

**VARIED OUTPUT**

FBW also built a wide range of buses at its Wetzikon site, including articulated models, trams and trolley buses — several of which are still working today in Chile.



This imposing 4x4 Type 70 was one of several purchased by the Swiss Post Office in 1957 for general-purpose use

**F**BW is not a marque known to everyone. Indeed, the tiny Swiss manufacturer built fewer than 7000 trucks, buses and trailers in a period that spanned almost 80 years — hardly a world record (Volvo builds 7000 trucks and tractor units a year for the UK market alone).

But what makes the FBW name special is the widely held belief that vehicles bearing its name were among the best engineered to be found anywhere in the world. In Switzerland, the name FBW and the term 'legendary reliability' are almost interchangeable.

The company was founded in 1908 by Franz Brozincevic, who moved from Yugoslavia to Switzerland as a young man in 1893 and who later established a factory in the town of Wetzikon. He built his first truck in 1910, and a decade later was producing

60 to 80 vehicles a year, many of which were destined for the Swiss Army.

In 1934, the company produced its first diesel engine: an 8.5-litre inline-six capable of developing 100 bhp. And 15 years later, the first underfloor engine built in Switzerland was introduced. This was an 11-litre unit that developed 145 bhp and which enjoyed immediate success. Meanwhile, in 1947 the first forward-control cab was revealed, this being delivered on a 4x2 chassis to Gebr. Von Ow Transport from Hinwil, a garrison town only a few minutes from Wetzikon.

**Getting a grip**

Because the topography of Switzerland requires that vehicles have excellent traction as well as adequate power and gearing, FBW introduced a 4x4 diesel-powered truck in 1950. At that time, all trucks were

**RUNS LIKE CLOCKWORK!**

How a little-known Swiss truck manufacturer built some of the world's most reliable and respected commercial vehicles



By Martin Phippard  
PHOTOGRAPHY MARTIN PHIPPARD / PETE CONNOCK



1974 Type 80V dry bulk was plated at 25 tonnes gvw



The 'heavy transport' headboard is a bit optimistic for this little 13-tonner



Type AS50V L70 identifies this tidy 13-tonner from 1951

subject to a 2.3 m width limit and most were two-axle rigids, as larger vehicles experienced problems on the mountain passes that incorporated numerous hairpin bends.

It was not until the 1960s that the company offered a range of stylish, modern cabs along with an assortment of more powerful engines. And in 1968, the first FBW automatic gearbox entered service.

A total of 2190 FBW trucks were registered in Switzerland in 1970, including two- and three-axle rigids and some two-axle tractor units. The rigids were configured as 6x2, 6x4 and 6x6 vehicles, with many featuring hub-reduction axles. Heavy-haulage tractor units also featured among the load-carrying trucks.

Four-axle rigids joined the product range in 1976, and a new cab was launched in 1980. Almost 30 years later, this still

manages to maintain a clean, modern appearance. However, at this point Mercedes had made a bid for the specialist manufacturer, and further development was curtailed.

FBW continued to build trucks until 1985, at which time the doors of the Wetzikon factory closed for the last time. The last truck to leave the plant was a 4x2 plated for operation at 16 tonnes gvw.

### Show and tell

To celebrate the marque and allow enthusiasts a chance to get a closer look at these legendary Swiss vehicles, a total of 178 trucks and buses were present at the 2009 FBW Show held this year in Hinwil, near Wetzikon.

Organised by the Swiss FBW Club, the event attracted visitors from as far afield as Sweden, Holland and Great Britain, many >

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Right-hand drive was still commonplace in the mid-1960s, as evidenced by this 1964 Type L70



### STICKING TO THE RULES

Swiss road transport has always been of interest because legislation there demanded high-performance vehicles capable of handling the difficult terrain. As a result, vehicles were required to have a minimum 12 bhp-per-tonne rating and be equipped with a supplementary braking system, such as a retarder.

1970 Type L50/70  
16-tonne gvw  
three-way tipper



Heavy-duty 4x4  
as employed by  
Swiss Railways



Smart 11.5-tonner  
with lightweight  
dropsides from 1962





Beautifully preserved Type Z wood-burner from 1927 was one of the oldest at the show

### WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Conspicuous by their absence from the FBW Show were any of the 23 8x4 trucks built during the final decade of the company's existence. Of course, such is the quality of the FBW marque that it's eminently possible all these are still working today, and the time has not yet arrived for an 8x4 restoration project!

bringing their classic restored vehicles (though not necessarily FBWs) with them.

Trucks ranging in age from a 1918 Swiss-built Berna to a sleek and stylish 1976 forward-control FBW were on display, and the levels of restoration and presentation were first class. It would appear Swiss classic truck devotees are content with restoring their vehicles to their original condition and leaving it at that, with no attempt to overdo the job by adding garish 'extras'.

### Run to the hills

In addition to the static display, a two-hour road run took in some of Switzerland's scenic landscape. It offered participants magnificent views of some of the country's aquamarine inland lakes, and proved popular with vehicle-owners and guests alike. In fact, some of the narrower sections demonstrated exactly why it was necessary

to limit vehicles to 2.3 m width, and why most early trucks were built with the controls and steering wheel on the right-hand side. Even so, meeting and passing any vehicle on these narrow sections required maximum concentration.

Several Dutch trucks — including a superb B-61 Mack coupled to a low-loader and a smattering of DAF, Scania and Volvo vehicles — were on display, though relatively few of these took part in the road run. Presumably the somewhat sloth-like pace of some of the older vehicles would have meant newer, more powerful trucks would have had to spend the entire circuit in low gear.

Among the more interesting vehicles present were a 1927 wood-burning FBW, a pretty little 1950s German-built Borgward, and a fine forward-control Austrian-made Graf und Stift from 1968. ■

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# RUNS LIKE CLOCKWORK!



Stylish Type L70/35 16-tonner looks way too cool to have been a tipper!



This forward-control Type 50 16-tonner looked as though it had just left the showroom



1948 Type AS50 with typical Swiss bodywork



Still crazy (about my truck) after all these years!



The FBW is employed on steel distribution within 100 km of the company's Bern HQ

# 29 NOT OUT!

A shining example of an FBW half-cab 16-tonner is still hard at work hauling steel in Switzerland

By Martin Phippard  
PHOTOGRAPHY MARTIN PHIPPARD / PETE CONNOCK

**E**vidence of the reliability and longevity of the Swiss-built FBW truck is not hard to find in the land of lakes, mountains and cuckoo clocks. In fact, on our second day of travel we stumbled across a 1980 half-cab 16-tonner still going about its business of hauling steel rods. And despite the somewhat cramped driving accommodation and lack of any obvious luxuries, the driver loved it!

it has reportedly suffered no mechanical problems whatsoever.

## Steeler's wheels

Equipped with a small on-board crane mounted behind the half-cab and a lightweight ally plank dropside body by Carrosserie Hess, the vehicle carries out deliveries to steel stockists within a 100 km radius of Bern. Featuring spoke-type front wheels and a blue paint job, the truck is

Therefore, it would appear restoration projects are probably quite straightforward in Switzerland. You just have to find a suitable FBW that's still working and wait for it to retire.

Of course, this presupposes you outlive the working life of the FBW. But if you do, then it's possible a can of polish and a tank of fuel will be about as much 'restoration' as you need to carry out. Good luck lads! ■

“Featuring spoke-type front wheels and a blue paint job, the truck is typical of Swiss vehicles from the 1970s and early 1980s.”



Underfloor FBW 12-litre diesel is rated at 230 bhp



Wilson SCG gearbox is an unusual installation



Proud driver says the FBW has "never missed a beat"



The FBW name is synonymous with quality and longevity



The half-cab has always been popular with steel carriers



Cramped cab interior certainly discourages hitch-hikers!