



Europa Star postcard from Switzerland – the markets are heating up

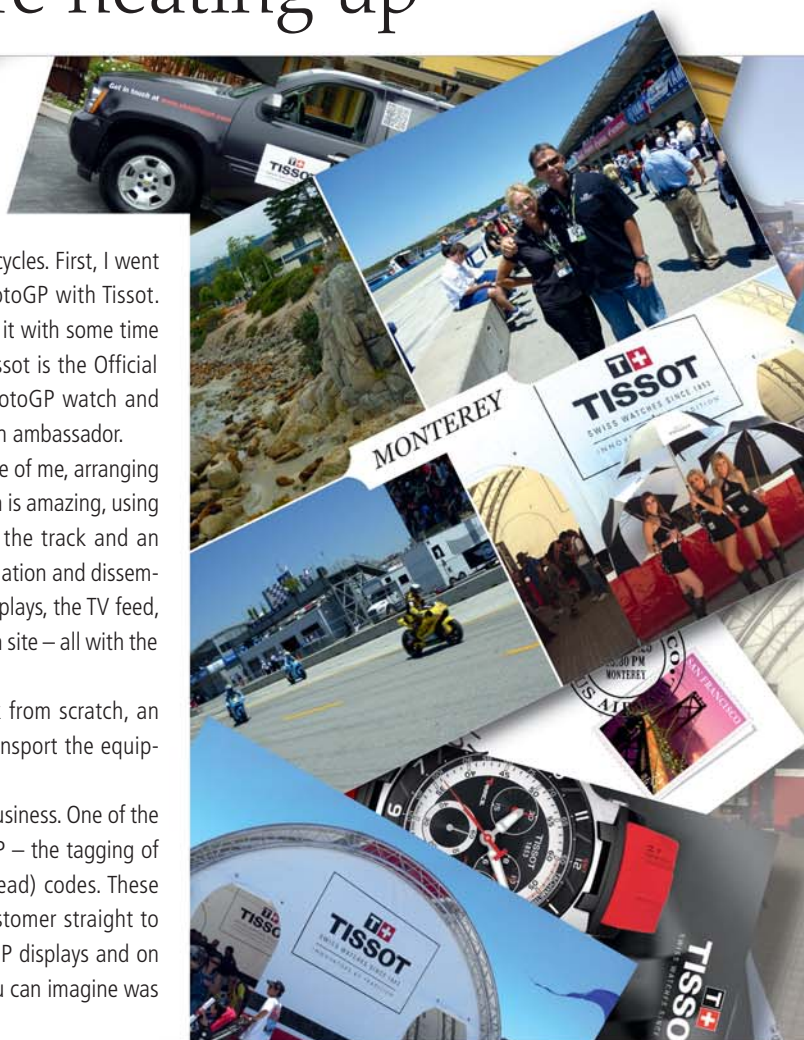
› Keith W. Strandberg, International Editor

Recently, I had some great trips, all involving motorcycles. First, I went to the San Francisco area for the Laguna Seca MotoGP with Tissot. MotoGP is always an exciting event and combining it with some time on the Monterey Peninsula made it even better. Tissot is the Official Timekeeper for MotoGP, they make the Official MotoGP watch and they work with former champion Nicky Hayden as an ambassador.

Sharon Buntain, Tissot's US president, took great care of me, arranging a behind-the-scenes of the timekeeping effort, which is amazing, using transponders on all the motorcycles, receivers on the track and an incredible control centre that manages all the information and disseminates it all to everyone who needs it – the track displays, the TV feed, the commentators and the hundreds of journalists on site – all with the Tissot logo attached.

Amazingly, Tissot's timekeepers set up every track from scratch, an incredible effort that requires tractor trailers to transport the equipment from track to track around the world.

Tissot also runs an on-site boutique, which did big business. One of the cool Tissot initiatives was introduced at the MotoGP – the tagging of ads, displays and POP materials with QR (quick read) codes. These codes, when read with smart phones, take the customer straight to special websites. Tissot put these codes on their POP displays and on the attractive models at their boutique, which as you can imagine was very successful in spreading the word.





Finally, I had a beautiful late summer (really early fall in Switzerland) ride to Thomas Prescher's workshop in Twann, a picturesque little Swiss village on a lake. It was one of the best rides of my life, but cold, as winter is firmly on its way to Switzerland.

While at Prescher's atelier, I realized all the steps that go into the making of each individual piece. Using his sophisticated software, I designed a bridge for his tourbillon, then outputted it into the CNC software, went through and set all the parameters for milling, then watched it being milled in the CNC machine. Then, I went through all the other steps – cleaning, beveling, polishing, finishing, galvanizing, drying and more. In truth, the work I did in four hours would have taken four days, just for one part! I walked out with my own tourbillon bridge -- I don't know why he didn't want to use it in his hand made tourbillons, he said something about "maintaining quality..."

On the schedule for me are the following trips: Greenwich UK for Zenith, a Jaeger LeCoultre factory visit, a Cartier factory visit, a trek to the Isle of Man to meet with George Daniels, an Agenhor visit, a trip to Monte Carlo with the Franck Muller Group, a visit to Iceland for a new watch brand, JS Watches, and a trip to New York City for the opening of a new Ralph Lauren boutique. No rest for the wicked. <



Next, I reconnected with my friend Robert Heinzer from Victorinox Swiss Army. Robert is president Carl Eisner's right hand man and a Harley rider from way back and I was able to include a couple of nice long rides with him as I toured the Ibach, where Victorinox was founded, and Porrentruy facilities of Victorinox.

The operation in Ibach is amazing, producing 13 million knives and multitools a year. While there, I assembled my own Swiss Army Knife, which I carry with me all the time.

In Porrentruy, I saw the Victorinox assembly facility for watches and put the minute, hour and second hands on my own piece unique watch, which is on my wrist right now. As I look at the dial now, I don't see the signature scratches I managed to carve into the pristine dial, so I'm wondering if it's really the same watch...