

S I M P L E M O D E R N C L A S S I C

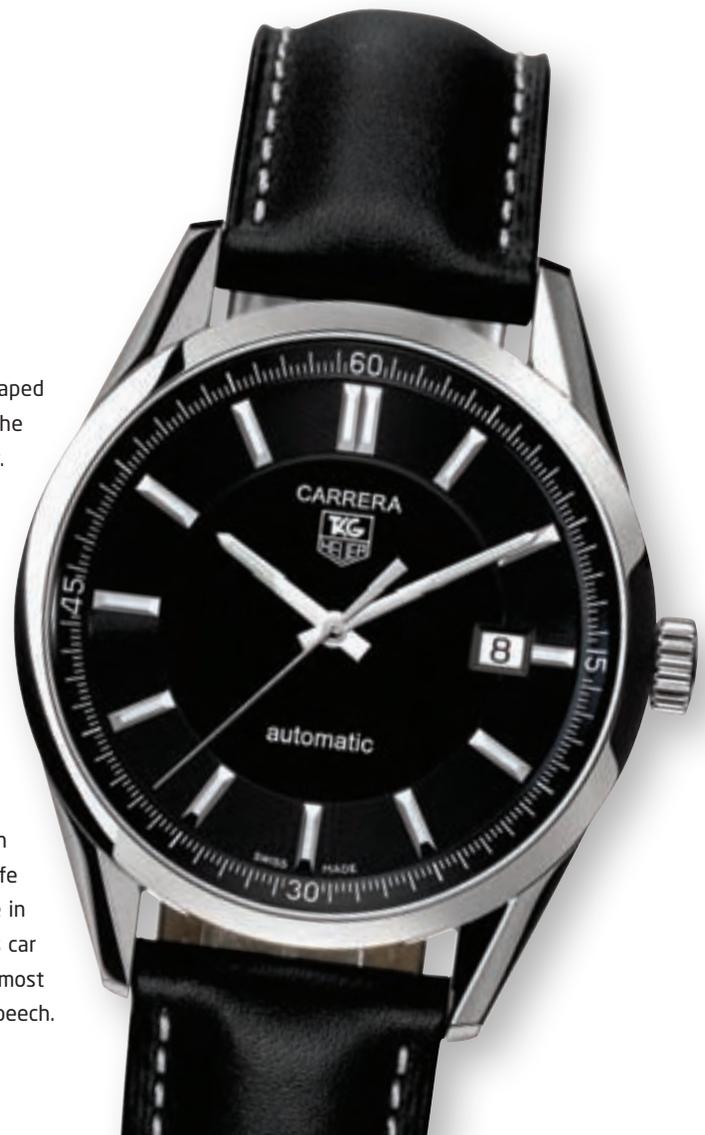


Cars and watches. Watches and cars. At some point in history, the two words didn't go together, but for longer than any of us can remember, they have inspired the passions of obsessive men in a way the horse and cart and the egg timer never did. Road races, motoring franchises, automotive manufacturers - they've all played a part in timepieces we've come to love.

Robin Swithinbank

If you're at all interested in cars, it won't have escaped your attention that this summer Bugatti did the unthinkable and made the Veyron go even faster. The second edition of the 'ultimate' car, the Veyron Super Sport, mustered a cataract-shifting 267.81mph in testing. In a list of top ten motoring stories for the year, Bugatti's achievement would be hard to beat (although tales of spontaneously combusting Ferrari 458s come close).

The watch it inspired is similarly bombastic. Bugatti has an established relationship with Parmigiani and the watch produced to coincide with the car's launch costs \$259,000 and is limited to just 30 pieces. Safe to say, it's not been designed for anyone living life in the slow lane. Thoughts of owning either Bugatti's car or Parmigiani's watch occupy the same realm in most minds as the finer details of an Oscar acceptance speech.



Package the two together, and you'll not get much change from two million dollars. A nice Christmas present for someone special, perhaps?

The top brands all have strong motoring connections, whether it's Rolex and the Daytona (favourite of the late motoring obsessive Paul Newman), Jaeger-LeCoultre and the Amvox (the only watch to wear if you drive an Aston Martin) or almost anything by Richard Mille, whose watches are Formula 1 cars in wrist-mounted form.

Rare and culturally significant pieces of these origins fetch tens, if not hundreds, of thousands at auction - a 'Paul Newman' Daytona scooped \$84,000 at an Antiquorum auction last year - while dipping your toe into the contemporary collections will still cost you a few bob. But the great mercy of the more humble end of the motoring-inspired watch spectrum is that, unlike the automotive world, if your budget isn't garage-full-of-supercars, you don't have to settle for the time-keeping equivalent of a Kia.

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Meccaniche Veloci Ace Café



It wouldn't be right to talk about motoring-inspired watches without a nod to the Italians. Italy's automotive credentials traditionally outstrip its watchmaking reputation, which is why Italian watch manufacturers often turn to the Swiss for reliable movements, before harnessing them to their own flamboyant designs. Ferrari has its own line of timepieces (reservations about the wit and wisdom of branding your life with all things Prancing Horse persist, mind) and Alfa Romeo teamed up with the brilliant designer Giuliano Mazzuoli to create the Contagiri, a spectacular watch with a gear lever instead of a crown and only one hand. Both rely on the Swiss for their power units.

Another young Italian brand forging a reputation for itself is Meccaniche Veloci. The name alone speaks of motoring (literal translation is 'fast mechanics'), as do the collections - Due Valvole, Quattro Valvole, Rally and so on. Some of the styling here may not be to everyone's taste, but even the more conservatively inclined will still appreciate the aesthetic of the more affordable end of the range where we find the Ace Café.

Built from titanium and customisable to your own specifications, the Ace Café employs the design language of 1960s motorcycles and the style notes of the Rockers who rode them. At its heart is the Swiss-made ETA 2824-2 mechanical movement, visible through an opening in the dial, while a screw-down crown assures water-resistance to 100m. Because it's customisable, it's available in all manner of guises, but the titanium-cased (without PVD) version, with a black dial, red detailing around the chunky bezel and a black leather strap with white stitching is a standout. An Italian brand with British style cues and a Swiss movement - all for £1,265. A brand to watch no doubt.

The Meccaniche Veloci Ace Café is already a bloggers' favourite and is a watch destined to become as iconic as the bikers' hang-out it is named after.

TAG Heuer Carrera

TAG Heuer sits comfortably at the high table of timekeeping, thanks to a back catalogue of industry firsts and the fact it's currently the only brand to produce watches with chronographs accurate to 1/10th, 1/100th and 1/1000th of a second. This year's 150th anniversary saw the launch of the Carrera Mikrograph, a rose gold mechanical wonder that can measure time to 1/100th of a second, thanks to a movement that beats at 360,000 vibrations an hour. Naturally, the run will be very limited, but you could do far worse than look to the entry-level Carrera, which comes in at a very palatable £1,350.

The first Carrera was designed by Jack Heuer, released in 1963 and named after the notorious 1950s Mexican Carrera Panamericana road race. Since then the collection has gone on to become the company's most successful line, with few changes made to its simple design. The perfectly round, black dial still bears the dashboard-themed signature of the original; those simple baton hour markers reminiscent of rev counters ancient and modern. The Carrera is available on a brushed and polished bracelet or, for the same price and the authentic touch, a perforated leather strap.

Rigorously tested and meticulously crafted, today's entry-level Carrera follows the footsteps of the first iconic piece of that name designed by Jack Heuer and released in 1963.



Frédérique Constant Healey Runabout

Much newer to the world of watchmaking is Frédérique Constant, a brand making a name for itself by presenting in-house developed mechanical watches at a fraction of the prices common to some of the more established players. The collection is full of high quality Swiss watches, one of which is the Healey Runabout, a piece that owes its name to the relationship the brand has with classic Austin Healey road events in St Moritz and Le Mans.

Clearly, the glamour and sophistication of these exclusive events has rubbed off on the watch itself. It looks like it's been transported through time, straight from the oily wrists of dashing 1960s rally drivers. Like the Carrera, it's unfussy in its design, with a black dial and polished stainless steel case, date indication at 3 o'clock and a white chapter ring around the edge of the dial. The perforated leather strap and Austin Healey logo at 6 o'clock give it its motoring-inspired finish. Yours for £1,030, or if the budget allows, there's a chronograph version for £1,920.

The subtle styling and Healey logo at 6 o'clock make this piece a future motoring classic.

