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Switzerland revisited

ONE hears dreadful stories about the way things are developing in Switzerland today – increasing crime, increasing unemployment, separatism in the Jura, falling standards of behaviour and so on.

It is all very worrying and makes one wonder what is really happening.

Since circumstances are such that I am temporarily resident in France within easy reach of the Swiss border, I have been able to make a number of brief visits to the country to look up my old friends and see what changes, if any, have taken place in the 12 years since I last lived there.

My first journey took me from Basle, via Berne, to Lausanne, and then to Aubonne. It was in most respects a 'sentimental' journey.

A superficial view from the train revealed only minor changes in the beautiful Swiss countryside. The mountains, lakes and forests are as lovely as ever and little different from when I last saw them.

It was true that there seemed to be rather more negro and oriental faces to be seen in the cities than I remembered, but all that I could think of was seeing all my friends again. The closer I got to Aubonne the more familiar were the sights and the more excited I became.

I was disappointed to see the amount of industrial development to the south, but the old part of the town was almost exactly as I remembered it, despite the fact that some of the shops were under new management.

Like everywhere else, people complained about rising prices, the weather, and the fact

Temporarily resident in France, **PETER SLATER** recounts his personal feelings of a recent trip back home – including a meeting with Hermann Sutter – keeper of motorcycles

that things were not what they used to be. True there are problems – and more on the horizon – but I saw no real evidence of impending catastrophe or the disappearance of the Swiss way of life.

More disturbing from that point of view was Zurich. I had never before really visited the city so I had no way of telling if the conditions that I found were changed or not.

It was during another visit to my friends in the north of Switzerland that Heinz took me to see the centre of Zurich, and I was sad to see a Swiss city peopled by folk who looked as if they would have been more at home in parts of America or even Holland.

There was litter everywhere and every other building seemed to be a disco or bar each with its own stripper or go-go girl. I can only hope that these conditions will be confined to this limited area and not allowed to spill over into the rest of Switzerland.

Returning to the real Switzerland, I found that there had been a lot of building, both residential and industrial, and I wondered if

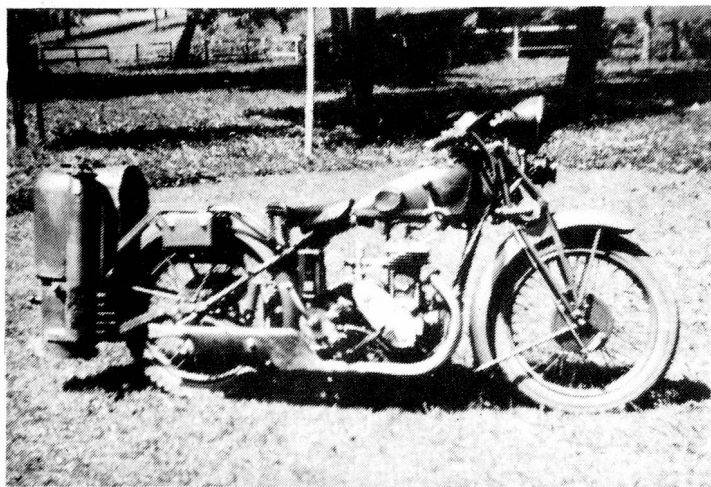
the country could really afford to lose arable land in such quantities. Otherwise, I was happy with what I saw.

Obviously it is impossible to get a real idea of conditions on such brief visits as I have been able to make, but it does seem to me that Switzerland has good cause to celebrate its 700th anniversary in seven years time.

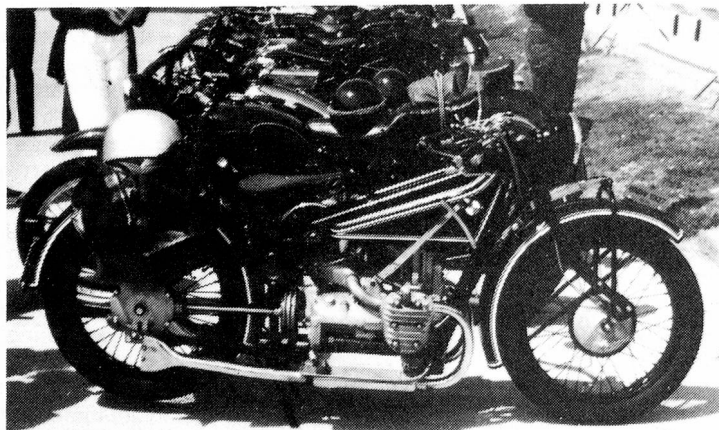
As in other countries, there is an increasing energy requirement, and Switzerland is trying to meet this requirement in a number of ways – one of which is the building of atomic power stations.

This naturally led to controversy, but unlike some authorities the Swiss go to great lengths to inform the public about every facet of nuclear power generation.

I was able to visit a cross between a museum, exhibition and information bureau near the Beznau nuclear power plant at Döttlingen. The exhibition is open to all and provides information on nuclear power generation, the disposal of radioactive waste, and the relative merits and state of develop-



1931 Condor



BMW from 1927

ment of other methods of power generation, such as solar power, wind power, and so on.

Perhaps appropriately, one can see nearby the largest water-wheel in Europe, and probably one of the oldest. Sadly it no longer operates, but it is still very impressive. If all the technology makes one hungry, there is the excellent Schloss Böttstein restaurant to hand.

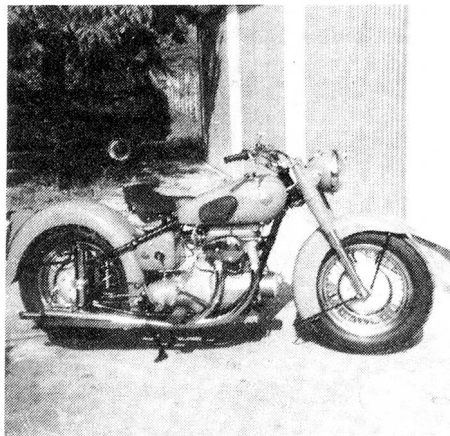
It is a tribute to the honesty of the Swiss that, when the nuclear monitoring service says that the effect of nuclear waste on the environment will be constantly monitored and action taken to prevent any adverse effects, no one questions the matter. There are many places where such statements are regarded with great scepticism.

As usual, I was treated with great kindness by everyone I met and made to feel at home. This was all the more remarkable in Eien, where Heinz lives, because I cannot speak a word of German.

Eien, although only a tiny village, is full of fantastic characters, not least of whom is my great friend Heinz Bellersheim. Some of my readers may remember him from one of my previous articles.

He is an exceptionally good modern artist who works mostly with iron to make everything from candlesticks to pictures. Although I can recognise his talent, I have to admit that all his work is not to my taste.

He wants to become the leading personality in his field in Europe and I shall be very surprised if he does not achieve his ambition.



Sunbeam S7 500cc – 1954

One of the many interesting residents of Eien/Kleindöttingen is Hermann Sutter, who, at the age of seventy odd, roars around the countryside on a 1954 British Sunbeam motorcycle, which he has lovingly restored to immaculate condition.

He has a veritable museum full of ancient motorcycles and cars which have either been restored or are in the process of being so.

Besides the Sunbeam these include a Swiss 1926 Condor, a 1927 BMW, and a 1931 Condor fitted with a wood burner for use during the Second World War.

I have to admit that, although I knew of cars that ran on gas generated by a plant fitted to a trailer and similar arrangements, I never realised that anything similar had been done for motorcycles.

To sum up my impressions of Switzerland today, I would say that despite my misgivings about Zurich and the silliness that still disturbs the good people of the Jura from time to time, the nation is still sound at heart and should be able to handle the problems of the next 100 years as efficiently as it has those of the preceding seven centuries.

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