

Life Styles

Sign of the Times

Black watches and functional chronographs are the traditional timepieces of Porsche Design. A new designer piece recently debuted at the watch and jewelry fair in Basel: the P'6920 Rattrapante Chronograph.

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Many consider wearing a Porsche almost as important as having their hands on a Porsche steering wheel. Porsche buffs have been able to flaunt their favorite brand on their wrist for 37 years. Beginning in 1972, Ferdinand Alexander Porsche, the designer behind the legendary 911, turned from designing cars to designing exclusive accessories for those who drive them. His first piece, the Chrono 1, was marketed under the newly created brand Porsche Design. His distinctive design vocabulary was instantly recognizable: The chronograph's dial echoed the minimalist instruments of the 911, and, as in the car, both face and casing were black.

In the 1970s and 1980s, black was one of the most popular colors for Porsches, because, as F. A. Porsche put it, "it showed off the form best." For F. A. Porsche, it always boiled down to the "essence, the features that are characteristic of a product," which is why he used colors only sparingly, as accents. Red, for

example, served to mark the tip of a watch hand, at most. Thus F. A. Porsche created more than just a status symbol that men could wear—he designed the very first black luxury watch, revolutionizing a business that until then had been very much in love with the glitter of gold. Getting the titanium to stay black on the wearer's wrist, however, proved more difficult. *Tempi passati*: the introduction of PVD (physical vapor deposition) coating solved the problem, and now black is black virtually forever.

Of course, the newest watch in the Porsche Design line is equally black and bold in its design. Recently introduced at the "Baselworld" watch and jewelry fair in Switzerland, the P'6920 Rattrapante Chronograph will be available from fall of this year in a limited edition of 250—200 of them all in titanium and 50 featuring the crown, bezel, and case back in red gold. The watch body of both models is fashioned from matte black titanium. ▶

Nimble fingers: The specialists at Eterna apply their skills to the chronograph for Porsche Design





“Now the watch motor is perfect”:
Eterna’s technical director, Patrick Kury (right)

Beating Bad Times with Ball Bearings

Porsche Design watches have been produced by Eterna since 1998. Based in the Swiss town of Grenchen, the company has experienced many ups and downs in its long history and has once again resumed its rightful place among the ranks of Switzerland’s best-known and most exclusive watch manufacturers.

Founded in 1856, Eterna got its name from the Eterna watch collection in 1906. Few in the business can lay claim to as many groundbreaking innovations. Besides introducing assembly line production to watchmaking in the nineteenth century, Eterna invented the eight-day alarm clock, the first cigarette lighter on a watch—featuring a mechanism that wound the watch each time the flame was ignited—and tiny baguette movements for delicate ladies’ watches.

By the late 1930s, women could benefit from technological advances in watchmaking, too. Thanks to Eterna’s ever smaller and thinner automatic movements, ladies no longer had to ruin their fingernails winding watches. The only problem was that as the hammer-winding mechanisms became tinier, they also became increasingly inefficient and were no longer able to generate enough torque to

overcome the friction in the bearings. A solution was soon found: a rotor mounted on ball bearings. But because Rolex still held the patent for the winding rotor, Eterna had to bide its time until 1948, when it became the first company to put a watch featuring a ball bearing-mounted rotor on the market. These first five ball bearings with a diameter of 0.65 millimeters paved the way for the legendary slim, elegant Eterna-Matic, inspiring the company to incorporate five stylized ball bearings into its logo.

In 1934, when the Swiss government essentially bailed out the country’s famous watchmaking industry, the company had been forced to split up due to a legal technicality, giving rise to Eterna AG, which manufactured watches, and ETA, which specializes in the production of raw movements. To this day, ETA is the world’s biggest manufacturer of watch movements and is now a member of the Swatch Group.

In the late 1940s, Eterna had established a reputation for reliable automatic watches rivaled only by that of Rolex. When Norwegian explorer Thor Heyerdahl set out in the balsa wood raft *Kon-Tiki* on his famed expedition from Peru to Polynesia in 1947, he needed a

reliable watch for navigation. He chose a waterproof movement by Eterna, which was not yet for sale due to the Rolex patent. Beginning the following year, Eterna gave its robust chronometer with the ball bearing-mounted rotor the name *KonTiki*.

Even in the heyday of quartz watches in the 1970s, the Swiss managed to trump the Japanese when it came to producing the thinnest quartz watch, setting a record that is still unbeaten today: just four-hundredths of an inch thick and weighing under four-hundredths of an ounce. As it turned out, it was a Pyrrhic victory. The aggressive pricing of the Japanese soon forced virtually all manufacturers in the Swiss watch industry to their knees. Although Eterna contributed to the renaissance of mechanical movements in the 1980s, it would be a while before the company got its big break. When Ferdinand Alexander Porsche bought the watch brand in 1995, it was with the idea of producing Porsche Design watches in-house once the contract with IWC expired in 1997. Prior to that, the watches were made by IWC in Schaffhausen on the Swiss-German border. But there were obstacles. Investments in the double-digit millions were needed to put Eterna in a position to design and construct movements of its own once again. In 2004 Eterna presented its Porsche Design Indicator, the first chronograph with digital hour and minute displays. In time for the company’s 150th anniversary the following year, it put out the Eterna 3030 caliber with ceramic ball bearings, the first movement it had manufactured itself in decades.

Thus Eterna has now become a watch manufacturer for the second time in its 150-year history. The 3030 caliber first became available in the elegant Vaughan Big Date in 2008. “We are now a full-fledged manufactory again and can produce all our movements ourselves,” says a delighted Patrick Kury, Eterna’s technical director. The presentation of the Madison, an elegant manual-wind tonneau-shaped men’s watch, at the “Baselworld 2009” was a milestone for the company on a par with the introduction of the ball bearing-mounted rotor in 1948. In the Madison, the barrel is also mounted on ball bearings, so that it works more efficiently and does not exert pressure on the gear train. But even in a watch this good, there is always room for improvement. As Kury puts it, “Now that the motor is perfect, we plan to focus on the regulating system.” In any case, one thing seems clear: Eterna is finally back where it belongs—at the top of the field. *Gerd Gregor Feth*

Because Porsche adheres to the tenet of form follows function, all Porsche Design watches are round. As F. A. Porsche once said, the hands and the cogs and gears in any mechanical movement always trace circles, and this basic function of a timepiece prescribes a circular shape. The circle alone can symbolize the infinity of time. F. A. Porsche’s present-day successors at Porsche Design share his philosophy: functionality reigns supreme. Thus the new watch’s broad hands and oversize numerals are there not merely for visual interest—they are designed to enable the wearer to tell the time reliably with even the briefest of glances.

A rattrapante (from the French for “catch up with”) is not just your run-of-the-mill timepiece—it is the prince among chronographs. It not only tells the time, but also functions as a stopwatch. First introduced in pocket watches in 1883, this feature is ideal for comparing lap times during car races, for example.

The P’6920 has two second hands, one superimposed over the other. The tip of the one is red, that of the other green. When the chronograph is in stopwatch mode, the only hand you see moving is the red one. To record an interim time, you press the push-piece ▶

Under the looking glass: The Rattrapante’s motor is a challenge for any watchmaker





Limited edition: The P'6920 is available in all titanium (left) or with crown, bezel and case back in red gold

located on the rim of the casing near the numeral 10. This causes the green hand to stop while the red one runs on. Once the indicated time has been registered, this feature allows the green hand to “catch up with” the red one so that they both circle the dial together. Double chronographs, as they are called, are fairly rare. The only difference in appearance to regular chronographs is the inconspicuous third push-piece on the rim.

The handsome P'6920 is 45 millimeters (1.8 inches) in diameter; its thickness one-third that. The large rhodium-plated numerals shimmering in dark gray make for a striking contrast with the black face, which features four subdials. Times up to 30 minutes are clocked under the numeral 12; intervals of up to twelve hours are recorded above the 6. The date is shown by the numeral 3, and the small second hand is located across from it next to the 9.

Thanks to the black titanium casing, the watch is waterproof up to a depth of 50 meters (164 feet) and weighs just under 110 grams (four ounces) despite its robust appearance. The broad rubber strap—also black, of course—closes with a folding clasp and features a pattern modeled on a sports car’s tire tread on the back.

The shape of the rotor echoes that of a wheel rim; you can watch it at work behind the sapphire bottom as it ratchets up a power reserve of up to 46 hours. The basic movement is by ETA (Valjoux 7750); the rattrapante module AR2 is supplied by Arola, a small specialist company based in Les Bioux. The dual rotor system used in the Rattrapante was developed by Eterna for the legendary Indicator P'6910, the most complex chronograph made by Porsche Design. Introduced in 2004 and made up of 800 individual parts, the Indicator costs €110,000 and shows clocked hours and minutes on movable discs. While the new P'6920 borrows certain design and construction elements from the Indicator, it is significantly smaller and lighter—and at €18,230 for the black titanium model (€24,940 for the version with red-gold crown, bezel, and case back), also considerably less expensive. For more than ten years, all Porsche Design watches have been made at the Eterna factory in Grenchen, Switzerland. It is owned, not surprisingly, by Porsche Design’s founder, Ferdinand Alexander Porsche. ◀

