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sports resorts. The resort directors take this seriously. They are all buying snow-cannons to be ready for the fight; tomorrow's snow will not fall from the sky.

When the Upper Engadine had been connected to the railway network, had recovered from set-backs at the end of the First World War, the Grisons car ban had been lifted and the world economic crisis was not due for a few more years, attention turned to extending the road system. In summer 1926, 197 visitors in 56 motor cars managed to drive up to the luxury Schweizerhof hotel in St. Moritz. A bronze plaque dating from 1998 reminds us of this period. It was commissioned by the local council in Samedan, and explains why the three kilometres of road past the golf course between Punt Muragl and Samedan were the first link in the Canton of Grisons to be metalled – it was because Sir Henry Detterding did not like cars enveloping the golf course in a cloud of dust as they drove by. Detterding was the managing director of Shell, and that cuts a long story short. His company paid for the asphalt. The stretch is still called Shell Road, and was renewed in 1997. The bronze plaque says: "The refurbishment gave Shell (Switzerland) reason to be pleased and to remember that clean air cannot be taken for granted."

Cars, transport facilities, Samedan airfield and other infrastructure features are now spread-

ing across the valley floor. The view of the surrounding mountains makes up for this less than pleasing sight. Global warming is an issue here as well. To protect itself from floods, Samedan is diverting the Flaz. The river is being separated from the Inn over a distance of 4 kilometres and moved to the other side of the valley. 70 000 tons of earth are being replaced with 75 000 tons of rock. Overall cost: about 30 million francs...

The great St. Moritz is a town! The new local poets sing the praises of the luxury hotels with their unique atmosphere, the expensive shops and rich pickings in the White Arena. They cry: "Curtain up and clear the stage for the play called life." St. Moritz is the shopping mall of the Alps, to use its own words, it is their ballroom, the top of the world, the sporting stronghold.

A recently published study has confirmed that prices on the St. Moritz property market are reaching record levels for Switzerland. There are 4600 residential units, and over half of them are used by their owners as second homes. This suggests that they are often unoccupied, but that does not help the local people who suffer from a severe lack of affordable rented accommodation. St. Moritz is growing, but the number of real St. Moritz people is constantly going down. They are moving out. They are leaving the stage of the play called life.

They have no inhibitions about showing themselves in a good light. They have 500 kilo-

metres of paths and over 1000 benches with panoramic views, they have a casino full of Italians who love gambling, they have the oldest bob-sleigh run in the world, they were the first with electric light, they play golf in the depths of winter, they founded the first Swiss tourist association, they had the first telephone in Grisons, the first electric tram in the Alps, the first horse-racing on snow. They've got everything. Mountain railways, chair-lifts, 350 kilometres of slopes with guaranteed snow, 220 snow-cannons and a cosmetic surgeon: "Anyone who is fit and looks good will have no trouble in making friends..."

The ski circus is coming to town in February. St. Moritz is building. This Alpine town is organizing the trendiest winter event, the most expensive sporting event that Switzerland has ever seen. Glittering images will be flashed around the globe. Athletes will embrace. 100 000 spectators are expected on the spot and another 300 million on television. The Alpine world skiing championships take place in St. Moritz in February. When the crazy starting pistol is fired on the crazy starting slope, the downhill racers will reach a speed of over 130 kilometres an hour in 6 seconds. Quick as lightning, they are demonstrating something about the world championship that occurred to the new local poets as well: "Speed is not everything, it's the only thing."

slightly abridged

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