

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 50 (2023)
Heft: 1

Vorwort: The speedy banana
Autor: Lettau, Marc

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 09.12.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

4 Focus

Switzerland ups the pace
in the production of solar energy

9 News

Federal Council elections 2022: stability
preserved and only limited change

10 Report

Lake Brienz: once well
fertilised and now almost too clean...

13 Economy

Coffee wars: Migros challenges
market leader Nespresso

14 Nature and the Environment

The revival of chestnuts
as Swiss cultural heritage

**News from your region****17 Swiss Figures****18 Politics**

The impact of the 2019 elections
A political scientist takes a look back

Swiss parties react to the growing
weight of the "Fifth Switzerland"

22 Literature**24 From the Federal Palace**

How the FDFA wants to raise awareness
among seniors in the "Fifth Switzerland"

27 Swiss Community News

The Council of the Swiss Abroad
adopts a position on Swiss neutrality

30 Discussion

Cover photo:
solar technicians on the roof of the Sevelen (SG) gym.
Archive image: Keystone (2011)

The speedy banana



Have you heard of the "Banana" from the Biel engineering college? It was not a fruit. It was a banana-shaped, banana-yellow solar racing vehicle, built in 1985. Hence the nickname. The only power source it needed was direct exposure to sunlight. Other than this, the fragile looking speedster was primarily a sort of utopian soapbox car cobbled together using low-cost building materials: the chassis was made from recycled aluminium ski poles from Swiss Army stocks. The "Banana" was not a thing of beauty. It was, however, fast.

In the 1985 long-distance race across Switzerland, it finished just behind the winner, Mercedes. By 1986, the Biel team had become unbeatable. Competing with an updated version of their vehicle, they were the first official solar racing vehicle world champions. Then, in 1990, the Biel team reached their zenith during the longest and hardest race for solar vehicles – all the way across Australia: their vehicle "Spirit of Biel II" outclassed the clear favourites Honda and all the other major high-tech groups in the race. The sun often shone brightly on the Biel team. In 1996 alone, they broke ten speed and distance records. They achieved a speed of 161 km per hour, leaving the previous record of General Motors in the dust.

Why are we looking back at this now? Because it raises the question of why a once pioneering solar energy nation is now languishing at the back of the European mid table. The Biel crew brought home the silverware, but they did not inspire any great transition in energy policy.

This transition was finally made possible by the Swiss parliament in September 2022. It decided that extensive solar power stations could now be built in a very short space of time in the Alps. The driving force behind this decision was not utopia or enthusiasm; it was fear. The war in Ukraine is threatening energy supply even in Switzerland – and energy prices have risen massively as a result. It is no great surprise that there is an internal conflict at the heart of the new Swiss solar offensive, as it plays natural resources off against each other: more energy from natural sources, and less protection for the natural mountain landscapes in the process. We take a closer look at this in our Focus article (starts on page 4).

We have included a couple of nostalgic pictures of the "Spirit of Biel" on revue.link/spiritofbiel. These pictures are a good 30 years old and date from a time when solar energy looked set to catch on in Switzerland.

MARC LETTAU, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

"Swiss Review", the information magazine
for the "Fifth Switzerland", is published by the
Organisation of the Swiss Abroad.

**Swiss
Community**