

Yachting in Swiss waters

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YACHTING IN SWISS WATERS

Yachting continues the old traditions of the days of sail at a time when shipping as a whole has gone over to steam or oil. In spite of all the striking progress engineering has made in our age, man's ability to sail the seven seas with only the winds of heaven to help him still compels admiration. Amongst seafaring nations, sailing is undoubtedly more popular than in land-locked countries. For one thing, a seagoing people's attitude to ships is shaped by the national necessity to do business on the great waters, and the waterways of maritime countries provide a much better connection with world trade than those mountainous countries in Central Europe where even the individual lakes are separated by considerable differences in altitude. Yet in Switzerland, Upper Italy, Austria and South Germany, yachting has become a very popular sport and the number of yachtsmen, complete with boats, visiting each other's regattas grows from year to year. What is it that makes the Swiss lakes so popular with yachtsmen? First of all, it must be remembered that our lakes differ very much among themselves as a result of climatic conditions — witness the enormous contrast between the Lake of Constance and the Lake of St. Moritz. However, most Swiss lakes are alpine in character, which means that the yachtsmen must be prepared for inconstant, highly variable winds which are sometimes light and sometimes of gale force. And these conditions may vary even from one part of the lake to another; the stretches of water set amidst the mountains are always much more incalculable than those lying in the Central Plain. This is explained by the fact that the prevailing weather conditions cannot penetrate into the narrow valleys because the steep sides exclude the wind or at least channel it in a particular direction.

To take the Lake of Uri as an example, it is hard to imagine what other direction the wind can take (apart from local thermal winds) unless it be straight up and down the lake. Natural conditions make the föhn the dominant wind here because this arm of the lake is too sheltered to admit a wind from the opposite direction. The föhn, which often reaches gale force, gains extra impetus from the funnel-like shape of the lake and its enormous pressure gives rise to a heavy, steep sea. Schiller is right in his "William Tell" when he says that the wind "rebounds from the Devil's cathedral"; this is a reference to phenomena caused by reflection of the wind from the mountain sides, so that it is hurled upon the yachtsman literally from all quarters and thus imparts a cross motion to the waves. And then there is the almost complete absence of refuges or landing places on the shore—a fact which can spell disaster for a yacht that has been damaged. Another peculiar feature of these waters is the katabatic squall. This is the stream of air cataracting down the steep mountain side like a vertical wind which can flatten a yacht and leave virtually no way of escape. As it is impossible to see early signs of foul weather blowing up because the view is intercepted by the towering sides, great vigilance must be exercised when sailing in these waters. On the other hand many mountain lakes have winds that blow regularly and are reasonably reliable, being largely independent of the general weather situation. The tourist offices on the lakes of the Bernese Oberland refer to these "scheduled" winds whose regularity allows the yachtsman to time his sailing trips to fit in with them. These large thermal movements of air usually attain the strength of a fresh breeze and often afford an opportunity for memorable runs. Setting off in the dawn grey on the Lake of Thun, heading for the great dark blue peaks whose summits are just catching the first golden gleam of the morning light is an

unforgettable experience everyone should enjoy once in a lifetime.

The most important yachting centres in Switzerland, however, lie on large lakes where, in the course of years, major fleets have been built up with traditions going back a long way. The Lakes of Geneva and Constance are in some respects like large open stretches of water where the yachtsman can make long runs, see changes of weather in good time and enjoy more constant winds.

Both these lakes are international and yachting shares this characteristic to the full. The most famous events on these lakes are the "Semaine de la voile" in Geneva and the Lake of Constance Week. Whereas the "Semaine" is held on the Petit Lac (the Geneva basin in contrast to the Haut Lac, the broad upper portion of the Lake of Geneva surrounded by the Savoy Alps and the Valais mountains) the regatta week on the Lake of Constance moves round from town to town, and is shared between three countries. The Lakes of Bienne and Neuchâtel make splendid sailing waters for yachtsmen and parts of the shores are still unspoiled. The winds there have the local Jurassian temperament. The Lake of Morat with its sailing club also belongs to this trio of lakes — The Basle Club cruises on the reservoir at Augst where it also has its clubhouse. A splendid example of enthusiasm!

Groups of yachting devotees are getting together even on the small lakes, and rightly so too, for who would not enjoy their scenic beauties, to which we can devote only a few words in these pages. Would you fancy a sail past the old battlefield of Sempach? Does the idyllic Schloss Greifensee appeal to you?

How about the romantic Walensee or the highly popular riviera of the Lake of Zug? Everywhere you will find yachting in full swing. Much-lauded Lugano has its Club nautico del Ceresio, so the Swiss Ticino is also in the picture where yachting is concerned.

The Lake of Zurich occupies a special position. It is long and narrow, running roughly from east to west in the upper portion and north to south in the lower part. Sailing along its length, we witness a changing landscape. When the north wind is blowing it is sometimes possible to sail all the way from Zurich to Rapperswil in a single leg. The record time for this stretch of 19 miles is less than two hours.

The contrasts of scenery here are in no way inferior to those of the Lake of Geneva. The upper portion of the lake is reached through the great dam of masonry cutting off the eastern end and is an extraordinarily rewarding goal for week-end trips. Here there are the sand-banks of Nuolen, the steep wooded slope of the Buchberg and the broad canals round the mouth of the Linth. The Lake of Zurich also has its caprices, and when a storm whips its water, the waves surge against the shore. It would take too long to pay a just tribute to all the possible sailing waters in Switzerland. The old hand gradually gets to know the best places and enjoys visiting the events and receptions arranged by the local clubs.

Why do Swiss yachtsmen go on land journeys together with their yachts? The reason is surely that our country is so small and there are no waterways linking up the various sailing waters. The short distances make such visits possible even when there is little time to spare. One thing is certain: whether we journey far or near, we get to know a new lake with a different kind of scenery, different water and wind conditions. And the number of Swiss yachtsmen taking part in regattas held in foreign waters is growing every year.

Anyone who has once loaded his ship for transportation will never boggle at the job again. Transport by rail is quick and convenient. Nowadays yachtsmen are using their own trailers in increasing measure. These are hitched behind a car like a caravan and make an excellent means of transport for small vessels. The very smallest can be carried on the car roof.

Switzerland is a magnificent country for the yachting fraternity. Northerners envy us our long season, which lasts from March to November. The costs of yachting depend on the choice of ship. There are boats to suit every purse and bring the joys of yachting within the reach of all. The cheapest sailing dinghies do not cost more than ski outfits for two persons; the sum that would buy a motor scooter would also purchase a second-hand boat of the popular Snipe or Pirate class. You will not go far wrong if you choose a boat which seems to be fairly widely used on your lake.

(By courtesy "Switzerland Revue of S.N.T.O.)

INTERNATIONAL CHOIRS AND THE GOLDEN ROSE

The International Choirs' Competition is one of those events which have made Montreux known as a city of music. This year it will be held from 11th to 16th April just during Lake Léman's spring season, at the time when the narcissi are in bloom. About thirty glee clubs, some even from the countries of the Eastern Block, have registered their participation in this unique competition. They offer guarantee, as it were, that all uniformity will be avoided and that music lovers will be able to take their choice among performances of every kind — popular, classical, or Gregorian.

From 24th April to 1st May, the city of Montreux for the ninth time is organising its international competition of good TV entertainment under the sponsorship of the European Broadcasting Association (Union Européenne de Radiodiffusion) and in co-operation with the Swiss Radio and TV Company (Schweizerische Radio- und Fernsehgesellschaft). According to the regulations governing the award of the Golden Rose of Montreux, the following types of programmes are admitted to this TV competition: variety shows, grand musical shows, entertaining shows with script as well as hits and light music. Ballet, classical dance, modern dance, expressionist dance, folk dancing, pantomime, folklore, circus, cabaret and jazz are also welcome if they form a part of the programme. The shows should not take less than 15 minutes nor more than one hour. The programmes to be submitted must not contain commercials, they must not be recipients of any other international award and they must not be more than one year old. The competition for the Golden Rose of Montreux last but not least has the aim of stimulating original productions and of fostering the international exchange of programmes.

[S.N.T.O.]

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