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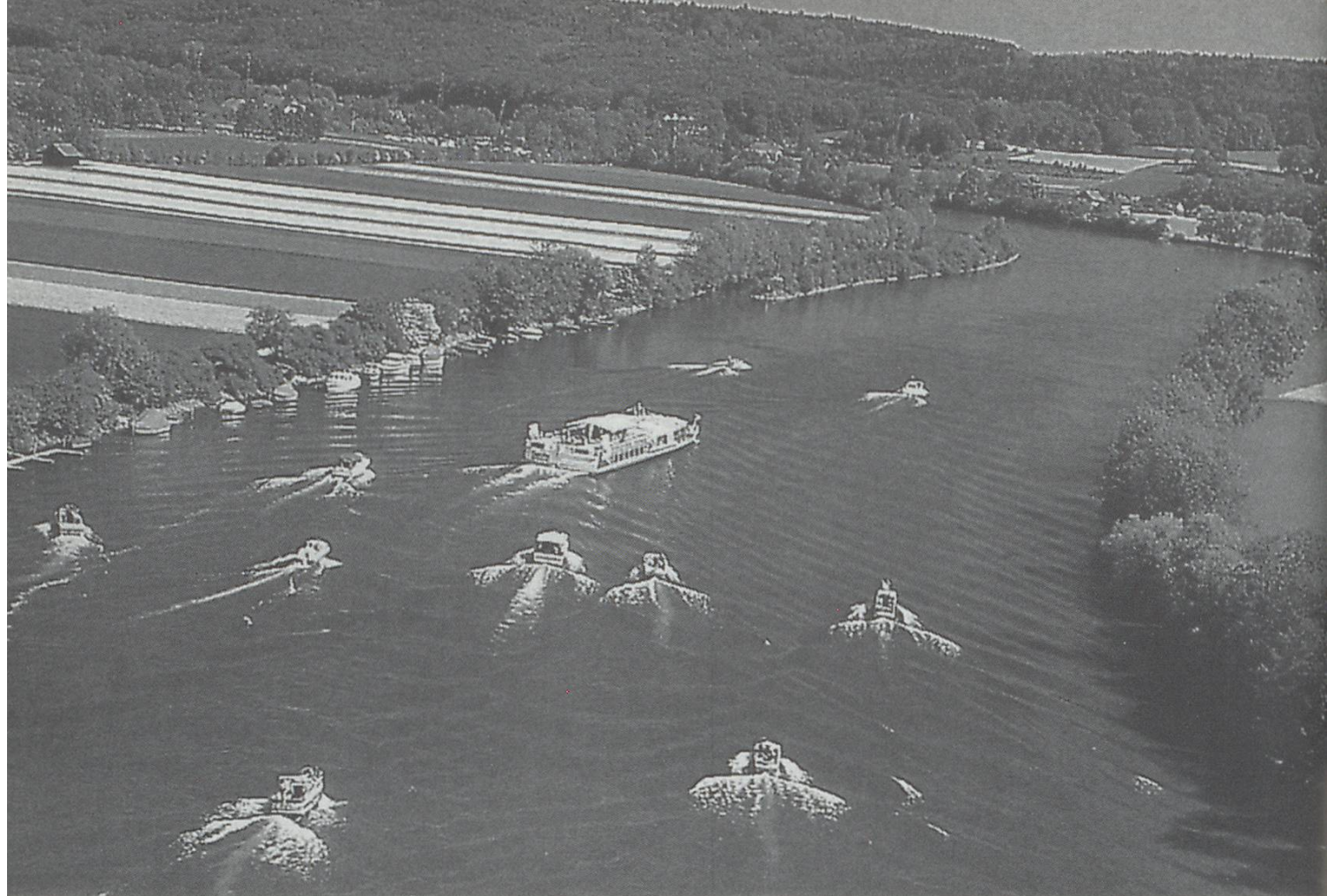
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MS "SIESTA" by Leslie & Naomi Falkson

One of the surprising mysteries of life is that none of our friends and acquaintances in the SRS seem to be aware of the existence of the *SIESTA*. Certainly, the more knowledgeable will recite the name of every single-hulled vessel in service on every Swiss lake, almost as of rote at the drop of a hat, but when we mention the name of this unconventional craft it invariably draws a blank expression!

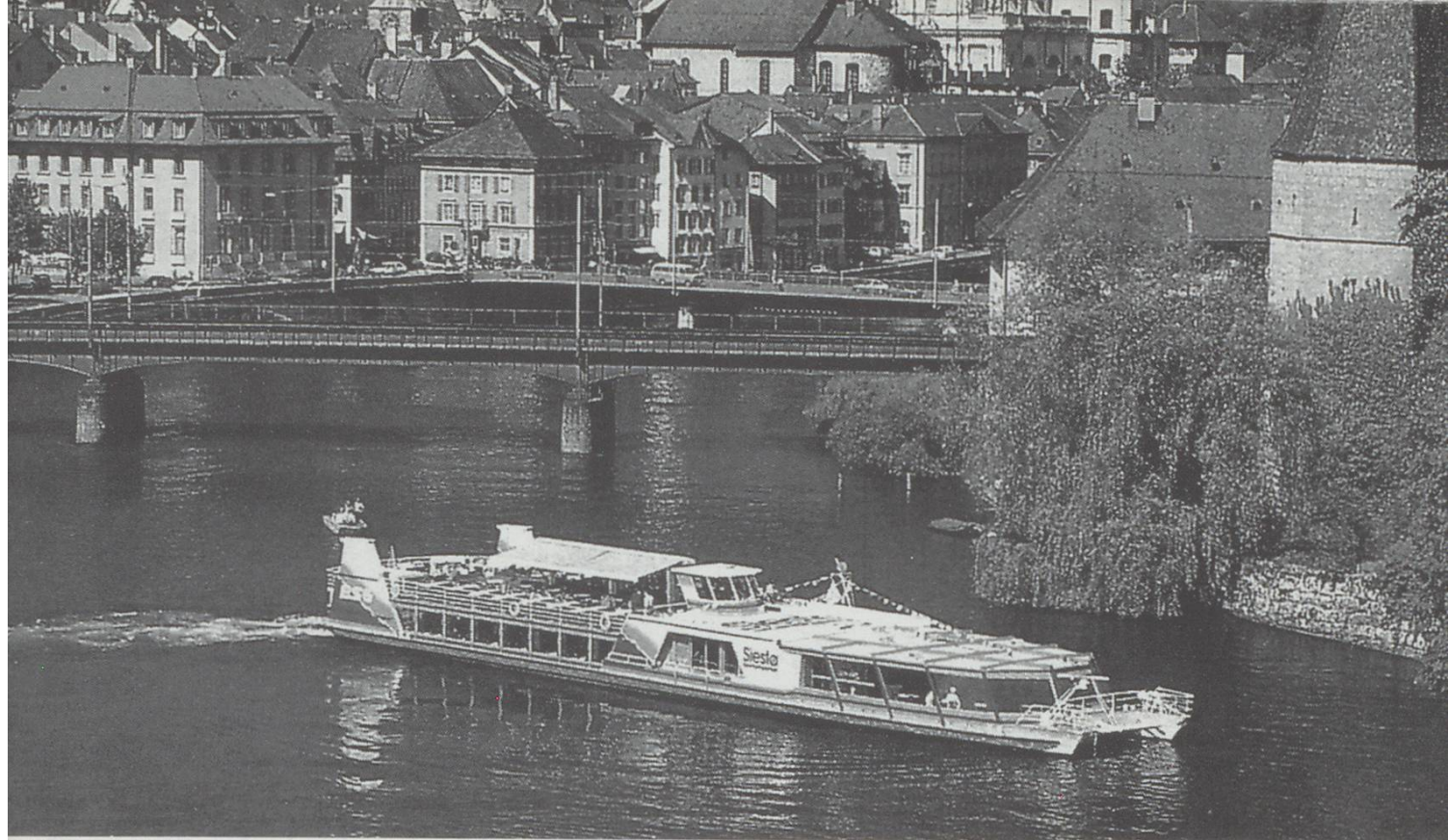
Evidently this semi-catamaran is one of Switzerland's best-kept transport secrets and, at the time of writing, is unique there.

Designed expressly for river cruising her twin prows soon blend together to form a flat-bottomed hull drawing only 1.30 metres, thus enabling her to negotiate shallows where the more familiar style of V-hull, with deeper draught, would founder.

Owned and operated by the BSG (Bielersee-Schiffahrts-Gesellschaft) she was built in Germany by Deggendorfer Werft und Eisenbau GmbH to a design proven in service on the Danube during the 'eighties. Constructed of steel and iron she is registered at 300 tonnes and

displays many innovative features which enable her to pass under the numerous road and rail bridges where clearances are minimal when the river is full. These include a massive scissors-jack to hydraulically lower the wheelhouse almost flush with the upper deck at the appropriate moment and then to raise it again to normal height once the obstruction is astern. Similarly, the fore-mast is lowered electrically and, in hot weather with the canopy in use, the canvas is furled against the spine by the motorised elbowed-strut mechanism (frequently seen on shop blinds and above domestic balconies) and the entire structure on its powered stanchions then lowered silently to the deck. This fascinating performance takes some ninety seconds to complete.

The sundeck offers other attractions for the observant traveller, in addition to the abundance of wildlife to be seen on the water, above the water and on both banks. Seated comfortably in your stylish armchair of polished aluminium (one of 210), glass of beer on the equally smart table before you, it is possible to watch the crew at



close quarters as they conduct the *SIESTA* safely downstream from Solothurn to Biel/Bienne and then back again six mornings per week during the summer. This return voyage is repeated in the afternoon, which results in a 9hr 50min daily working schedule Tuesday to Sunday inclusive, leaving just Monday of each week for maintenance and servicing.

With the wheelhouse glazed all round you can check the perfect accuracy of the helmsman's chosen course simply by standing behind him and peering over his shoulder. When the wheelhouse is lowered he resorts to the repeater controls at either side of the ship. These are not housed in the more usual flying bridge but, instead, located under perspex covers sited on the sundeck. Another departure from normal is that these command stations are positioned inboard and do not project beyond the confines of the beam.

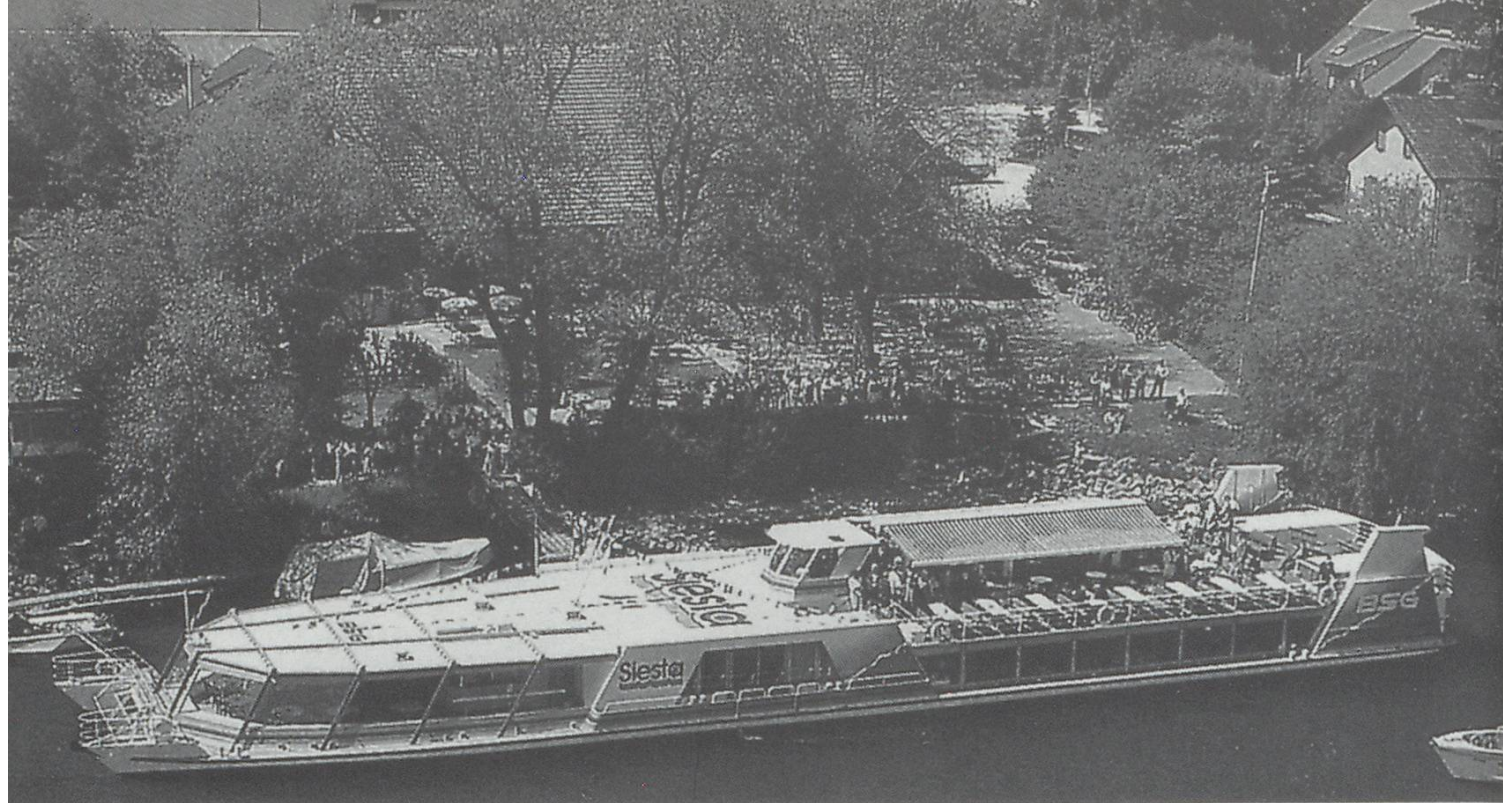
Without doubt the most radical departure from traditional propulsion and steering is the elimination of rudder(s) and marine screws; instead she uses powerful pump-driven water jets to accomplish both modes. As many readers will be aware, this principal was developed for passenger vessels by Boeing in the late 'sixties and adopted with great success in their sea-going Jetfoil craft, notably on the routes between Macau & Hong Kong and the UK & Belgium. In this instance *SIESTA* is neither foil-borne nor particularly fast so instead of gas turbines she is

powered by the rather more mundane but nevertheless highly efficient twin V8 Detroit diesels, each rated at 324Kw and producing 440hp. To assist with manoeuvring alongside jetties and turning 360° in her own length she is fitted with a smaller bow-thruster pump jet. This is of 60Kw (82hp) and electrically driven. The total power pack also includes two diesel auxiliary units of 70Kw each, developing jointly approximately 190hp for the generators which have to cope with heavy demands from the constantly engaged air-conditioning system throughout the lower deck as well as the more usual lighting and cooking requirements.

Marine engineers all agree on the maxim that if you eliminate the prop shaft you eliminate vibration and the resultant smooth passage is most evident when the *SIESTA* is proceeding upstream against the current without a tremor.

The sundeck extends from the wheelhouse to the stern. Forward of the wheelhouse there is a steel framework supported by twelve uprights and from this skeletal tracery the roof of the forward saloon is suspended. Aesthetics have not been overlooked so the uprights are canted to lie parallel with the glazing bars of the enormous windows; these rise from about one metre above the waterline to the roof and are structurally integrated, as with modern coach - building practice.

Descending to the main deck there is a



spacious vestibule midships which separates the luxurious restaurant aft from the cafeteria which doubles as the forward observation saloon. Passengers embark at this point and can purchase tickets, postcards, etc., from the purser cum deck hand. Leading off from the vestibule are the conveniences and, because the main deck is completely level, wheelchair-bound passengers can gain easy access to a dedicated and well equipped toilet facility.

The smartly staffed restaurant is well supported by the Swiss, particularly on Sundays when three generations of a family can be observed enjoying a leisurely meal together.

Our preference is for the cafeteria, where we habitually tuck into what must surely be the largest strawberry flans in captivity followed by deliciously fresh coffee. The pleasure of sitting back in blissfully cool air-conditioned surroundings on a blistering hot day, surveying the gently passing pastoral scene through the vast windows which afford a 270° viewing arc, is truly hard to beat. We thoroughly recommend it!

She entered service at the end of May 1991 and we were disappointed to find that we could not sample a journey during the first week of operation because of slight fire damage following a short circuit. Leaving the landing stage we resolved to check each day on the progress of repairs and were relieved to learn that she was able to resume her duties eight days later. She has continued with unblemished reliability ever

since and maintains the previously mentioned six-day cycle from end of May to the third week in September, completing two return trips per day. For a further four weeks she continues her autumn schedule of just one return sailing each Saturday and Sunday.

We tend to concentrate on the morning departure from Biel/Bienne to Solothurn but our last journey was also the last one for *SIESTA* in 1995 as we concluded with her a very successful season on 22nd October last.

FACTS AND FIGURES

Builders	Deggendorfer Werft und Eisenbau GmbH, Germany
Gross weight	300 tonnes
Length	48.15 metres
Beam	10.50 metres
Draught	1.30 metres
Motive power	2 x Detroit diesels, 324Kw each (developing 440hp)*
Auxiliary power	2 x unspecified diesels, 70Kw each (developing 95hp)
Bow thruster	1 x 60Kw electrically driven pump
Service speed	21.7 kph*
Total Capacity	500 persons*
Restaurant	165 places
Cafeteria	82 places

* These current figures differ slightly from BSG's original press release statement of: 272Kw/370hp per engine and a service speed of 21 kph. Additionally, the total capacity was initially set at 460



A typical passage from Biel/Bienne to Solothurn

by Leslie & Naomi Falkson

- 11.20 Depart landing stage and cross the lagoon to enter canal.
- 11.30 Arrive Nidau. 1st passenger stop.
- 11.35 Arrive Port Lock, head of canal. Enter when signalled by operator to proceed.
- 11.46 Depart Port Lock into River Aare. Time to lock through will obviously depend on the state of the river and is therefore variable. Average rise/fall appears to be about 3 metres taking approximately 11/12 minutes to fill/empty.
- 11.47 Pass MS Büren, heading for Biel/Bienne and preparing to enter the now vacated lock.
- 11.55 Arrive Brügg. 2nd passenger stop.
- 12.00 Depart Brügg after exchange of six or seven voyagers.
- 12.08 River Schwarzenau empties into the Aare on starboard (right) side.
- 12.24 Pass under the recently renovated covered wooden bridge before tying up at the ancient citadel of Büren. Possibly twenty or more will disembark here but we take up a similar number of new passengers.
- 12.30 Depart Büren and resume course for Solothurn.
- 12.33 Pass MS Stadt Solothurn, on route to Biel/Bienne and right on time for her own call at Büren.
- 12.50 Stop at Grechen after completing a 360° about turn in midstream to approach the landing stage from the Solothurn direction. Evidently this is a safety requirement when the current is running fast.
- 13.10 Another mid steam pirouette, this time on a bend, which tests our pilot's skills to the limit as he makes his approach to the landing stage at Altreu. At first glance a simple cluster of a few restaurants and cafes. Look up and see why everyone else is eagerly peering skywards. For this is the famous 'Storks' Haven' where these graceful creatures nest each year behind the roof boards of the said establishments. No one seems to mind the ceaseless staining of tiles and brickwork; no doubt the volume of business they attract is highly valued.
- 13.45 A U-turn now, before making fast at the Solothurn terminus and the entire compliment prepares to disembark and explore the delights that this interesting town has to offer.

To sum up, if you have not yet sampled a trip on this novel ship we have no hesitation in prescribing the *SIESTA* treatment as the perfect antidote to an overdose of frenetic gricing; there is an abundance of mechanical innovation to keep the technically minded fully entertained. To the more indolent sector we would say that the relaxing calm of a post-prandial siesta on the *SIESTA* is very hard to beat!