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CHATEAU D'OEX, EUROPE'S BIGGEST HOT AIR BALLOON CENTRE



Every year in January, hot-air balloon enthusiasts from all over the world converge on Chateau d'Oex (Pays d'Enhaut in the canton of Waadt) for a week of competitions.

It was in 1979 that the local Tourist Office of Chateau d'Oex decided to stage its first hot-air balloon week in order to boost the station's turnover and economy. A dozen teams responded to the offer and a few hundred people came along to watch.

Each year competing teams and spectators grew in numbers until 1994 when the event attracted a record 80 hot-air balloon teams, 65,000 spectators, 200 journalists and 12 TV chains. It was Chateau d'Oex's biggest event ever. Every day during the whole week, the competitors could participate in a large variety of "races": set courses, biggest height, pin point landings and many more. But the biggest event came on the last day with the "David Niven Cup", a long-distance race which took some contestants as far away as Italy, France and Austria.

Since 1994, the high costs involved for both competitors and spectators has produced a steady decline in the popularity of the event. With the rising Swiss Franc, competitors just could no longer afford the costs of transport and stay at the expensive Swiss hotels. Those who still came along opted for a stay in holiday apartments, often away from Chateau d'Oex, to the great dismay of the local hoteliers.

An increasing number of spectators also decided not to stay in Chateau d'Oex anymore but rather to commute daily either from home or from less expensive resorts, creating of course monumental traffic jams mornings and evenings.

But still, despite such setbacks, Chateau d'Oex remains Europe's capital of hot-air ballooning.

A spectacular sight each morning with the departure of the contestants for their daily competition.

SWISS ARMY KNIFE

"Every good Swiss boy has a knife (Hegel) in his pocket" was an old saying in Switzerland. And the pocket knife he was carrying was usually a Swiss Army Knife, often attached to a small chain which went from the belt to the right hand trouser pocket, where the knife was invariably tucked away. No Swiss boy or man for that matter would ever have dreamed to be without his cherished Swiss Army Knife.

The only snag was that the pocket knife he was carrying around was not really a Swiss Army Knife. What he had was a swept-up version in stainless steel which invariably incorporated a cork screw.

The actual knife issued to all Swiss



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soldiers never had that most important implement built in. Furthermore, in the old days at least, the knife issued to army recruits was made from ordinary steel which meant that from the very first time you used it to cut your meat, a stain appeared on the blade which no amount of soap or detergent could ever remove again. This led to an eternal tug-of-war between recruits and officers who insisted that on inspection the knife had to be absolutely clean and above all stainless. Since this was a total impossibility, the only solution was to purchase at the army store a second knife which you never ever used except for inspections.

The curious thing about the "Swiss Army Knife" is that it has never become part of the equipment of any army of any country, not even of the Swiss army either. *(Continued next page)*

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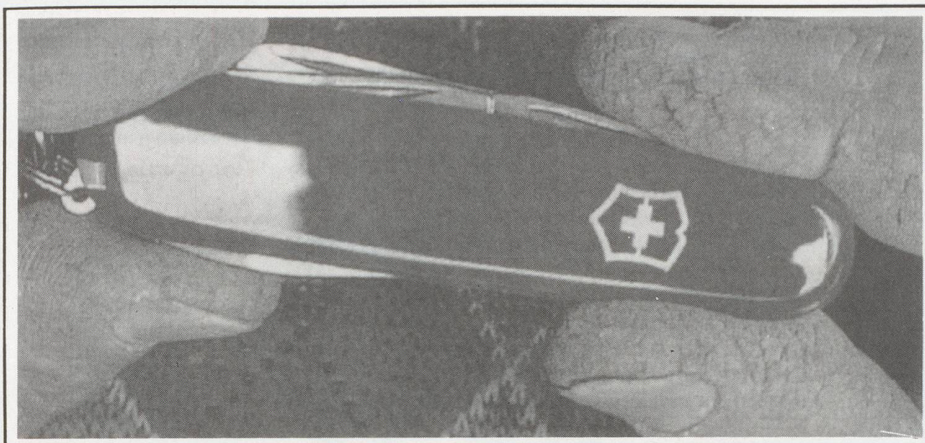
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Victorinox, the manufacturing firm in Ibach which started production in 1897, registered its knives under the name of "Officers Knives" (Offiziermesser). The name was always written with inverted commas to indicate that it was simply a brand name.

The name "Swiss Army Knife" only came after the 2nd world war when it became a standard article of sale through the US-Army surplus shops.

Today, carrying a Swiss Army Knife in your pocket can get you into all sorts of trouble, especially if you travel from one country to another. The obvious places where you will encounter trouble are airports when your knife triggers off detector alarms. Whilst you may consider your beloved pocket knife as an everyday tool to clean your finger nails, cut a string or pull a cork, the airport officials see it as a dangerous and offensive weapon. So, instead of carrying it on you, you have to put it into your suitcase and hope that no customs officer at the other end will find it when he rummages through your belongings.

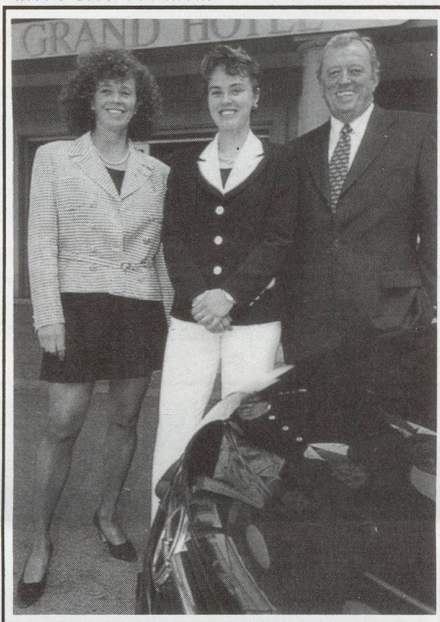
MARTINA HINGIS

Being a superstar at the tender age of 16 is great but it also brings along a certain number of problems. Martina finds it increasingly difficult to go shopping without being immediately recognised. What is a very simple activity for most of us becomes for Martina a real headache: trying to avoid the photographers and the autograph hunters is not an easy task for her.

On the other hand, being famous also opens new doors for promotional

The "Swiss Army Knife", for generations the proud possession of every boy and man. Today a dangerous and murderous weapon? It's hard to believe how much times have changed.

contracts. Martina just signed a million dollar deal with Opel Switzerland to promote their line of cars. As part of the deal, she also received a brand new Opel car. This was a great present for Martina who loves beautiful and fast cars. Small problem though: at 16 she is not allowed to drive in Switzerland. So she has to wait another two years before she can obtain her driving licence. In the meantime, Mum has to drive her around.



Picture taken at the Grand Hotel Dolder near Zurich after the signing of the contract with Opel Switzerland.

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SWISS MISS

Here are some extracts from an article by a Wall Street Journal reporter which illustrates quite clearly how the Americans view the Swiss and its present economy. Although some of it might be typical American exaggeration, the basis of the article sounds quite true and a bit frightening.

HOW THE RICHEST COUNTRY IN EUROPE WOUND UP IN A SIX YEAR RECESSION.

Banks Stumble and Workers Are Idled. Bern Has Army Stand By - Just in Case.

A Soup Kitchen for Geneva.

Late last year, the Swiss Army, famous for its knives (where did they get that one from?, Editor), drew up plans for how to counter an attack on the capital. It wasn't preparing for an invasion by Austria. Instead, the government wanted to be ready in case rising unemployment brought out violent protests.

Other European countries are suffering slow growth. But Switzerland, Europe's richest country in per capita income, is stuck in a six-year old recession. The trains are as punctual as ever, the streets remain the cleanest in

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