

Bookreview: Berner, Horologists Dictionary

G.A. Berner; Dictionnaire professionnel illustré de l'horlogerie, Français-Deutsch-English-Espagnol, I&II&CD-ROM; 2002 edition; published by Société du Journal La Suisse horlogère SA,, Biel, Switzerland. Book only (incl. postage to USA) SwissFrancs 300, CD only SwissFrancs 260, book & CD SwissFrancs 510. (order at: <http://www.fhs.ch/english/Eberner2002.htm> 1Sfr = 0.77 US\$ approx.)

For decades horologists the world over have acknowledged the 1961 publication by G.A. Berner, former Director of the Watchmaking College in Biel, Switzerland as the worlds finest multilingual dictionary specialized in horological terminology. Its unique four-column layout for the first time allowed studying the detailed definition of a specialized horological word side-by-side in French, German, English and Spanish. In addition an explanatory illustration was included wherever this was appropriate to better explain a concept or an item. Even the first volume was a massive undertaking with thousands of entries, reduced to a manageable size handbook by using special, bible-style thin paper.

By the 1990s technological advances had created the necessity to produce a Supplement which added over 1000 additional terms, and which was published in 1995. Now the horologist trying to decipher a foreign language text had to consult two books if they were unsure of the meaning of a term. Both volumes were out of print by 2002.

The world of international horology is indebted to the publishers for now avoiding the temptation of the easy solution (i.e. just reprinting the two books) but doing it "right", i.e. not only merging the two separate volumes into one alphabetical listing, but at the same time also making an interactive computer based version available. . (One can buy only the book, only the CD-ROM, or both). The current edition creates a linguistic resource for the international horologist that has never existed before: The dictionary defines about 5700 key horological terms in four languages and contains nearly 1000 illustrations.

This reviewer – in spite of being a book lover – found the interactive electronic version to offer a major improvement in ease of use and speed of

finding stuff. The computer version installs easily from the CD to any PC (Windows or MAC, needs about 50 Meg of hard-disk space to run without the CD present). Wisely the editors have decided to retain much of the functionality of the paper edition; one may e.g. easily toggle between the definitions in the four languages. However the main limitation of the book format is gone” Size limitations on paper had dictated one listing of all the definitions, they appeared in French alphabetical order and numbered, with three separate indexes for the terms in the three other languages needed to find the number for the multilingual listing of the term in the main section. That limitation is of course gone in the interactive version; any language may now be the primary language.

The functionality and layout on the screen takes a bit of getting used to, but not more than most new software applications: After choosing a primary language, a separate small window is used to launch a search, e.g. for terms containing the word “gear”. The results are then displayed in a separate window, nine terms were found: 1)gear, 2)sliding gear, 3)throw into gear(engage), 4)throw out of gear (disengage), 5)gear train etc.. By clicking on any of the 9 terms found one opens the definition window, which defines the term. The definition and explanation for “gear” is 666 words long and refers to 9 illustrations (showing parts and types of gears), which one may pop up in a side window. Toggling between languages one may read not only the term, but also the definition in English, French, Spanish or German.

Admittedly this is a somewhat pricey publication, and it will therefore not be considered by the casual horologist who has the need to translate a specialized timekeeping term once or twice a year. However for a professional in horological research, horological science or horological writing on an international scale this is an invaluable and indispensable tool.

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