First HKX Ex-ÖBB Carriages Refurbished

There has been a long period of silence over the fate of these vehicles, which are now being refurbished at the EuroMaint Rail works at Delitzsch, to which RDC Deutschland, HKX’s parent company, arranged a visit on 24 September 2014, to show the first four of them to be completed.

Initially the refurbishment contract was awarded to the H. Cegielski - FPS works in Poznan, but RDC Deutschland annulled it and, starting in November 2012, the stock was moved to Delitzsch (see R 6/12, p. 22), some 150 km southwest of Berlin. On 20 March 2013 HKX announced that the contract was re-awarded to the Delitzsch works (see R 2/13, p. 20). Initially this contract was to embrace the refurbishment of two end cars, which in ÖBB days had been driving cars, and four intermediate cars, to create a six-car rake. The contract also envisaged the refurbishment of two more six-car rakes, but this will not be fully confirmed until the first rake has been completed and authorised. Later the contract was modified, to involve four end cars and two intermediate ones.

At the H. Cegielski - FPS works the cars dealt with were subjected to basic transformations in 2011/12, substantial for authorisation testing. Later, it also became necessary to realise technical tests on some components used, to get these authorised, but these tests were static, not dynamic. Therefore authorisation by EBA was granted at a much later stage. In the end the test running involved a complete rake of cars, but these tests were only done to assess the quality of the work done, and were not part of the authorisation procedure. It took some time to complete all these tests, as there were few occasions when the test circuits at Velim were not booked by other users, and only some tests could be done on the Bitterfeld-Delitzsch line, near the works. However on 22 September 2014 HKX was able to announce that the EBA had granted approval for all four refurbished versions of the stock.

Most of the refurbishment was realised at Delitzsch during 2013 and 2014, since most of the earlier work realised by H. Cegielski - FPS was unsatisfactory and HKX had to have much of it redone. The six vehicles refurbished under the first contract are to be of four different types:
- two Class Aomdz ex-driving cars with an open saloon and a multi-purpose area, with 42 seats in total;
- a Class ABvmz intermediate car with 60 seats in compartments and a kitchenette;
- a Class Bombz second class open saloon intermediate car with an area for wheelchairs, 49 seats and four tip-up seats;
- two Class Apmz ex-driving cars with a 42-seat open saloon and a refreshment trolley storage compartment.

The HKX trains are one-class only, but the class lettering A and B has been retained, reflecting the original designation, as changing this would have caused a lot of paperwork. There will be therefore even more classes - the Class Apmz and Apmz former driving cars and Bpmz and Bvmz intermediate cars. But this matter is naturally not of great importance to passengers, nor does it affect authorisation procedures, provided that the characteristics of the vehicles declared for the authorisation are kept within the specifications for these four types. Therefore when further refurbishments are carried out, these will result only in vehicles belonging to one of the four types.

The passenger compartment in driving cars has fewer windows than in the intermediate ones, this being partly because the single pair of entrance doors has an intermediate position, and above all because these were originally first class vehicles, with a more spacious seating arrangement. Even in second class the seating is arranged in a very spacious manner, the amount of legroom being only about 50 mm less than in first class. The configuration of seating from ÖBB days has been retained, with the result that the seating is even more generously arranged than the most spacious accommodation on ICE trains.

The accompanying photos show the interior modifications that have been realised. There have also been modifications of a technical kind - the braking...
the wheelchair occupant can always sit facing the direction of travel. In the left-hand view, the multi-function part of the vehicle has in all 13 ordinary seats and four tip-ups, while the other part, separated by a partition located not quite at the halfway point, has 36 ordinary seats.

The left-hand photo also shows that the original luggage racks have been retained, but the edge moulding on them has been equipped with seat reservation displays and LED illumination. There are new power points in each car, two under each window, regardless of the seating configuration. WiFi reception is now possible, with a hotspot in each car. Window glazing was only replaced where necessary, since following their last modernisation for ÖBB the Class 4010s lost most of their operable windows when air conditioning was installed. Two windows on each side can be opened, as this was mandatory for authorisation, for safety reasons. Each car is now equipped with one WC cubicle, the WCs being new, of vacuum retention type. While operating for ÖBB the cars were equipped with the older vacuum type of WC. The inter-car gangway doors are fitted with photo-electric cells to facilitate opening, but this is not a new feature.

HKX timetables have remained practically unchanged since March 2013. There are 14 train pairs per week, and between one and three train pairs per day. Most of the services are not daily. In 2014 a through service between Köln and Westerland on Sylt was introduced, this provided between 27 June and 26 October. This was operated jointly with Veolia subsidiary Nord-Ostsee-Bahn, which operates the Marstallbahn service between Hamburg-Altona and Westerland, and which also provides drivers and maintenance for HKX’s trains. Northbound there was one service on Fridays and Saturdays, and one southbound on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. Since HKX uses some NOB stock, this was easy to arrange. North of Hamburg-Altona these were ordinary NOB services.

HKX services started up on 23 July 2012 (see R 4/12, pp. 64 - 65). Patronage was around 25,000 passengers per month, dropping off slightly before rising following an increase in service frequency in March 2013. During 2013 the monthly average patronage was 40,000 to 45,000 passengers, remaining stable at this level during the first nine months of 2014, even following the adjustment of the timetable in spring 2014 to meet the demand.

With a service frequency of between one and three train pairs daily, the demand for travel in the corridor serving the densely populated areas of the Ruhrgebiet and Hamburg is sufficiently high to generate adequate patronage, in spite of the frequent DB Fernverkehr services, domestic air services, and express coach services, which were deregulated early in 2013, becoming fierce competitors for all long distance train operators. HKX targets those passengers who are price-sensitive to fares. Given the large number of competing modes of transport and operators on the Hamburg to Köln corridor, it is very difficult to say what the effect of long distance express coach service de-regulation has had on HKX patronage.

RDC Deutschland is aware of how the travel market is changing, and the difficulties that might arise. Because of this it generally seeks new activities.
RDC Deutschland has announced its intentions to start up a Niebüll - Westerland car carrying service in December 2015. It has already requested a station at a point on the Sylt service, envisaging a half-hourly service daily, between 05.00 and 23.00. The current DB Syll Shuttle service is only half-hourly during peak period, and is otherwise hourly or every 90 minutes in each direction. There is no road link to the island, and rail provides the only easy and fast option for cars to access it.

At present this service is provided in a rather unusual way. DB operates it without any subsidisation, because it is highly profitable, but train paths are requested from DB Netz by Schleswig-Holstein Land and currently these have been allocated to DB until 2017. However Schleswig-Holstein has plans to put the whole service out to tender. Exactly how the land will respond to RDC’s proposal is hard to say at present, but it is likely that one operator should be sufficient to provide this shuttle service. RDC will therefore have to convince the Land that it can provide a better offer than can DB. This will probably mean demonstrating not only that it can step up service frequency, but also that it can improve quality, for instance by lowering fares and offering new facilities, such as WiFi reception in station waiting rooms, and an on-line reservation system for cars and passengers. Confident of its monopoly status, on 6 June 2014 DB ordered seven TRAXX DE locomotives for the Sylt Shuttles services (see R 3/14, p. 16).

Moreover, RDC Deutschland is carefully looking at the potential of activities in which DB is in steady retrenchment, these including overnight trains and long distance car-carrying services. One possibility cited by the company is a car-carrying service between Hamburg and Lüneburg in southwest Germany. DB’s service on this route is said to be in danger of withdrawal and could possibly cease in 2017 if not earlier. Another is an overnight service linking Paris with Berlin, DB’s service scheduled for withdrawal in December 2014. For this service though, it is reckoned that another business partner will have to be sought.

The possibility of extending the HKX service south from Köln to Frankfurt is also being investigated, and earlier in 2014 HKX applied to join the tariff union of the regional operators in Germany (including for example DB Regio, Nord-Ostsee-Bahn, metronom and trans regio) who accept rail tickets issued by one another. At present passengers who want to continue their journey beyond Köln or Hamburg by rail (such as on DB Regio services) have to buy separate tickets for the part of their journey not made by HKX trains. The converse would then be feasible as well, so that DB Regio and the local operators would be able to issue through tickets involving use of HKX trains.

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