Transalpin Stock Refurbished

Almost two years ago, in TR EU 205, we reported on the launch of Germany’s first privately-operated passenger service in recent years, the Hamburg-Köln Express (HKX). The service was launched on 23 July 2012, initially with a restricted service due to problems obtaining rolling stock. HKX has since boosted the service to up to three train pairs per day and this summer extended certain trains from Hamburg to the North Sea resort of Westerland (Sylt).

HKX’s original plan was to use refurbished former Austrian Railways (ÖBB) Class 4010 “Transalpin” EMUs on the service but the launch had to be put off several times due to the financial difficulties of the Polish firm chosen to carry out the refurbishment work, H Cegielski. In the end, HKX decided to launch the service with a motley selection of hired-in stock including some vintage coaches which had been “refreshed” and a push-pull set more suited to regional services. In the meantime, the operator finally gave up on Cegielski and recontracted the refurbishment to EuroMaint Rail Deutschland at the former East German Railways (DR) workshops in Delitzsch.

Work on the first six coaches was being finalised on 24 September 2014 when TR EU was one of just two magazines invited to see the result. By happy coincidence, the modified stock had been authorised for service in Germany the previous day. The authorisation covers two different layouts for the driving trailers (see below), plus an open layout intermediate trailer and a compartment trailer. The modernisation has mainly been of the coach interiors, the main work on the overall mechanical state of the stock, apart from a general overhaul, being on the brakes. These have had to be modified in order to raise the maximum speed of the stock from 150 to 160 km/h. Interior work has involved improving fire protection, plus the addition of closed circuit toilets, reservation displays on a band incorporating individual lighting above the seats, wi-fi equipment in all vehicles and sockets by seats. The seating, which was made to the very high standards of comfort of the late 1960s, has been retained as before (a change of layout would actually entail a new authorisation process...) and re-covered but is otherwise unchanged – legroom is exceedingly generous by modern standards. The vehicles’ ceilings and luggage racks are also unchanged. Neither has any change been made to the air conditioning, or the lack of it – in ÖBB days, some coaches had been fitted with air con, and others remained with simple forced air ventilation.

Driving trailers

In both refurbished driving trailers, the driver’s desk has been removed, but in one vehicle (D- RDC 55 80 17-75 003-2) the compartment between the cab and the passenger saloon has been opened up to allow the carriage of bikes. The compartment has six fold-down seats on either side. This section of the other coach, 55 80 17-75 021-4 (former 6010 001), is unmodified.

There are 42 seats, arranged 2+1 in the open saloon of each driving trailer (dt), and one toilet at the corridor end. Tables have been added between facing seats.

Henry Posner III, Chairman of HKX shareholder Railroad Development Corporation which is financing the refurbishment, would surely love to transform at least one dt into an observation car, but this project’s time has yet to come.

Compartment trailer

This is a conventional, former second class, vehicle (55 80 30-75 003-5) with ten compartments each containing six seats, and with one toilet. HKX has fitted one end of the coach out with a kitchen but this is not a feature likely to be extended to series vehicles.

Into service

One more move to be made before entering service will be to apply company vinyls to the purple exterior of the coaches.

It is hoped that the “Transalpin” stock (HKX is looking for a new nickname) can enter service with the timetable change in December so that the operator and its staff can assess whether the refurbishment is a success. The plan is to form two 3-car sets with one dt at each end – the trial refurbishment has covered four dt's and two intermediate cars. This will, of course, mean that staff will not be able to pass from one section to another, but can be considered as a temporary inconvenience – the final plan is to have 6-car sets with a dt at each end.

Open trailer

Significant work has been carried out on one end of this coach (55 80 29-75 002-0) in order to install a toilet compartment designed for wheelchair users and there is an adjacent area, with four fold-down seats, where two wheelchairs can be anchored. The rest of the vehicle has 49 seats, arranged 2+1.

Above: The first four completed coaches, awaiting branding.

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What next?
The time taken to complete refurbishment of the former ÖBB stock – HKX is still at the prototype stage – means that the company has had to find other sources of stock, with which it has gained considerable experience, from the bottom up. From rakes of only three coaches, the company has built up formations so that much longer rakes are used for one weekend rush – the most recent source of stock has been Belgian Railways (SNCB).
Having seen the first four “Transalpin” coaches one wonders whether this will be the right stock for the company’s business model.
It is likely to cause operational hitches due to the driving trailers and may be inflexible as coaches can only be coupled to each other—a driving trailer is needed to couple to a loco.
The stock is also so comfortable that HKX might find it is more worthwhile finding a use for it on rail cruises where higher charges can bring better returns...

EuroMaint at Delitzsch
Euromaint Rail is a company specialising in maintenance and upgrading of traction and rolling stock. Euromaint started life in 2001 when Swedish Railways (SJ) split off its maintenance division as SJ Maskindivision. The company went through a series of changes within Sweden, and in 2007 was acquired by private equity company Ratos. In the subsequent period, Euromaint expanded into Latvia, then crucially, in 2009, took over German firm RSM Group which gave the company facilities in Germany, Poland, the Netherlands and Belgium. The company is now the biggest privately-owned rolling stock maintenance company in Europe.

The Delitzsch facility is surprisingly busy. Whereas the workshops formerly overhauled all of DR’s coaching stock, today’s activities are more varied. The works is still carrying out maintenance and refurbishment – as well as the HKX work, staff are currently revamping a batch of former MRB Adtranz RegioShuttle RS1 (Class 650) railcars for Niederbarmriner Eisenbahn, one of which was on show at InnoTrans. However, the facility’s main work at present is putting new rolling stock through its paces in order to gain authorisation to enter service. Indeed, every EMU leaving Stacler’s Pankow (Berlin) plant – single-deck FLIRT and double-deck KISS units – is currently receiving attention from Euromaint. During our visit several Class 430 FLIRTs for Nordbahn were present as were two of the six Class 2300 KISS EMUs for Luxembourg Railways (CFL) and a Class 428 FLIRT for DB. Another activity is safe storage of stock for private concerns, including some preserved carriages.