



18 mois de Swiss Quality Time all'italiana.

Sottsass Advert 1991

# Tissot

## at the MIH

by Theodore Diehl



Whenever I am in La Chaux-de-Fonds, I always make a point of visiting the Musée international d'horlogerie (MIH). Not only is this an open, visitor-friendly collection, vast in the number of objects it contains and the historical span of horology it covers, there is always a new temporary exhibition to see, and items fresh from the restoration workshops are regularly put on display.

In La Chaux-de-Fonds, which can be counted among the most important and ancient of watchmaking centres in Switzerland, the use of French remains de rigueur, and so only a few items in the MIH have coherent English descriptions, with the exception of the temporary exhibits, which always seem to have excellent multilingual presentations. Last year the development of the quartz watch was covered in minute detail and was a real eye-opener. In the present age where computers and microcircuits are indispensable parts of our lives, we have all easily forgotten the tremendous number of technical hurdles that had to be overcome to make quartz technology reliable as well as small enough to fit on the wrist. The original oscillator system for a functioning wristwatch was about the size of 6 shoeboxes, and the meandering paths, including dead ends, which were followed by several different companies during development, made the challenge seem like a "mission impossible". Which is clearly why the background music, as well as the visual theme for the exhibit, also came from the film of the same name.



Book-Keeper 1890



Eduard Louis Tissot



**Looking back**

This year, Tissot, as part of their 150-year celebration, have organized an exhibition overview of their advertising, covering posters, sales folders, television spots and memorabilia, and after viewing the collection one cannot avoid the sensation of having passed through a rather groovy Tissot time capsule. What should we think about the 1973 Carousel watch, "The unique fab watch with a thousand and one faces"? Whether you find it fab or not, it is a really clever idea – the watch had several interchangeable and coloured bezels that could be snapped on and off and showed various tachymeter scales, world time zones and a decimal converter. The watch was so popular in Hong Kong that a local pop group called Teddy and The Playboys had a chart hit with a song about it.

Or take the 1971 Sidereal with a funky banana-yellow fibreglass case and a steel diver's bezel, waterproof to 200 metres. It looks like it could have been designed last year.

Some of the older posters bring a smile to one's face due to the incongruous nature of the image transpositions they invoke, such as the 1950s poster for the Aquasport, "The World's

Best-Protected Precision Watch... Ideal for Miners". (Where on earth were all the divers, sailors, and swimmers hiding?) Also humorous are the names that possess a vowel too many, such as the "Chrono-Electroiman", a magnetic testing device used exclusively in Tissot factories. It subjected the watches to magnetic levels many times higher than could be reached in everyday life in order to check their antimagnetic properties before they left the factory. And this was at a time when daily life had only a tiny fraction of the electromagnetic devices and magnetic fields that surround us today. Some of the TV spots

are charming, with their hip bell-bottoms and a correspondingly high flower-power content. Other films lay naked our early '60s pre-feminist, male chauvinist pig attitudes, like the ad for the Tissot Mach 1 with a racing driver zooming around at a speed higher than any 21<sup>st</sup> century PlayStation 2 could emulate. The text of the soundtrack, which has a distinctly British news-reel nasality, intones over the vroom of the engine: "It's Hard... It's Fast... It's a Man's Watch." Egads, the damsels of today with their 44-mm diameter chronographs would actually probably agree with him wholeheartedly! How times change. ○

**Further information:** *Tissot 1853–2003: A History in Images*. Open daily 10 am to 5 pm except Mondays, exhibition runs until October 2003. Musée international d'horlogerie, Rue des Musées 29, CH-2300 La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland. Tel: +41 32 967 6861, E-mail: mih.vch@ne.ch, www.mih.ch