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Navigation on the high seas raised the problem of determining longitude, but after 1830 another mode of locomotion, the railway, gave a new impulse to the desire for perfect timekeepers. Until then exact time was required only by navigators and a few men of science. The coming of the railway obliged even the man in the street to keep an eye on the right time and a good watch became an indispensable commodity for travellers. Watches became more and more popular as the need for precise timing grew.

And in order to meet an increasingly heavy demand for watches, production had to expand. The number of watchmaking firms expanded rapidly, and, for example, in the Canton of Neuchatel the output rose from 130,000 watches in 1818 to 500,000 in 1870. Today this appears an insignificant figure, as the 1948 expert reached the amazing total of 50 Million pieces. As the demand increased, so the watchmakers soon dreamed of producing large quantities, with interchangeable parts. This could only be achieved through the invention of tools and machines for the manufacture of various parts. The triumph of machinery was not easy, for many specialists feared it as a rival which might deprive them of their livelihood; others thought that machines would debase their noble craft. The progress of mechanical methods of watch manufacturing may be attributed greatly to the fine training schools created, which year by year produce excellent teams of watch technicians.

A few years ago a quite unique institution was established in Neuchatel, the Swiss Laboratory for Horological Research. This institute is magnificently equipped with the most delicate and sensitive instruments and it is a veritable Information Bureau for watch manufacturers.

Finally, here are a few explanations of the latest and best known types of watches made in our homeland: The Water-Repellent Watch, the case of which protects the movement not only against water, but also - what is more important still - against dust. The Self-Winding Watch, fitted with a very small weight which oscillates freely on the slightest movement of the arm. This oscillatory movement, based on gravitational laws, is transmitted to the mainspring which is thus almost constantly in action. The Timer-watch, indicating split seconds from 1/5th up to 1/100th of a second. Used all over the world in sporting events. The Calendar-Watch, showing the day and the date, even the moon and its phases. Such watches of course require extremely minute and delicate parts, some as small as 0.0025 millimeter, which one can hardly visualize; or can you for instance imagine the size of an individual screw of which 50,000 can be placed comfortably in a thimble?

Today, 2,500 firms which represent the Swiss watchmaking industry, possess the most efficient technical equipment in the world, and as mentioned at the beginning of my short article, its position is unassailable.

SWISSAIR TRAFFIC IN 1949.

Swissair traffic statistics from and to England which have just been published show that compared to previous years results in 1949 are remarkably improved. A most satisfactory increase has been registered in passenger, freight and postal traffic and an extension of the flight programme of the Swiss Air Transport Company has therefore proved to be a necessity.

The travelling public recognises more and more the enormous advantages offered by the aeroplane; the number of those who give preference to this most modern means of transport grows from year to year.

Swissair has therefore not hesitated to modernise its aircraft park by adding four Convair Liners. This "Flying Pullman" attains a cruising speed of 300 miles per hour.

Thanks to its excellent organization, its principle of high quality in personnel and material Swissair has made great strides in the past years. Today its network comprises approximately 23,000 miles of route.

	1948	1949
Miles flown	3,867,979	5,350,660
Passengers	113,622	153,812
Freight (kg.)	1,224,971	1,733,383
Mail (kg.)	430,996	603,444
Regularity	98.81%	98.90%

GOLD STOCKS

Despite Switzerland's adverse foreign trade balance, an influx of gold is again recorded by the latest Swiss National Bank's return for the week to January 14th.

During that period, gold stocks rose by Frs.6.8m. to Frs.6,253m. (N.Z. £500 million). A like increase is shown by foreign exchange holdings which advanced to Frs.267m.

The fiduciary issue dropped by Frs.117m. to Frs.4,274m., a decline of Frs.176m. having already been recorded during the previous week, thus completely offsetting the sharp rise immediately before and after Christmas.

British exports to Switzerland in December reached the record total of £2,700,000 compared with £1,950,000 in November, it was announced. British imports from this country fell from £1,500,000 to £1,200,000, the lowest for the year.

TRAFFIC

As a result of the decision of the Swiss Federal Railways in December, 1947, to undertake working tests with two rubber-tyre coaches in service conditions, orders for two prototypes were placed with two Swiss wagon-building works. One was to have a lightweight all-steel body, the other an all-aluminium body, as mentioned in The Railway Gazette of June 18th, 1948.

The body of an ordinary fast-train lightweight steel carriage of the Swiss Federal Railways weighs 22,880 lb., and the steel body of the rubber-tyre coach will weigh only 10,780 lb. As with the Micheline-type coaches forming the three rubber-tyre rapides now in service between Paris and Strasbourg, this saving in weight is imperative because the weight of the complete vehicle must not exceed 15 tons so as to avoid an excessive load on the rubber tyres, and with the same object each bogie has ten wheels.

These considerations together with the fact that the coaches are the first with rubber-tyres to be built in Switzerland, prompted the decision of one of the builders, Schweizerische Wagons-und Aufzügefabrik, Zurich-Schlieren, to undertake the extensive tests and measurements of the steel body. These tests, relating to vertical and longitudinal stresses, were again carried out and demonstrated in January, when a special American electrical measuring instrument was placed in operation.

All the tests have been supervised by Monsieur Gaspard, a French engineer and rubber-tyred coach expert of the French National Railways, working in co-operation with Monsieur Robert Guignard of the traction and workshop section of the Swiss Federal Railways.

All the experts consulted agreed that the tests carried out have been entirely successful. Considerably higher stress values than obtaining in normal service conditions were reached without exposing the steel body to any harmful consequences.