

The Michelin Men: Driving an Empire. By *Herbert R. Lottman*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2003. ix + 310 pp. Illustrations, photographs, notes, index. Cloth, \$27.95. ISBN: 1-860-64896-7.

Reviewed by Stephen L. Harp

The Michelin Men is a revised, English edition of Herbert Lottman's *Michelin: 100 ans d'aventures* (Paris, 1998). Like the earlier and longer French version, *The Michelin Men* is a popular history with wonderful, at times true, anecdotes and much suggestion. The original French version appeared in Edition Flammarion's Grandes Biographies series, and Lottman artfully made the book a chronicle of the Michelin tire company and a biography of the two Michelin brothers at the same time. A Michelin employee in France is sometimes referred to as a *Bibendum* (or "Michelin Man") to this day, but the book takes "Michelin Men" to mean Michelin's senior management, from the original Edouard and André Michelin to Edouard's great-grandson, also named Edouard, today.

Lottman begins in the early nineteenth century, recounting the founding and development of the early Barbier et Daubrée company until its reconstitution with the name Michelin in 1889. In that year, the younger brother, Edouard Michelin, took control of the factory in Clermont-Ferrand, while the older brother, André, remained in Paris to handle public relations and advertising. Lottman clearly admires André Michelin, to whom he dedicated the French edition of this book ("to André, the patron saint of the Michelin guide, who would have appreciated this attempt to say everything about Michelin's success" [frontmatter; my translation]), because he recognized that André was an advertising genius. Lottman briskly accounts the wide array of Michelin initiatives, from the first poster of *Bibendum* in 1898, through the composing of the red guide in 1900, through maps and road signs, guides to World War I battlefields, regional (eventually "green") guides, and sponsorship of aviation, to advocacy of Taylorism in French industry. After André died in 1931, Michelin spent very little on advertising, and Lottman rightly portrays the years after World War II as an era in which guidebooks grew in readership to the exclusion of much other advertising. Above all, the superior

radial tire, created by Michelin and introduced just after the Second World War, ultimately spoke for itself.

By writing a little about a lot (the book has 42 short chapters in 278 pages of text), Lottman mentions a great deal. There are only few omissions, such as Michelin's very forceful and expensive advocacy of pronatalism and some of its cadres' involvement in the secretive fascist Cagoule group on the eve of the Second World War. Errors are few and tend to result from exaggeration when information is taken out of context. So when Lottman writes in reference to the new red guide in 1900 that "Michelin had the benefit of no predecessor from which to copy" (p. 2), he overstates the uniqueness of the Michelin guide. Although Lottman is correct that the Michelin guide was very different from the earlier Baedeker or Hachette guides, it is nevertheless true that the Michelin version largely copied the format and contents of the Touring Club de France (TCF) *annuaire*, adding information about Michelin tire dealers. Of course, the Michelin guide evolved, and it quickly became much better than the TCF publications.

More troubling is the paucity of analysis—a lack inherent in most popular histories—resulting in part from a neglect of crucial secondary sources that would have enriched Lottman's account. On the development of regional touring, one should see Marc Francon, "Le guide vert Michelin: L'invention du tourisme culturel populaire" (Université de Paris VII, 1998), and Catherine Bertho Lavenir, *La roue et le style: Comment nous sommes devenus touristes* (Paris, 1999). On Taylorism, Aimée Moutet's *Les logiques de l'entreprise: La rationalisation dans l'industrie française de l'entre-deux-guerres* (Paris, 1997) is indispensable. For battlefield tourism, useful references would have been David Lloyd, *Battlefield Tourism: Pilgrimage and Commemoration of the Great War in Australia and Canada, 1919–1939* (New York, 1998), and Daniel J. Sherman, *The Construction of Memory in Interwar France* (Chicago, 1999). Admittedly, much of this work has appeared after the French edition of Lottman's book, but since the English edition traces events up to 2002, use of these recent sources would have strengthened Lottman's analysis.

Above all, Michelin's place in the global rubber industry would have been clarified by incorporating material in Lionel Dumond's "L'industrie française du caoutchouc, 1828–1938: Analyse d'un secteur de production" (Université de Paris VII,

1996) and Michael J. French's *The U.S. Tire Industry: A History* (New York, 1990). On Michelin's postwar reentry into North American markets, one of the most interesting sections of the book, the findings of Donald N. Sull, Richard S. Tedlow, and Richard S. Rosenbloom, "Managerial Commitments and Technological Change in the U.S. Tire Industry," which appeared in *Industrial and Corporate Change* (1997), would have been relevant. .

Given current interest in global history, it is unfortunate that Lottman only briefly mentions Michelin plantations in Indochina, which imposed some of the most exploitative working conditions and in turn were the most ridden with labor conflict of any in Southeast Asia. Here the work of Pierre Brocheux ("Le prolétariat des plantations d'hévéas au Vietnam méridional: Aspects sociaux et politiques, 1927–1937," published in *Movement social* [janvier-mars 1975]) and Martin J. Murray (*The Development of Capitalism in Colonial Indochina, 1870–1940* [1980]) would have provided background for a more nuanced and perhaps less admiring analysis of Michelin business ventures.

As business history has evolved to include its cultural aspects, some readers of this journal may enjoy this account of the broad contours of Michelin's advertising, especially if they already know something about the historical context. Others, particularly readers interested in the nuts and bolts of Michelin's business strategy, will need to continue to wait for Michelin to open its archives. Although Michelin did not assist Lottman, the company has allowed a few of us to view its advertising and printed sources. But without being allowed to freely consult company records, particularly the correspondence between the Michelin brothers, no historian will be able to write a comprehensive history of Michelin. Yet, lacking any access, Lottman has still managed to outline the broad contours of Michelin's growth, including its truly remarkable early-twentieth-century advertising. Moreover, his account of the secrets of the post-World War II red guides—largely compiled from press clippings since 1945—is as comprehensive and interesting as anything we have to date.

The Michelin Men, like the actual Michelin men themselves, will probably frustrate professional historians, be it those interested in cultural history or those more inclined toward traditional business history, unless they view the book as entertainment.

However, this book is more accurate, more engaging, and better written than most popular histories.

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