

TO QUICKEN THE PULSE

Discovering an exceptional watch may not just be a defining moment, but can be the beginning of a long, often irrational pursuit of the rare and the complicated.

Words RICHARD WEBB

THE PRIMARY FUNCTION of a watch has been pretty much rendered obsolete by the invention of the cell phone. But inventive and pioneering brands have ensured that watches are much more than just timekeepers – they are technologically advanced micro-masterpieces, based on centuries-old tradition. Rather than technology sounding the death knell to the watch, the opposite has happened. While watches have become the acceptable face of masculine jewellery – bar a cufflink or two – they are one of the few items that a man can wear to express his personality. Beyond the watch ‘wardrobe’ lies the ‘collectable’, the bespoke Rolls Royce or Bentley of a watch that redefines its class.

The first watch propels and compels the collector, much like a wine connoisseur through an impossibly

rare vertical tasting of fine vintages. Whether you are seduced by complications or craftsmanship, there are standout editions for a lucky – and mildly obsessed – few.

Here, we look at a selection of timepieces that may help to define the key moments of your life, starting with the Audemars Piguet Royal Oak Offshore Grande Complication – a favourite for many collectors around the world. Its 648 parts take over six months to assemble with otherworldly attention to detail. The rugged-looking 18ct pink gold Royal Oak features a split-second *rattrapante* complication, with a perpetual calendar showing the date, day, month, phase of the moon and leap year indications. It’s yours for around \$740 000.

The Poinçon de Genève (Geneva Seal) is the ultimate guarantee of origin, quality, durability and savoir-faire for Genoese fine watchmaking maisons. The only Manufacture to carry this prestigious mark across its entire production is Roger Dubuis

Breguet Marine Chronographe ‘200 ans de Marine’ 5823



IWC Big Pilot Le Petit Prince



Audemars Piguet Royal Oak Offshore Grande Complication



Panerai Radiomir Firenze 3 Days Acciaio



Franck Muller Aeternitas Mega 4



Vacheron Constantin Mémoires d'Art Mécaniques Gravées



Girard-Perregaux The New World ‘Novus Orbis’



Jaeger-LeCoultre Hybris Mechanica à Grande Sonnerie



THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION

As watchmakers innovate ways to track time accurately within an increasingly complex composition of functions and movements, slimmer case widths, artistic decorations, new compounds and precious metals, to some this accessory is still simply a means to monitor the passing hours. When wearing a timepiece becomes more an expression of personal style, however, aficionados turn to the rare and limited. This is a selection of *Private Edition* favourites.

While watches have become the acceptable face of masculine jewellery – bar a cufflink or two – they are one of the few items that a man can wear to express his personality. Beyond the watch ‘wardrobe’ lies the ‘collectable’, the bespoke Rolls Royce or Bentley of a watch that redefines its class.

For relative newcomer, Franck Muller, complexity is a very good thing. The Swiss watchmaker was established in 1991 and has created a 21st-century monument to engineering with the Aeternitas Mega 4. The most complex wristwatch ever created, it packs 1 483 individual components, 205 sub-assemblies, 99 jewels and 36 complications into a case merely 22mm thick. Available on special order, it costs an eye-watering \$2,7 million.

At the other end of the time continuum is Vacheron Constantin, founded in 1755. To celebrate the company’s 260th anniversary this year, they unveiled the 1920s chronograph-inspired Harmony collection. The most ambitious of the collection is the platinum Harmony Ultra-Thin Grande Complication. This cushion-shaped watch took seven years to develop in-house, and is limited to 10 pieces at \$369 200 each. Its 5,2mm-thick movement 3500 Calibre is the thinnest self-winding split-seconds chronograph available.

At the heart of Jaeger-LeCoultre’s Master Grande Tradition Grande Complication is the Calibre 945 movement. Featuring more

than 300 gems, the aventurine dial’s flying tourbillon orbits the sapphire-outlined dial with an intricate lacquered guilloché rim. A zodiac calendar appears on a central star chart and the sun tracks the 24-hour cycle, while the minute repeater uses crystal repeater gongs and trébuchet hammers. All this for about \$650 000.

Collectors will value Breguet’s Marine Chronographe reference ‘200 ans de Marine’ 5823, which recalls King Louis XVIII’s 1815 appointment of Abraham-Louis Breguet as chronometer-maker to the French royal navy. Combining modernity and classicism, limited to 200 individually numbered and signed pieces, it is distinguished by a platinum case and a hand-guilloché gold oscillating weight with a two-tone black and rhodiumed exterior. This hybrid sports classic is water resistant to 100m and costs R552 800.

And high on the ‘nigh impossible to source’ list is the Omega De Ville Central Tourbillon enhanced with 459 diamonds, as only three editions of the sublime handcrafted timepiece were released. The dial adds a modern twist to the beauty of the tourbillon visible through the sapphire glass with an antireflective treatment on both sides. The titanium tourbillon cage is showcased in the centre of the watch, an unusual position that makes it all the more unique, and makes one revolution every minute. At its heart is the Co-Axial Calibre 2637, a self-winding movement with a 45-hour power reserve. A free-sprung balance allows for more precise adjustments of the watch, which has been officially certified as a chronometer by the COSC or Contrôle Officiel Suisse des Chronomètres. The price? Irrelevant. They’re not to be had for love or money.

Some customers of the world’s most expensive watches buy them in appreciation of their artistry, craftsmanship and innovations. Others buy them for their exclusivity or as status symbols. The purist? Simply to admire discreetly and reverently in homage to the master craftsman. □



James Bond themes Omega’s limited-edition Seamaster Aqua Terra 150M with the Bond family coat of arms used to pattern the dial and the oscillating weight of the movement shaped to resemble that iconic gun barrel