

RegioJet's New Astra Carriage On Tour

The first opportunity the general public had to see this long-awaited vehicle built by ASTRA Vagoane Călători was at InnoTrans. Following its exhibition in Berlin the carriage was taken on a promotional tour to the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

The carriage is designated Class **Bmpz**, and numbered 61 81 20-90 001-3. It is designed for a top service speed of 200 km/h, is 26,400 mm long over buffers, is 2,825 mm wide and weighs 44 t tare. Its design is essentially similar to that of those batches of Eurofima carriages, which are represented in RegioJet's fleet by the latter's ex-ÖBB and SBB stock. It is mounted on Type Y32 bogies, built by ASTRA under a licence granted by the former manufacturer De Dietrich, Reichshoffen (now part of Alstom). The carriage is an open second class saloon, with 80 seats and two WC cubicles. Each of the new cars costs slightly over 1 million EUR.

The carriage is **registered** in Austria, and therefore it was approved by the pertinent authorisation body, BMVIT (Bundesministerium für Verkehr, Innovation und Technologie, the Ministry for Transport, Innovation and Technology). This took place prior to InnoTrans, and was realised quite rapidly, since the new cars are of identical design to those used for the CFR Calatori carriages used in EC trains linking Romania with Hungary and Austria. The main design difference involved the electrical equipment, and under the cross-acceptance strategy it was possible to get the vehicle authorised for the Czech rail network. On 10 September 2014 the carriage was allocated its 12-digit EVN by

the Wien-based Schieneninfrastruktur-Dienstleistungsgesellschaft (SCHIG), a rail infrastructure advisory company which works closely together with BMVIT.

The first stop on the tour following InnoTrans was at Praha hl. n., where the carriage was exhibited to the media on 6 October. Later the same day it continued to Bratislava, forming part of a demonstration rake of RJ stock comprising three first class carriages and a dining car. One objective here was to present the operator's stock and services to the general public in advance of the start-up of regular services in **Slovakia**. Another objective was to use the train as part of a train crew training programme prior to the start of these services. The train was open to the public in Bratislava during 7 October 2014, and later that day departed for Žilina and Košice. During the night of 7/8 October a driver training run was made from Krásna nad Hornádom on the south-eastern outskirts of Košice, to Žilina and back, the train being ready on 8 October for a presentation in Košice. That was the final day of the presentation tour, and the train then returned to the Czech Republic.

Initially, RJ intended to start the public service between Praha, Ostrava, Žilina and Košice with the introduction of the new timetable in December



The interior of the Class Bmpz ASTRA carriage was designed in partnership with the Czech architect Patrik Kotas, who has been involved in many transport projects, and Clagi-Coplax, a Romanian company with Italian roots, which is involved in carriage interior design, and which a few years ago was asked by RJ to assist in the design projects for rebuilds of older carriages. **The carriage has a typical second class seating configuration, found in usual modern vehicles of similar dimensions. There are 80 seats in a 2 + 2 configuration**, around 60 % more than in RegioJet's Class Ampz carriages with Relax or Business class accommodation. But the latter are exceptionally comfortable vehicles, with 32 seats in a 2 + 1 configuration and 16 seats in four-seat compartments. Many of RJ's carriages are compartment vehicles, with 66 seats in Standard class. The 2 + 2 seating configuration results in a narrower aisle width, and also means that the train catering person appointed to the ASTRA carriage has rather more work to do, since the policy of allocating one catering person to one vehicle will still apply. However, the strategy of accommodating more passengers in one vehicle is a sensible one from the point of view of operating economies.



The Bmpz carriage during the media presentation held on 6 October 2014 at Praha hl. n. (main station). The dining car, positioned immediately behind the locomotive, was exhibited too. Although the ASTRA carriages are externally fairly similar to RJ's earlier stock, they can be identified by the text panels adjacent to the entrance doors (one per side). The guiding slat for the door can also be seen at the bottom of the sidewall. The buffer plates are covered in Nylatron, a plastic substance incorporating silicon, which decreases friction and does not require greasing. It meets TSI requirements and those specified by DB for stock used on push-pull services.

2014, simultaneously with the launch of LEO Express's FLIRT service and ČD's Class 680 Pendolino service, both on the same route. ČD's service is to replace the daytime locomotive-hauled train on this route, the operator endeavouring to make its offer more attractive in the face of competition.

But by the early autumn RJ decided it had sufficient spare carriages to offer a daily public service **starting** up on 11 October 2014, this involving an eastward extension of trains IC 1003 and 1010 (so far Praha to Haviřov and back) to and from Košice. Departure from Praha hl. n. is at 7.44, and arrival at Košice at 16.46. Return from Košice is at 7.22, reaching Praha hl. n. at 16.16. Two rakes of stock are required to maintain the daily service on this 700 km long route. The website seat reservation system indicates the use of rakes of up to nine carriages, with the operator stating that rakes of up to ten carriages are envisaged.

The trains incorporate a dining car, where seat reservation is not required, contrary to the operator's previous obligatory reservation policy. WiFi connections (standard practice on RJ services in the Czech Republic) will be available on the train within Slovakia from December 2014. The cheapest Internet single fares for the 703 km Praha to Košice run are around 9 EUR in Standard accommodation, slightly over 20

EUR in Relax accommodation, and over 24 EUR in Business accommodation.

It is planned to use the new ASTRA-built carriage on this service, but the vehicle can appear marshalled in the trains EC 1011 and 1006 linking Praha with Ostrava and Žilina. Ordinary Standard fares are to be charged for its use.

This initial period of operation is being used to source **teething troubles**, and to realise certain improvements. Already prior to the start of operation it was decided to fasten the glass partitions within the saloon more securely, and to remove the footrests under the seats adjacent to the aisle, since none are fitted to the seats adjacent to the windows, because there is no space for them, on account of the heating duct, running along the bottom of the sidewall. It would not have been fair to offer footrests to around 50 % passengers, but not to the other 50 %.

Once the carriage has undergone test period, it is planned to return it to the ASTRA works, so that required modifications can be realised. RJ anticipates taking delivery of the nine others on order during the first half of 2015. Moreover, negotiations are in progress over the possibility of ordering up to 30 more carriages. RegioJet's owner, Radim Jančura, states that the delay in delivery of the ASTRA carriages resulted from the decision to abandon plans for RJ and DB to provide a joint Praha - Berlin



Photo: RJ

The carriage's FUNTORO information system was supplied by the Bratislava company MOLPIR, which is the importer of this Taiwanese brand (see R 3/14, p. 35). Funtoro, one of the most interesting features of the new vehicle, is also widely installed on the long distance road coaches operated by RegioJet's parent concern, Student Agency. In the ASTRA carriage the displays for FUNTORO are installed in the seat backs, with a reading spotlight provided on the lower edge of each display. Each of these seats, Grammer's IC 3000 model, is fitted with a 230 V power socket.

- Hamburg service. This abandonment initially resulted in a deferment of the requirement for new rolling stock.

There is not much publicity being given to the start, in December 2014, of RegioJet's **Bratislava - Žilina - Košice** services. These trains will require haulage by three multi-voltage electrics, equipped with on-board ETCS, but so far no information has been officially released concerning what type these will be, or from whom they will be leased. There is a suggestion that Vectrons hired from ELL will be used, but in Bratislava on 8 October Radim Jančura hinted at the use of TRAXXes. This might have been simply a reaction to the fact that the authorisation of Vectrons in Slovakia has not yet been completed.

However there could be complications too with the use of TRAXXes, since at present only a few specific F140MS **locomotives**, equipped with the latest software version 7/7A, have been approved for use in Slovakia, under test mode. They are for use by four specified freight operators (RJ is not among the

latter), and are only allowed to run at speeds up to 140 km/h, and with their ETCS equipment switched off. For RegioJet, having locomotives equipped with on-board ETCS will be essential, since service timings require 160 km/h running between Bratislava and Trenčín.

The Praha - Žilina - Košice trains are to be staffed by Czech catering teams, while those from Bratislava to Žilina and Košice will have Slovakian catering teams.

RJ is keen to **expand** in Slovakia. Pressure is being applied to the Slovakian Ministry for Transport for the company to be allowed to take over the ZSSK's InterCity Bratislava - Košice services, RegioJet claiming that it can do so without the need for subsidisation. The Ministry states, however, that this service will be subjected to tendering.

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Photos unless cited:



Photo: Dalibor Palko

The five-car RJ rake used for the presentation tour, with the new ASTRA carriage immediately behind the locomotive, passing through Kolín zastávka en route from Praha to Bratislava on 6 October 2014. Haulage was provided by PKP Cargo's 189 153, hired by the Czech company LokoTrain, which has for several years been re-hiring PKP Cargo locomotives to Czech and Slovakian operators (usually railfreight ones). The hire of 189 153 was necessary, since at present RJ only has a fleet of 3 kV DC Class 162s, and the tour took the train to parts of the Slovakian network electrified at 25 kV AC. En route from Bratislava to Košice the Polish Europrinter was exchanged for one of RegioJet's own Class 162s at Žilina.



A luggage stack designed for large items of luggage, and a WC cubicle in the new ASTRA carriage.



*Photo:
Jaromír Pernička*

Although RegioJet is now ordering new carriages, it is continuing to modernise its older fleet members in the Pars nova's Šumperk works. A contract was recently awarded for the refurbishment of 14 Class Ampz carriages. The work involves the installation of new power supply equipment, new air-condition, individual HVAC control systems for each compartment, replacement of windows, and a complete repaint, interior and exterior.

Another separate contracts for the window replacement and repaint of exterior and interior in the area of entrance vestibules are awarded. Pars nova has already dealt with two batches, one of three and one of four carriages, and in early autumn was dealing with a third batch, this comprising four carriages. **This photo was taken on 11 June 2014, and shows some of the Ampz (ex ÖBB) carriages awaiting refurbishment.**

Another works being realised in Šumperk is the overhaul of the Fiat Type Y 0270S bogies on which RegioJet's older carriages are mounted. Work was completed in September 2014 on first two bogies of the ex-SBB Class Amz cars, and a further nine carriages are to be dealt with soon.

162.118 hauling RegioJet's EC 1003 service from Praha to Košice on 12 October 2014, against the background of the High Tatra in the vicinity of Štrba. This was the second day that this service ran.

Photo: Tomáš Kuchta

