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EXPO 1964

OF SPECIAL INTEREST FOR THE SWISS ABROAD

During the National Exhibition in Lausanne, the Youth Service of the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad are organising a camp for young compatriots residing away from their homeland. The object is to enable as many young Swiss as possible to visit the EXPO 1964. The date will be 16th to 30th August, and Swiss boys and girls from seventeen to twenty-five may take part. The cost will be kept as low as possible and should amount to Fr.120.— to Fr.140.—, covering board, lodging, transport, various visits, etc. The journey to and from Switzerland has to be financed by the individual participants. Where an Embassy or Consulate supports a claim, a reduction in cost may be granted. Registration forms are obtainable from the Swiss Embassy in London and the Consulate in Manchester. Applications must reach the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad in Berne not later than 15th May.

THE WHITE TURF

by

PETER KASPER, St. Moritz

Horse-racing on snow — a conception we cannot get away from in the winter events of our country. Words which, in the case of a resort such as St. Moritz, imply as much as ski-ing, snow and ice-skating. But it is not only words which draw the attention of sportsmen to events; no, indeed every racing fan has daily opportunity for weeks to anticipate what will be taking place in the coming racing events.

Every year, as soon as there is a thick enough layer of ice on the lake, and Master Winter lays a white carpet over it, a broad strip is marked out as a track on the immaculate, white surface.

The St. Moritz racecourse is not the longest of the continent, but it is certainly the longest in Switzerland. And it is quite surely the flattest in existence. Indeed it is the only racecourse which can claim to be absolutely even; and, as its name implies, it is not green but white, framed in a bridal veil of snow. To the north the strips are flanked by the stands, awaiting a large number of enthusiastic spectators; and every morning there is a lively crowd in the village and at the racecourse. Wrapped in gay winter blankets, the horses wend their way — some through the village and some alongside the lake — to take their morning exercise. They walk and trot along the roads; but their galloping exercise is taken on the course, although this is not done daily because the thoroughbreds' fine structure demands no more than a certain amount of daily exercise. So one sees, as the experts say, the quiet canter, the faster canter, the elegant, good, fast gallop . . . endurance . . . liveliness . . . and all the significance of the various degrees of tenacity and distance. One sees pullers striving and straining at the bridle, the jockey using all his skill to master the unruly temperament; lazy, moody creatures which need hard work to keep them on

the rein and to lead them . . . horses, horses, horses, but each of them an individual with a character entirely its own.

And then the jockeys and the trainers, professionals and amateurs from all countries, all perhaps strangers to each other a few days previously, but closely bound through the same aim, the same activity. A white veil is woven by the powdery snow behind the galloping steeds, the sun gleaming through in a thousand colours.

During the racing period it is not only the gallopers which are an attraction but equally the trotters, because trotting races are part of the winter turf sport. The conditions encountered by the trotting horse and its trainer or jockey on snow cannot be generalised as basic, but still in many ways they differ from those one is accustomed to meet on sand, grass or cinder tracks. First of all, the sulky is replaced by a racing sledge. The St. Moritz Racing Association has a large number of the latter, especially constructed for trotting races. In order that the rider is not exposed to the disturbing spray of snow, the racing sledge is built considerably higher than the sulky, which means that the horses have to adjust themselves to the difference in the seating position of the rider. The weight is exactly the same as in the case of the sulky, and the horses are put to the same amount of strain.

For many years the racing stables used the system of shoeing as on an ordinary racecourse, until a Munich owner of trotters brought along a new type of horseshoe, which was soon adapted by other stables and which, with slight alteration, became a speciality of a St. Moritz blacksmith. This shoe has special toe and hoof patches forged on which offer better protection against slipping and, above all, guarantee the necessary grip on the "flying" surface.

The snow track itself can best be compared with a very heavy sand track, although with the difference that the light snow "flies" to a much greater extent than sand which is heavy. The absence of even the minutest unevenness and the ideal preparation of the track guarantee such steady action that bad blunders, even in the case of sensitive horses, hardly ever occur. This is also the reason why many gallopers, but especially trotters which often make a false step on grass tracks, run easily and with measured movement at St. Moritz.

The speeds attained at St. Moritz can, however, not be compared with those on classic tracks — they are higher than those on grass courses.

Experience shows that the distance on snow must always increase its actual value by one-third to make relative comparison with the distance of racing on turf. In choosing horses for racing over snow, this must be taken into consideration because otherwise horses might often be entered which would have exhausted themselves when the course was only half finished.

The sky is blue, the horses in form; owners, jockeys, and drivers in good mood; a happy day, a real sporting atmosphere abounds in the air around the lake of St. Moritz when racing stops for its mid-day break.

Anybody who has been there once, and from the sun-drenched stands has watched the horses galloping by, or seen the trotters gracefully passing, will not regret having taken the opportunity of seeing behind the scenes on an occasion other than during the races.

Such happenings are not unique in St. Moritz. It is nigh on sixty years since the sunny town in the Engadine first introduced the White Turf in 1906. It is true that the plan to hold races on the lake had to be abandoned because of unfavourable conditions, and since at that time

the unpleasant odour of petrol sent off by motorcars was unknown, the next best thing was to have the track along the road. St. Moritz Postplatz — Bahnhof — Bad — Champfer and back to the centre of the village of St. Moritz was the course chosen. At that time it was a "Snörekjöring" race that was held, with brilliant success. Ever since then it has been a tradition to carry out the big international St. Moritz races, regularly. These skikjöring races took place at St. Moritz as long ago as at the end of the last century. At first not behind foaming thoroughbreds; at that time it would be a cavalier who was harnessed, and who was shod not with horseshoes but with ice-skates. This is depicted in a photograph taken on the lake of St. Moritz in 1893. And at that time, the ladies who took part in skikjöring did not wear ski-trousers resembling pencils, as it now the custom. In our grandmothers' day long dresses were worn also for ski-ing — but in spite of that there was no lack of enthusiasm for sport; on the contrary, it appeared to be even greater. When the first trotting races were held on the lake of St. Moritz in 1907, and the first galloping races in 1908, it was logic to include skikjöring, at first ridden, i.e. one horserider and a man behind towed on skis. Soon afterwards, however, the rider was omitted and the skier drove the horse with one hand, holding fast with the other to let himself be drawn. Not every thoroughbred is suited for this kind of racing. It is always a delight to experience the sight of a close field moving over a long course in a skikjöring race, and to admire not only the thoroughbreds and their achievement but also the daring skill of the skiers. One of the most important bases for worthwhile participation in skikjöring racing is a thorough study of the horses, besides mastery over the thoroughbreds and an absolute expert knowledge of ski-ing. Only he who goes carefully to work knows his horse and how to lead him correctly, has any prospect of achieving success.

The co-ordination between man and horse is here, as in riding in general, the deciding factor. A thoroughbred enjoys breaking away from his rider sometimes. But that can be prevented if the skikjöring driver concentrates even more than does the galloper and the trotter.

The racing track on the lake of St. Moritz is surrounded on two sides by lovely mountains. The beauty of the alpine scenery provides the nature-lover as well as the thoroughbred with a certain sense of peace, indeed of elation. Although the large resort is very close by, on the St. Moritz Oval one feels far removed from all commonplace things. Here one is surrounded by a real holiday atmosphere combined with the best sport.

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