

## QUARTERLY INVESTOR COMMENTARY 30 SEPTEMBER 2016

CONTRARIUS GLOBAL EQUITY FUND

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The Fund aims to earn a higher Total Rate of Return than the average of the world's equity markets, as represented by the MSCI World Index, including the reinvestment of dividends net of withholding tax ("World Index"). It aims to achieve this without greater risk of loss, over the long-term. The Fund is an actively managed fund, and as such does not in any way seek to replicate its benchmark index, but may instead differ materially from the performance benchmark in order to achieve its objective.

Total Rate of Return		Since Inception	Latest	Latest	Latest	2016	Latest
in US Dollars	Class	on 1 Jan 2009	5 Years	3 Years	1 Year	Year-to-date	Quarter
			% Annualised -			— % Not Annualised	
Contrarius Global Equity	Investor	20.3	17.0	9.5	51.1	46.5	14.9
Contrarius Global Equity	Institutional	20.7	17.5	9.9	51.5	46.7	14.8
World Index		10.8	11.6	5.8	11.4	5.6	4.9

The Fund's Investor Class shares returned 14.9% for the quarter versus 4.9% for the benchmark MSCI World Index, including reinvested net income. As we have highlighted previously, our investment philosophy is not benchmark cognisant and our portfolios would normally vary materially from the benchmark World Index. The Fund's returns are therefore likely to deviate from those of the benchmark. Investors are reminded that given the long-term, contrarian, valuation-based investment philosophy, there will be times when the Fund will materially underperform its benchmark in the short-term in order to achieve its objective of long-term outperformance.

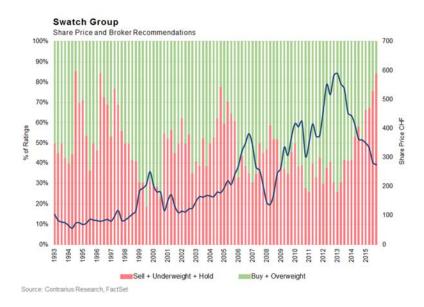
The Fund remains overweight Materials, Energy and Technology stocks. In terms of geographic exposure, the Fund continues to be significantly overweight shares outside the major developed markets.

Sector Exposure	Weig	Over/(Under)	
30 September 2016	Fund	World Index <sup>1</sup>	Weight
Energy	21	7	14
Materials	23	5	18
Industrials	1	11	(10)
Consumer Discretionary	20	13	8
Consumer Staples	1	11	(10)
Health Care	2	13	(11)
Financials	5	16	(11)
Real Estate	0	3	(3)
Information Technology	25	15	10
Telecommunication Services	0	3	(3)
Utilities	0	3	(3)
Total Shares	98	100	
Net Current Assets	2	-	
Net Assets	100	100	

Geographic Exposure	Wei	Over/(Under)	
30 September 2016	Fund	World Index <sup>1</sup>	Weight
North America	50	63	(12)
Europe	17	24	(7)
Japan	2	9	(7)
Asia ex-Japan	11	2	10
Other	17	3	14
Total Shares	98	100	
Net Current Assets	2	-	
Net Assets	100	100	

## **SWATCH GROUP**

It is unusual for the well-managed, financially sound, leader of a long-term growth industry to sell for less than ten times normal profits. So we were excited to find Swatch Group, whose share price has fallen by more than half since early 2014. This rarely happens when everything is going right—that would be too good to be true. Indeed, with Swatch the market appears to be concerned about not only the current operating environment, but also its competitive position. Swatch revenues fell in 2015, mainly because China (including Hong Kong) was down 11%. Hong Kong is a key retail hub for Swiss watches and so far this year industry sales there have plunged 28%. The impact on Swatch's profits is made worse by management's reluctance to cut costs. Moreover, smart watches are usurping wrist space, potentially a long-term competitive threat. Sentiment is about as bad as it's ever been.



We agree that there are challenges. But from our bottom-up analysis we believe that these are eclipsed by powerful forces working in its favour.

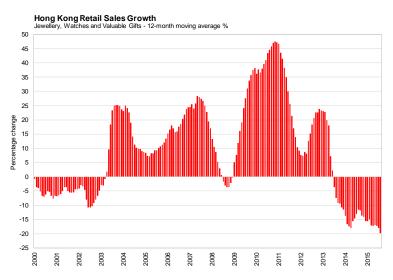
Most people probably associate 'Swatch' with the quirky plastic watches that became popular in the '80s and '90s. But these are only a small part of the business. The Swatch Group is by far the biggest producer of Swiss watches and their components. It owns brands across the price spectrum, from basic (Swatch, Flik Flak), through mid- and high-range (Calvin Klein watches and jewellery, Hamilton, Mido, Certina, Balmain, Tissot, Union Glashűtte, Rado, Longines) to luxury (Omega, Leon Hatot, Jaquet Droz, Glashűtte Original, Blancpain, Harry Winston, Breguet). It accounts for about 35% of Swiss watch exports by value. Moreover, it is the primary manufacturer of components. In recent years it supplied 70% of 'movements' (the core mechanics) and 90% of 'regulators' (the balance spring that controls timing), but it is likely to be less today since Swatch intends to reduce its supply to competitors. Although the Swatch brand has done well to remain popular for thirty years, this end of the market is perhaps vulnerable to competition and flighty fashions. But the opposite is true of the high-end brands: a heritage of more than a century (in some cases more than two) is a big barrier to entry. It is hard to start a new watch brand that will have the cachet of Blancpain.

With that in mind, the smart watch fear seems to be a false dichotomy. They compete at the margin only and the choice between a smart watch and a luxury watch is probably not an exclusive one for most buyers. An Apple watch may also be a fashion item, but it is in an entirely different category—few would say that Mini Cooper competes with Ferrari or Maybach. Electronic watches are too uniform to be personality statements. They have short product cycles, whereas precision mechanical watches are heirlooms. A luxury watch is more jewellery than timepiece.

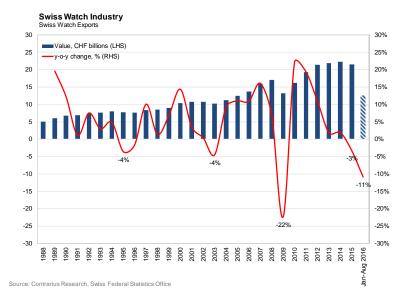
Even so, to the extent that there is crossover Swatch has some strengths. It supplies precision and low-power electronics to third parties, including being the provider of official timekeeping to the 2016 Olympics. For more than a decade skiers have been able to use their Swatch watches as ski passes. We don't expect the group to compete with Apple in the market for general purpose smart watches, but it will probably start including more and more electronic conveniences into certain ranges.

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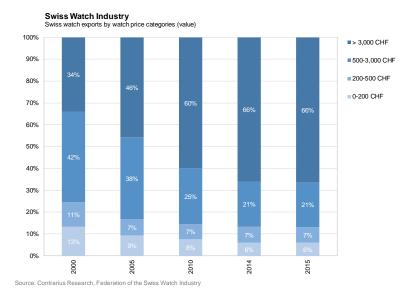
Luxury goods is a cyclical business. In the short- to medium-term it can be sensitive to economic uncertainty, exchange rates, travel patterns, and political volatility. These probably all contribute to the difficult environment facing the industry today. Hong Kong sales, which may well have been high, have crashed in part because of pessimistic expectations of China's economy and a clampdown on extravagant gift-giving. But we believe that these effects are temporary. Whatever China's near-term troubles, it remains a rapidly developing, urbanising society. In ten years' time, will China be richer or poorer? Will there be more or fewer wealthy people? We think 'richer' and 'more'. And the same is true of India. Indeed, we expect this to be true of the world as a whole, and for luxury goods to have a bright future.



Source: Contrarius Research, Hong Kong Census and Statistics Departmen



Some investors may point out that the Swiss watch industry has imploded before; that, in fact, the Swatch Group only exists because in the early 1980s bankers cobbled together two bankrupt watchmakers. That is true, but the industry is very different today. After three decades of consolidation, four watchmakers (Swatch, Richemont, LVMH, and Rolex) account for about 85% of exports. Management have professionalised and the companies – which used to be many small, independent, family businesses – now have sophisticated distribution infrastructure and international marketing programs. The 1980s collapse was triggered by the invention of cheap, accurate digital watches. Prior to this, a Swiss watch was primarily a timepiece and, of course, a handmade mechanical watch cannot compete (on either price or accuracy) with a quartz crystal watch made in huge, lean, automated factories. Although it probably didn't feel this way at the time, the collapse in the '80s may have been a blessing. It forced the industry to 'premiumize'. In 2015, two-thirds of Swiss watch exports (by value) were in pieces costing at least 3,000 Swiss francs (about \$3,100). Luxury may suffer cyclical volatility, but a high-end brand with a century-plus legacy is likely to endure.



In the meantime, though, profits have fallen. But management is taking a long-term view. The managing Hayek family, which owns shares worth more than three billion Swiss francs (about 23% of the economic interest), has so far resisted cutting back investment, marketing, or staff, saying that they would rather suffer in the short term to protect Swatch's unique assets. Still, even in these bad times it has healthy profit margins (although about half of what we believe to be normal). The company has about \$1.1bn in net cash and we estimate another \$2bn of excess inventory that should eventually become cash, and so it is likely to remain financially stable.

Swatch is in no small part responsible for 'Swiss-made' becoming one of the world's most valuable brands. Its commanding position in the supply of components sets it apart from the other watchmakers. Much of the industry has focused mainly on design and branding, leaving to others the finicky (but valuable) business of making precision mechanisms. This let Swatch build a near monopoly, powering not only its own watches, but also the majority that are made in Switzerland. The industry may regret this: in 2017, the criteria for labelling a watch 'Swiss' will be tightened, likely increasing demand for Swatch's components.

It is difficult to predict exactly what the Chinese economy (or the world's) will do, or how global politics may shape spending patterns. But we don't need to know these answers to find Swatch attractive. We expect its enduring competitive position and strong balance sheet to see out the current cyclical strains, and for it to continue providing exclusive products to a growing affluent class. It seems odd to us that we can buy Swatch for less than 10x normal profits when the S&P 500 sells for 20x profits (and the S&P 500 Tobacco index, whose constituents seem to be in long-term decline, is on 21x profits). Being able to buy such a good business at such a low price is truly...(ahem) a luxury.

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