

Service d'Exploitation Industrielle des Tabacs & Allumettes



Turn just about any French matchcover over, and you'll see "SEITA." SEITA, until recently, was the national match and tobacco manufacturing corporation of France. A publicly-owned corporation listed on the Paris stock exchange since February 24, 1995, it has two principal activities that are centered around its core tobacco business.

SEITA manufactures tobacco products: blond and dark cigarettes, cigars and cigarillos, rolling and pipe tobaccos, and matches. These are marketed in France and abroad under well-known brand names such as "Gauloises," "Gitanes," "Royale," "Fine," "Lucky Strike," "Meccarillos," "Havanitos," "Fleur de Savane," "Amsterdamer," and others. The company supplies state-licensed tobacconists in France with SEITA brand products and, under licensing agreements, those of other manufacturers.

The history of SEITA is actually the history of tobacco in France. Jean Nicot [*"nicotine"?*] introduced tobacco into France in 1560. In 1674, under Louis XIV's reign, a "tax farm" was established for managing tobacco sales. A few years later, Louis's famous finance minister, Colbert, extended the farm's monopoly to tobacco products manufacturing. A decree regulated and limited tobacco cultivation. The farm's monopoly was abolished in 1791, during the French Revolution, but Napoleon later reinstated it in 1810, and a state agency was set up to operate the monopoly. In 1860, the Finance Ministry established the Executive Office for State Production. Gitanes and Gauloises cigarettes were introduced in 1910. In 1926, French Premier Raymond Poincare created SEIT (later changed to SEITA with the added responsibility of matches) to be responsible for reimbursing public debt and managing the tobacco monopoly. In 1959, SEITA became a French public industrial/commercial utility.

The following year, deregulation of cigarette imports from other European Economic Community (EEC)

countries began. In 1962, SEITA's staff assumed an autonomous legal status, but the growth of the EEC meant change for SEITA. It lost its monopoly on tobacco cultivation in 1970, its monopoly on importing matches in 1972, and its monopoly on importing and distributing processed tobacco in 1976. It did, however, gain licenses from foreign tobacco manufacturers to distribute their brands in France.

In 1980, SEITA became a "national company." It was privatized on February 24th, 1995. After a 5-year decline in match sales in France, SEITA succeeded in slowing the decline by 50% by 1995. At the same time, SEITA was gradually expanding its match division's presence in the rest of Europe. In 1998, it was generating a steady stream of revenue in Spain from all of its lighter products. Matches sold in promotional books and boxes were also showing promising results in Germany and the Netherlands. While export sales revenue rose to FRF 3.1 million, up from FRF 2.1 million in 1994, it was still far too low to offset the decline in the French market. "so we'll have to wait and see what the future holds for SEITA."

That's how I wrapped up this article in 1998. Today, in 2006, SEITA no longer exists. In 1999, SEITA merged with Spain's Tabacalera in a move that surprised everyone. The end result is that SEITA is now just an item from the past.

[the picture at the right shows the SEITA manumark, in case you can't read it]

