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A DREAM ON FOUR WHEELS

Driving along Piccadilly recently, I caught a glimpse of a beautiful, sleek, sky-blue car coming up in the opposite direction. Nothing unusual with that, but I chanced to notice that the car had Zurich plates and immediately my mind ticked: I had seen that dream-like shape in pictures somewhere; yes! I had just caught sight of my first "Monteverdi"! I immediately turned round, but the car had moved out of sight in the stream of traffic.

Going for a walk the next day, I saw the same car again a hundred yards away, or so I swore, partly concealed by the bushes of a crescent-garden. I rushed to the next traffic-lights, hoping to see it stop so that I could admire it, but it chose to go another way and thus a dream of chrome and withering power vanished away.

The Swiss do things thoroughly: they haven't been producing a marketable car for the past 30 years and now a pretentious 35-year-old Swiss from Basle, Peter Monteverdi, decides to build the smartest and most expensive car in the world, intrenching on Lamborghinis and Ferraris and the whole family.

My only former experience of this mechanical goddess had been acquired with a car-magazine and the "Sunday Times" colour supplement. It's a glittering and finely chiselled Grand Tourisme coupé, with four capacious saloon chairs.

In spite of his young age, Peter Monteverdi has had a vast experience of cars, having lived in them all his life. He was only 21 when he got the Ferrari agency for Switzerland and this means he knows the clientèle for these kinds of cars and knows what it is looking for. His experience is that men who buy high-luxury cars are well over 50 in their overwhelming majority. At that age they are not primarily interested in cruising over 150 m.p.h. and if that's all a car is good for, it is not very useful, show-piece apart, for those who aren't racing-drivers. What people want is smoothness, reliability, unstressed engines, power-steering, automatic gears, silence and, more than anything else, easy driving. What they want is really a Pall Mall smoking-lounge which can whisk along at 100 m.p.h.

To achieve this dream of perfection, Peter Monteverdi has had to shop for components around the world. He found the engine he wanted in America, an impetuous, 7.2 litre, 380 b.h.p. Chrysler V8. The air-conditioning comes from America too. The custom-built body comes from Italy. The back-axle, the instruments, the leather and unholstery, the brake hydraulics come from Great Britain. The high-fidelity radio comes from Germany and the Swiss are left to produce such components as the wind-screen, the brakes, the wheels and the chassis. The latter was so sturdy and so massive that Peter Monteverdi had to stop putting it on show, the Basler Press having teased him about his "new lorry".

Although the car weighs two tons, it can reach 100 m.p.h. in less than 20 seconds and finds 120 m.p.h. no more wearing than a leisurely amble.

So far, Peter Monteverdi has produced about 60 of them in his workshop since he started two years ago. He expects to produce 70 this coming year. Since the car is practically hand-made with all its components made following his specifications, it is bound to cost pretty high. Add to this the guiding philosophy that cost-for-quality is not a hindrance for the very rich, then you will not be surprised that the car costs £10,500 in Great Britain, enough to buy 18 "Minis". Unflustered Mr. Peter Monteverdi expects to sell 15 in this country. Mr. Jenkins might not be so happy about it.

(*PMB*)

YOUR NEXT "SWISS OBSERVER"

will be published on . . .

Friday, 9th January, we shall be glad to receive all articles and reports by Tuesday, 2nd January. Short news items only can be accepted later.

The "Swiss Observer" is published every second and fourth Friday of the month, and consequently, your next copy but one will be out on 23rd January, 1970. Contributions for that issue should be to hand by Tuesday, 13th January.

OUR FIERY ANCESTORS

Celtic Origins

The Greeks used the name "Celts" in a very wide sense to describe all the fair-haired peoples dwelling north of the Alps. During the last millennium before Christ the Celts had wandered and settled over much of the area between the Atlantic and the Black Sea. They penetrated into France, the British Isles, and Spain; by the fifth century B.C. they had reached Italy; they drifted down the Danube valley and left settlements in Asia Minor; they held the area of modern Germany perhaps as far as the Elbe and also Bohemia. These peoples formed neither a political nor, in any proper sense, a racial unity. But there was among them sufficient homegeneity for ancient authors to consider them as a whole, distinct, on the one hand, from the more highly civilised Greeks and Romans of the Mediterranean basin, and, on the other, from the less advanced Germanic tribes which lay to their north and east. It is Celts whom the opening historic record shows in possession of much of Switzerland, superimposed on the Ligurians, who themselves represented a later layer of settlement than the neolithic and bronze age men who had made their homes on platforms supported by piles rising out of the waters of the Swiss lakes. And it is from a Swiss site, at the egress of the river Zihl from lake Neuchâtel, occupied, it would seem, by Celts from *c.* 250 to *c.* 100 B.C., that the culture of Celtic Europe during the later iron age has been given its name of the La Tène civilization.

A Secret Country

Neither the Alps nor the lands immediately to the north of them were well known to the Greeks, and no description has survived earlier than that of the historian Polybius *c.* 130-120 B.C. From this time onwards recurrent conflict between Celts and Romans caused the latter to set down in writing what they could discover of the peoples who then inhabited the Swiss area. Though predominantly they were not exclusively Celtic: the upper valley of the Rhine from lake Constance to the high mountains of Grisons was occupied by the Raeti, a wild and barbarous segment of the Veneti of north-east Italy, who themselves formed a distinct group of peoples of the Indo-European family. Speaking roughly, the line of division between Celts and Raeti ran from lake Constance southwards to the valley of the Linth, and thence to the St. Gotthard. But the boundary was not rigid, and in the mountains it can hardly be drawn. We do not know whether Raeti or Celts held Uri; each in turn appears to have occupied Glarus;