

# The Time, The Watch & The Wardrobe

According to the style experts, smart British chaps now own several watches. And these are not collectors but rather enthusiasts who like to change their timepiece according to the time of day. With this fact in mind *QP* goes in search of the newly discovered, Homo-horological Britannicus. **David Waters**

For many a sartorial trend, the British male can be slow off the mark. We were innovators when it came to suiting – after all it was British tailors that adapted the riding coat with its saddle-friendly vents into today's business suit. But for the contemporary English buffer, brown shoes or tweed in the city will tend to make his lip curl.

Which is why, unlike us Brits, affluent European men would have inherited their grandfathers' ageing, but still functioning Patek, Vacheron or Heuer with an eye to the future. From their teens they would have steadily added their own mini collections of sports, dress or travel watches to be worn according to the season, the colour of their cuffs or the social event *du jour*. For these men, owning more

than five quality watches wouldn't raise so much as a well-trimmed eyebrow within their inner circle.

This European attention to horological detail was, until recently, regarded by most on this side of the Channel as, well, worryingly sophisticated. Showing off, in fact. For the British equivalent of the Continental timester was proud to wear his jolly decent and perfectly accurate Oris, Omega or Seiko, which he'd received for his twenty-first and which, more to the point, had never let him down! A watch, after all, is merely a time telling tool.

But all this has very recently changed...



*Fig 1.  
Homo-horological  
Britannicus*



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"The tide started turning about ten years ago," says Danny Pizzigoni, owner of vintage watch shop, The Watch Club in London's Royal Arcade. And Pizzigoni is certainly a man to listen to, having been a pioneer in expanding the UK market for vintage and rare timepieces and a man with a penchant for spotting and supporting the most nuanced trend in the watch market.

Sebastian Manes, Accessories Buying Director at Selfridges, confirms this seismic shift in watch ownership, declaring that sales of premium watch marques have increased more than tenfold over the past few years among brands such as Rolex, Zenith and Blancpain. "I think in the past our British customers saw watches as purely instruments for telling time," muses Mane. "But now they are seeing them as important fashion statements too."

## In fashion

So it seems what was functional is now becoming an essential accessory. The typical British watch buyer has become more style conscious – in part driven by the influence of men's consumer magazines like *Esquire*, *Men's Health* and *GQ* – which point out that a watch is one of the few effective ways a man can show his uniqueness. A quality watch is a legitimate, masculine piece of jewellery that can be justified through its functionality. Luckily it can look great too.

Although he agrees that features in men's magazines and daily newspapers have had a degree of influence on the UK watch market, Gary Mead, UK CEO of Audemars Piguet, says that he still sees a fundamental difference between the new English watch buyer and his Continental equivalent. "An Englishman is much more measured in his approach to buying a new watch," he claims. "Rarely will he buy on his first visit. He likes to research the product and shop and gain as

much information as possible about a brand and model before buying."

Rob Diver, Managing Director of TAG Heuer in the UK agrees. "British chaps are becoming much more style aware today. Young men will want to upgrade that tired timepiece they were given at their graduation quite rapidly as they assert their own style – particularly as their disposable income grows.

"Fundamentally for professional men, this disposable income has grown a great deal in the past ten years. And what better thing for them to spend their money on than something that is going to look great, is useful and will last them for years?"

And, as TAG Heuer has an entry point at under a thousand pounds, Diver is confident that this new watch customer can work his way up through the Heuer brand from his teens to his forties. "I could see a young chap starting his watch collection with an Aquaracer or a Link, then moving onto a Carrera and finally ending up with a Monaco as a mature man," he says.

## The new generation

This new, affluent watch-buff is typified by Morgan Rees, 36, Editor-in-Chief of *Men's Health*. "I wear a Rolex Oyster Perpetual as an everyday watch. But if I'm wearing a navy suit, I'll put on my TAG Monaco which, with its blue dial, sets off my clothes," he says. Rees, who wants to add an IWC to his growing collection of watches, is no purist when it comes to his watch choices. "One of my favourite watches is from Gucci and has a sporty rubber strap. Yes, it's from a fashion house, but it still has Swiss-made quality," says Rees.

For Julian Winter, 41, a London-based osteopath, the need to own and wear a watch according to the occasion started at an early

age. "I asked my family for a Cartier Santos for my bar mitzvah. I was just 13," he says. But it is a 1968 Jaeger-Le-Coultré Reverso that he bought for himself in his early Twenties he describes as his first 'proper' watch.

Also a magazine buff, Winter read *Vanity Fair* and *Playboy* as he was growing up. He says these showed him the ability that watches have to give their owner a sophisticated, masculine status and style. "I now snap on my Bulgari Aluminium whenever I'm wearing a smart shirt with cufflinks," he says. "It's super slim and sits neatly under my cuffs. It's exactly the sort of watch I can imagine James Bond wearing in a super-sharp dinner suit."

Whatever the driving force, there is no doubt that today's new Brit pack are stocking up on time. So it looks as though *Telegraph Time's* Caragh McKay is right, when it comes to men, watches really are the new handbags!



## The Wardrobe

There are many, many timepieces that a man collects on his journey through life from an emergency Swatch purchase to a first job statement or wedding present from his dearly beloved. QP picks five pieces that could make up a collection suitable for all tastes and moods – and most occasions.



### IWC Pilot's Mark XVI

The IWC Mark 11 was one of the most famous pilots' watches of all time and the Mark XVI has proved itself a worthy successor with a reliable and accurate movement, a simple and legible dial and strong case. Rugged enough to be a sports watch yet elegant enough for the opera. A perfect first proper watch.



### Rolex Submariner

The Rolex Submariner is a classic, first introduced to the public in 1954 and is today one of the most widely recognised luxury products in the world. A tried-and-tested, safe bet watch that oozes class without being too try hard, with this on your wrist, you've made it to base-camp in life's mountain ascent.





**Jaeger-LeCoultre Reverso**

The Jaeger-LeCoultre Reverso – perhaps the most iconic watch design in the world – turns 80 this year. Designed in the 1930s for professional polo players in colonial India, the face is hinged and can be hidden away to protect it during competition. Worn by royalty (Edward VIII wore one when he was King) and the glitterati, it is a timeless classic that, despite all its iterations, has never veered far from the Art Deco look.



**TAG Heuer Monaco**

The TAG Heuer Monaco, first introduced in 1969, has both style and history. One of the first automatic chronographs, it is also indelibly associated with Steve McQueen who wore it during the filming of 1972 racing classic *LeMans*. Even today, it is a radical statement watch that requires confidence to wear.



**Ulysse Nardin**

Once you have the watch basics covered, it's time to step into more individual waters. Like all Ulysse Nardin models before, 2011's Freak Diavolo is a long way from ordinary, showcasing unrivaled advancements in technology, materials and design. Like its Freak siblings, the Diavolo pays tribute to the pioneering spirit of the brand. Stunningly innovative, obsessively technical and strictly limited in production, Ulysse Nardin gets noticed for all the right reasons.

