

## The Life of Locomotive Road Number 617

Road number Ge 4/4 II 617 belongs to the first series of the class Ge 4/4 II thyristor locomotives placed into service by the Rhaetian Railroad in 1973. Even today, the Ge 4/4 II is the largest locomotive series ever purchased by the RhB. Twenty-three units still reliably provide their service. While the locomotives of the first series (611-620) were all put into operation in 1973, the entry into service of the second series that was similar to the first started in 1984 with road numbers 621 – 633. Although the first series was delivered in the old green RhB paint scheme, the second series was delivered in the new red scheme.

Our Ge 4/4 II 617 was put into operation on October 26, 1973. At that time, the aforementioned green RhB paint scheme was customary and each locomotive in both series was also given locomotive names from one of the communities on the RhB route network. To go with this, the coat-of-arms for the community was also applied to the locomotive. Road number 617 was thus christened with the name Ilanz. Ilanz itself is situated on the Vorderrhein on the Rhaetian Railroad route between Chur and Disentis and has become known primarily because of the Valser water that is still transshipped in Ilanz between trucks and the RhB. Ilanz currently counts over 4,000 inhabitants and is part of the Surselva Region.

Road number 617 can also look back on an excursion over the Oberalp Pass as well as on the Swiss standard gauge route network. In February of 1984, an avalanche in Disentis carried away and totally destroyed the RhB viaduct. The line was blocked until a detour line was created. In addition to passenger cars, three RhB locomotives were also trapped in Disentis, among them road number Ge 4/4 II 617. Since it was urgently needed in the strongest month of February, the RhB decided to bring the locomotive via the Oberalp Pass and the Furka Pass to Brig and load it there on an SBB carrier truck. The trip continued via the Lötschberg switching yard in Limmattal to Landquart. Road number 617 was pulled by RhB road number Ge 4/4 I 603 with FO pantographs installed on it from Disentis to Brig. On the rack route Disentis – Oberalp, road number HGm 4/4 61 pushed from behind and from Oberalp – Andermatt, it pulled in the front. The two RhB locomotives then ran on their own to Fürgangen-Bellwald. Road number HGm 4/4 62 awaited them there and hauled the two RhB locomotives to Glisergrud, where they were transloaded.

A special feature of the first series of the class Ge 4/4 II at that time was that these locomotives had lettering in relief and coats-of-arms. The latter have remained on ten units down to the present. The letters for the lettering have been replaced by letters made of adhesive foil. Our locomotive, road number 617, which was delivered initially in the green RhB paint scheme, was given the new red RhB scheme as part of an overhaul starting in 1984. At the same time, the letters in relief were also replaced but the coat-of-arms in relief were kept.

Yet the change in the paint scheme from green to red was not the only external change in the previous service years that our locomotive, road number 617, and the entire series had to undergo. By 2003, about 30 years, locomotive 617 with its round lamps on the ends characterized the look of this locomotive type. In the past, headlights for the ends of the locomotives had been selected from round ones available in the truck market. Over time, these lamps became less common and the RhB was finding it difficult to get suitable repair parts in the future for these round lamps. The RhB therefore decided as early as the turn of the millennium to replace the round lamps with new, modern rectangular headlights. The lamps were not the only things that were no longer up-to-date. The conventional control electronics in analog technology had also aged. Road number Ge 4/4 II 617 thereby served in 2003 as the

prototype for an extensive refit program that the RhB conducted on all 23 locomotives on its own in the main shop in Landquart.

In the process, the class Ge 4/4 II units were given scheduled body and truck overhauls, which are the same in detail as an R3 overhaul. In addition, over the course of the refit program about 50 conversion locations were implemented and executed. Among these were replacement of the compressor and the vacuum pump in the first series of the class Ge 4/4 II, to which our 617 belongs. Furthermore, the old analog technology was replaced by new computerized control technology from Siemens Krauss Maffei. Externally, the locomotives were equipped with an additional, heated rearview mirror. The so-called park position is also new. It is already being used on the class Ge 4/4 III. The park position allows the locomotive to be left under voltage when changing cabs or after parking the locomotive. Externally, the park position can be recognized by means of two pantographs in contact with the catenary.

After a somewhat longer than planned break-in period, the completely freshly painted Ge 4/4 II 617 was officially put back into service on September 13, 2004. This refit allows the Rhaetian Railroad to use the 23 units of the class Ge 4/4 II with their high level of reliability daily for the next 20 to 25 years.

During the following six years, the locomotive was used in its red RhB paint scheme pulling passenger, freight, and maintenance trains on the entire RhB route network (except for the Bernina line). Road number 617 did its last days in operation for the time being in the red RhB paint scheme in September of 2010. This locomotive lettered with the name Ilanz was moved to the repair shops in Landquart. Adjustment work was again done to the ends of the locomotive. Road number 617 was equipped with new, so-called LBT plug-in sockets to the right and left of the Grisons coat-of-arms. Yet the ends were not the only things that had to undergo a change. Road number 617 also was given its first advertising for the firm REPOWER. The new thing with this advertising was the red locomotive frame that initially took getting used to for many people. The advertising theme extended down to the frame. Road number Ge 4/4 II 617 did its first meters / feet in the new look on September 30, 2010. Henceforth it formed the image of an advertising medium in the new design at the head of all kinds of trains. Over the course of six years, road number 617 was caught on many memory cards and movies, until the end of December 2017, its last day of operation as an advertising medium for REPOWER. Road number Ge 4/4 II 617 was chosen as the medium for the anniversary message. Yet before road number 617 could be used in the new LGB design, the old adhesive sheets had to be removed, the locomotive had to be cleaned and painted, and the new anniversary design had to be applied to the locomotive.