

THÉODORE: CHAMPION CYCLISTE!

By Thomas Matthies 1 Feb. 2018



In "Bicycle Stamps" no. 2 from spring 1987 my friend Rupert Waltl reported a stamp from Liechtenstein according to Théodore Champion:

Liechtenstein 28.08.69

Rupert Waltl reports that some members might wish to add this stamp to their collection. He doesn't consider it to be a bicycle stamp, but a friend of his does as, thought the stamp was issued to commemorate Théodore Champion as a "Pionier der Philatelie", he was a "Schweizer Radmeister".

So it was controversial because the reason for the stamp was his career as philatelist. But I think most collectors don't know any facts about his cycling-career. Me too and 2012 - living in times of internet - in I decided to ask Google.

This was not as easy as it sounds. The first thing I have found was the company he has established in France for selling stamps worldwide. It exists up to now¹.

The Philatelist

Théodore Champion was a stamp collector from an early age and he was the joint publisher of the Yvert and Tellier² stamp catalogue and of the 'Bulletin Mensuel', a periodical catalogue update. His purchase of two Post Office Mauritius stamps at the Ferrary sales in 1922, "brought him prominently into the limelight"³. He helped to found the Musée de La Poste in Paris and he was a critic of the "remorseless war upon the collector's purse when France, which had already issued twenty-six stamps for self and colonies in celebration of the World's Fair at New York in 1939, announced the imminence of a hundred and forty more stamps. At that, Theodore Champion, her great philatelic publicist, who had stood by his native land through all her previous stamp racketeering, gagged and declared that he would have nothing to do with the new issue."⁴. Therefore he got my sympathy. What would he say to the IGPC-I issues of "Tour de France 2003" or the Stamperija business ...

In 2012 French Wikipedia⁵ does only give a short hint to his cycling career without verification. But they wrote about 2 other stamps: Antigua 1993 and Montserrat 2002.

MiNr. 1821 - 1828 (1825), (Block 261) Antigua und Barbuda, 1993-06-14 (Scott Number: 1663-9)

Philatelic Persons

MiNr. 1140 - 1144 (1142), (Block 89) Montserrat, 2001-04-30

Famous Stamp Personalities



¹ <http://www.theodorechampion.fr>

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yvert_et_Tellier

³ <http://www.helenmorgan.net/bm/biogs/E000045b.htm>

⁴ Alvin F. Harlow, The Amenities of Stamp Collecting, 1940, p. 198/199 <https://archive.org/details/paperchaseamenit00harlrich>

⁵ http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theodore_Champion

The Cyclist

Up to here no problem. But try to find something about "cycling" and "Champion" ... 9.580.000 hits - every cyclist seems to be a champion. "Theodore Champion cycling" reduced it to 2.150.000 hits ... a challenge for the rest of my life.

At next I tried "Théodore Champion cycling" ... é ... this small little scar above the e makes the difference! And so it picked up speed:

"Cyclingarchives.com": A cyclists "database" (in different languages) with biography data and results ... including our protagonist⁶.

Théodore was the first national champion in switzerland as a professional sprinter in 1892.

And there were also results in "Memoire du cyclisme"⁷ and "Swiss Cycling"⁸

But all these sources were partly contradictory and had no real references on authentic sources like books or newspapers from this time.

Then I wrote to "Théodore Champion S.A." to find more information. And the General Manager Anne Marie Ricaux Demail sent me two scanned documents that show another side of our Champion: He was a tricyclist! And in this discipline a champion too. He set a record in 50 km road cycling on 14.6.1891 in Paris in 1h45'45''.



Diplom⁹

The first internationally ratified records in this discipline were set in 1893 by Henri Desgrange¹⁰.

⁶ <http://www.cyclingarchives.com/coureurfiche.php?coureurid=26447>

⁷ http://www.memoire-du-cyclisme.eu/piste/suisse_vitesse.php

⁸ http://www.swiss-cycling.ch/uploads/files/Bahn_Schweizermeisterschaft_Sprint_2017.pdf

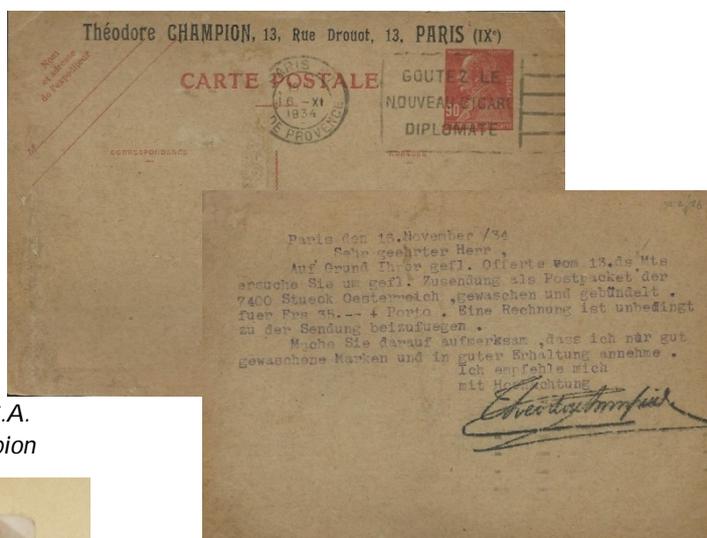
⁹ kindly copied by Anne-Marie Ricaux Demail, General Manager of Théodore Champion S.A., France

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henri_Desgrange

When I searched again in 2017 I found much more information than 5 years ago – inclusive photos of "Théo" as cyclist - but still not without contradiction. But a new Google search brought me to the full text archive of two Swiss newspapers: Gazette de Lausanne (GdL) and Journal de Genève (JdG) ¹¹. And with some work I could find all the results of Swiss championships from 1892 (1st Swiss championship) to 1899, the last year in his cycling career. And I was amazed that he was also participant of road races like Paris-Roubaix (1898).

What do you think? Wouldn't he be a member of the Bicycle Stamp Club today?

I'm sure now, that he has merited a place in my collection of "sport cycling" as a Champion of philately AND a Champion of cycling.



Postal stationaries from Théodore Champion S.A.
The right one with impr. signature of T. Champion



Henry Henneberg & Théo Champion before the start of Paris-Roubaix, 1898 ¹²

Here are his Palmarès in swiss championships:

- 1892 1st in Track, Sprint, Profs,
- 1893 1st in Track, Sprint, Profs,
- 1893 2nd in Road, Elite,
- 1894 2nd in Track, Sprint, Tricycle,
- 1895 1st in Track, Sprint, Profs,
- 1895 1st in Track, Sprint, Tricycle,
- 1896 2nd in Track, Sprint, Profs,
- 1896 1st in Track, Sprint, Tricycle,
- 1898 1st in Swiss Championship (S.V.B.),
Track, Sprint, Profs, ¹²
- 1899 2nd in Swiss Championship (S.V.B.),
Track, Sprint, Profs,
- 1899 2nd in Swiss Championship (UCS),
Track, Sprint, Profs,

¹¹ <http://www.letempsarchives.ch>

¹² Because of disagreements a second federation (UCS) had temporary split from the Swiss Velocipist Association (S.V.B.), so two Swiss championships were held a year.

¹³ Collection Jules Beau. Photographie sportive T. 6. Année 1898 / Jules Beau : F. 16v. Paris-Roubaix, 10 avril 1898 https://fr.wikibooks.org/wiki/Photographie/Personnalités/B/Jules_Beau (Fantastic site!!! This photo is from Album N° 6)

The Results of the Swiss Championships

1892 (1st) Sprint, Profs, Zürich-Hardau 2.10.92; [JdG 4.10.92, p. 3]
[Bicycles, 5000 meters]

1^{er} *Théodore Champion*, du Bicycle-Club de Genève, en 9 m. 29 s.;
2^e P. Sarzano, du Bicycle-Club de Genève, en 9 m. 29 s. 1/5;
3^e Ed. Wicky, du Bicycle-Club de Lausanne.

1893 Sprint, Profs, Genève-Varembé 9.7.93; [JdG 11.7.93, p. 3]
[Bicycles, 10000 m. 20 registered, 14 starters]

1^{er} *M(onsieur). Champion* 18m. 49 s.; 2^e M. Sarzano 18 m. 49 s. 2/5;
3^e M. Bozino 18m.49 s.4/5;

1893 Road, Elite, Berne 13.8.93; [GdL 14.8.93, p. 2]
[Cycling race Berne-Lyss-Morat-Avenches and return (100 kilometers)]
1^{er} Wicky, de Zurich; 2^e *Champion*, de Genève; 3^e Bozino, de Genève.

1894 Sprint Bicycle & Tricycle, Genève-Varembé 28.10.94; [JdG 30.10.94, p. 3]
[Tricycles, 2000 meters]

1. M. Kubler in 3 m. 36 1/5 sec. ; 2. *M. Th. Champion* in 3 m. 56 3/5; 3. M. C. Etter in 9 m. 7 3/5 s.

1895 Sprint Bicycle & Tricycle, Profs, Genève-Jonction 11.8.95; [JdG 13.8.95, p. 3]
[Tricycles, 2000 meters, 5 registered, 2 starters]

1. *M. Champion* (Genève) en 4 minutes 14 secondes 2/5. 2. M. Bozino (Genève).
[Bicycles, 5000 meters. 12 registered. 6 starters]
1. *M. Champion* (Genève) en 8 m. 51 s. 1/5. 2. M. Bozino (id.). 3. M. Damond (id.).

1896 Sprint Bicycle & Tricycle, Profs, Genève-Jonction 16.8.96; [JdG 18.8.96, p. 3]
[Tricycles, 2000 m. This is the last time this championship is run.]

1^{er} *Champion*, en 3 m. 12 s. 1/5; 2^e Bozino; 3^e Lewis.
[Bicycles, 2000 m]
1^{er} Henri Henneberg, en 4 m. 1 s. 3/5.; 2^e *Champion*; 3^e Portier;

1898 (S.V.B.), Sprint, Profs, Basel-Muttenz 3.7.98; [JdG 6.7.98, p. 1]
[Bicycles, 2000 meters]

1. *Champion*, de Genève, 4 m. 5 s. 1/5; 2. Kurz, de Bâle, 4 m. 5 s. 4/5; 3. Vassalli, de Genève, 4 m. 6 s.;

1899 (S.V.B.), Sprint, Profs, Zürich-Hardau 18.6.99; [JdG 20.6.99, p. 3]
[Bicycles]

1. H. Henneberg, Genève. 2. *Th. Champion*, Genève. 3. Ch. Hugon, Genève.

1899 (UCS), Sprint, Profs, Genève-Jonction 16.7.99; [JdG 18.7.98, p. 3]
[Bicycles]

1. H. Henneberg, en 1 m. 26 3/5 s.; 2. *T. Champion*; 3. Ch. Dufaux, D. T. en 29 s.

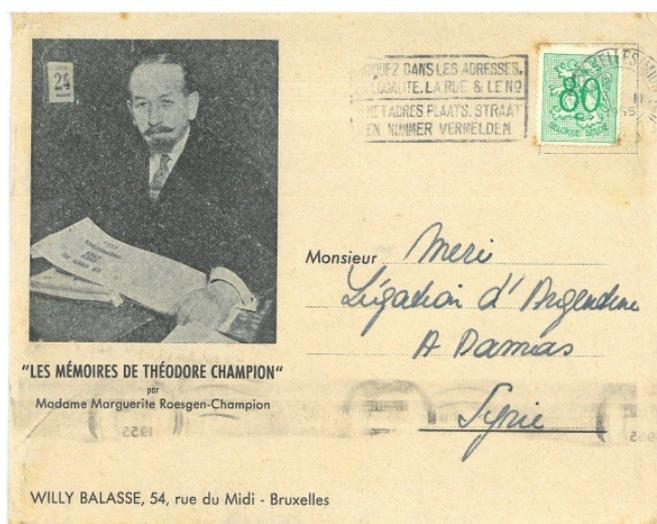


From "Les Rois Du Cycle",
Breyer/Coquelle, 1898, www.bnf.fr

A Swiss Team for Paris.

We are daily expecting four of the best Swiss riders below mentioned to reach Paris, where they intend racing in the early part of the season. Theodore Champion is twenty-two years of age and has ridden a wheel since his thirteenth year, although it is only since 1890 that he has taken to racing. He won the tricycle championship in 1891, 1893 and 1894. The 1894 bicycle wreath also went to him, all the championships falling in his net. He raced forty-six times last year and secured twenty-one firsts and thirteen seconds. He won the internationale at Geneva, beating Buni, Ferrario, Alaimo, Soibud, Cottereau, etc. Arnold Bozino first made his debut as a crack in 1890, winning a championship in 1892. During last season he rode in thirty-four events, capturing twelve firsts, sixteen seconds and was six times unplaced. He ran a good second to Zimmerman when they met at Geneva. Henry Favre is the eldest of the lot, being twenty-five. He first rode a machine in May, 1893, but could never score on the path. Then he went in for road racing and ran away with the twenty-five-kilometre championship of his club, making a fresh Swiss record. He rode in the 100-kilometre road championship and secured it, beating forty-two others. John Damond is the kid of the party, being seventeen years old. He has a few junior events to his credit, but nothing very extraordinary. He is considered to be a promising rider since he won an internationale at Evian.

From "The Referee & cycle trade journal", US, 14.11.1894¹³



Letter from 1955 with invitation for the presentation of the Memoires of T. Champion

¹⁴ <https://archive.org/stream/referee1418941895chic#page/n813/mode/2up/search/Theodore+Champion>

Theo CHAMPION

(from Bicycle-Club of Geneva), CHAMPION OF HAUT-RHÔNE (TRICYCLE).

LE VÉLOCE-SPORT 719

Theo CHAMPION
(Du Bicycle-Club de Genève),
CHAMPION DU HAUT-RHÔNE (TRI).

Champion ! un nom prédestiné, auquel répond un des plus aimables cyclistes que nous commissions et sans conteste l'un des meilleurs tricyclistes qui existent.
Né le 14 février 1873, Theo Champion qui, avec son frère Adrien, est un des membres les plus influents et les plus dévoués du Bicycle-Club de Genève, s'est passionné pour le cyclisme dès son enfance.
Il a successivement gagné les championnats de fond (tri, 50 kil. sur route) de la grande Fédération du Haut-Rhône en 1891 et 1893, et vient de renouveler cette belle victoire pour 1894 le 1^{er} juillet dernier, ainsi que nous l'avons dernièrement annoncé.
Sa performance de 1891 (14 juin) — 1 h. 45 m. 45 s. — lui valut non seulement le titre de champion du Haut-Rhône, mais en même temps celui de recordman de France.
En 1892, ce fut Durif qui devint champion du Haut-Rhône (tri) et recordman de France par 1 h. 39 m. 51, sur la même route de St-Genis-d'Aoste à Luçay (26 juin 1892).
Champion se classa 3^e à sept longueurs du premier dans cette course, mais après avoir été heurté par le 2^e (Bozzi o) à 200 mètres du but et avoir éprouvé de sérieuses avaries à sa machine.
Le record actuel appartient toujours, pour la France, à Duanip (50 kil. en 1 h. 33 m. 29 s., le 28 septembre 1893, route de Libourne-Périgueux), Theo Champion n'ayant réussi à faire dans son récent championnat du Haut-Rhône que 1 h. 40 m. 31 s.
Le 29 juillet dernier, il a remporté à Venne le championnat de fond 100 kil. (bicyclettes), du Haut-Rhône.

Theo Champion a remporté d'autres victoires nombreuses, mais ses plus beaux succès ont toujours été sur le tri-cyclo.
Son énergie remarquable et ses belles qualités physiques sont fort bien servies par un entraînement méthodique et rigoureux.
Nous sommes particulièrement heureux de publier aujourd'hui, dans notre galerie des célébrités vélocipédiques, un portrait qui appelle si légitimement l'attention de nos lecteurs sur la grande et toujours sportive Fédération du Haut-Rhône et sur son distingué *Champion*.

SPECTATOR.

From "Veloce Sport", 23.8.1894, No 494, www.bnf.fr
(Bibliothèque nationale de France)

by 1 h. 39 m. 51, on the same road from St-Genis-d'Aoste to Luçay (June 26, 1892). Champion was third with seven lengths to the first in this race, but after being hit by the 2nd (Bozzino) 200 meters from the finish and have experienced serious damage to his machine.

The current record for France still belongs to Duanip (50 km in 1 h. 33 m. 29 s., 28 September 1893, road Libourne-Périgueux), Theo Champion has managed to do in his recent Haut-Rhône championship just 1 h. 40 m. 31 s.

Theo Champion has won many more victories, but his greatest success has always been on the tricycle.

His remarkable energy and physical qualities are very well served by a methodical and rigorous training.

We are particularly pleased to publish today, in our gallery of velocipedic celebrities, a portrait that so legitimately draws the attention of our readers to the great and always sporting Federation of the Haut-Rhône and its distinguished Champion.

Champion ! a predestined name, answered by one of the friendliest cyclists we know and without a doubt one of the best tricyclists that exist.

Born February 14, 1873, Theo Champion, who along with his brother Adrien is one of the most influential and dedicated members of the Bicycle Club of Geneva, has been passionate about cycling since his childhood.

He successively won the long distance championships (tricycle, 50 km on road) of the great Federation of Haut-Rhône in 1891 and 1893, and just renewed this beautiful victory for 1894 on July 1st, as we have recently announced.

His performance of 1891 (June 14) - 1 h. 45 m. 45 sec. - earned him not only the title of champion of the Haut-Rhône, but at the same time that of recordman of France.

In 1892, it was Durif who became champion of Haut-Rhône (tri) and record holder of France