

Zeitschrift: Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand
Herausgeber: Swiss Society of New Zealand
Band: 61 (1995)
Heft: [7]

Artikel: Car number plates auction
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-945049>

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CAR NUMBER PLATES AUCTION



After Solothurn, Geneva and Tessin, the craze has started in Zurich too where the first car number plate auction took place recently.

Number plate ZH2211 fetched SFR 21,000.- whilst ZH1818 even reached SFR 22,000.-. The auction was a great success as the hall where the auction took place was filled to capacity. Automobilists who thought they might

be able to get an interesting number plate for a few hundred francs were in for a shock as prices quickly climbed into the thousands of francs. Even the relatively high number of ZH620000 fetched SFR 2300.-.

The most intriguing part of this type of auction is that the number plates still remain the property of the State, so people pay big money for something which does not even belong to them. The number plates must be registered against an existing car. They cannot be simply stored away in a safe. If you are scared that someone may wish to steal your plate, the only thing you can do is to register your valuable plate against an old bomb which you will keep locked up in your garage, never to be driven on the road.

DEARER CIGARETTES

Like in New Zealand, the duty on cigarettes is being constantly increased in Switzerland. A recent increase of 20cts has brought the price of a packet of cigarettes to SFR 3.70.

Along with many other governments, the Swiss authorities are in a double standard situation concerning use of tobacco. On one hand the government agrees that tobacco is a dangerous drug, responsible for lung cancer and heart diseases and, because of this its use by the public should be curbed and discouraged, if not banned outright. On the other hand, the duty imposed on tobacco represents an income of over 1.4 billion SFR for the government and for this reason alone it cannot and does not want to ban the drug. Cynically, the governments throughout the world claim that by increasing the duty on tobacco, they try to discourage its use, but this is just an excuse. What governments are really after is purely and simply added revenue to reduce their deficits.



The auctioneer's assistant seems to be just as startled as anyone else about the price offered for this plate: SFR 2300.-.

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MEATY COMPETITION

The price of meat has dropped by nearly 20% in Switzerland over the past few months. Butchers and meat producers call the situation a total disaster. Many are forced to go out of business as prices are tumbling down. Several reasons have been mentioned for this unexpected drop:

1) Meat is 40%-50% cheaper in France, so people travel up to 150km to stock up on their meat supply. From Basel right down to Geneva, Swiss butchers are facing ruin as their customers are deserting them for the cheaper product just across the border.

2) Several well organised black market rings have been discovered over the past few months. Illegally imported cattle are estimated to exceed 5000 animals and cut up meat runs into hundreds of tons. The Customs Department is convinced that this is only the tip of the iceberg and that far more illegal meat is being sold on the Swiss market.

3) Direct sales from small producers straight to the consumers, by-passing butchers and supermarkets altogether, is today an increasing trend. With more and more households sporting their own freezers, consumers are ready to buy meat in bulk and so many meat producers have long lists of clients who purchase their meat supply direct from them. Whereas in the past, Swiss housewives used to buy a kilo of "Gschnätzlätz" at a time, they now seem to purchase half a side of a cow all in one go. Things have certainly changed in good old Switzerland.