or the primitive on board accommodations.

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