

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



Financially speaking, things might be a bit tough at the moment but shopping within monetary boundaries doesn't necessarily mean having to pass on a quality mechanical watch. The pound may be struggling against the Euro (as well as several other currencies) but there are still some excellent models to be found for under £1,000 - perhaps more today than at any time since the start of the recovery from the quartz revolution.

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If you've had the pleasure of visiting one of our continental neighbours recently, you'll have noted with equal displeasure the shrinking power of our pound. At a time when even a glass of prosecco becomes an investment, it's no surprise that the cost of a luxury Swiss timepiece has also gone skyward.

As a result, many would-be watch enthusiasts looking to take their first step onto the horological ladder now find once attainable timepieces beyond their grasp. Today, for example, you'll pay the same for an Omega Seamaster Professional powered by a quartz movement as you would have done for the mechanical equivalent five years ago.

But all is not lost. For the astute consumer with a budget hovering around the four-figure mark, the market remains flush with quality Swiss automatic mechanical timepieces. Only now the contenders are perhaps less well known.

Time, then, for some introductions.

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## The Frédérique Constant Large Carrée Heart Beat

Rising quickly through the fog of watch snobbery is Frédérique Constant, a company that prides itself on offering customers 'affordable luxury'. To the sceptical ear this might sound like marketing puff, but peel away the cliché and you'll uncover a collection of timepieces inspired by the same traditions as those espoused by some of the Geneva-based company's more illustrious neighbours (Patek Philippe and Vacheron Constantin also call the Geneva municipality of Plan-les-Ouates home) - at a fraction of the price.

The brand's signature collection is the Carrée, a series of elegant square-edged dress watches, which is where you'll find the Large Carrée Heart Beat. Its most salient attribute is an opening in the dial, through which its wearer can gaze at the movement's oscillating balance wheel.

Of course, an aperture such as this adds nothing to the watch's performance, but it does point to a watchmaker passionate about his craft. Frédérique Constant is a relative newcomers to the watch world having opened for business in 1988, but a second proprietary movement unveiled in Basel this year shows intent. Neither of the brand's two calibres appear in the Large Carrée, but it's reassuring to know this is a watch made by a young company with a zeal for Swiss-made mechanical movements.

Further evidence of the brand's aspirations is provided in the Large Carrée's detailing - note the bevelled case edges and guilloché finish to the dial and chapter ring. You could be forgiven for thinking this level of finish might come with a hefty price tag, but the stainless steel model is yours for just £750.



In the Frédérique Constant Large Carrée Heart Beat, a rectangular stainless steel case is teamed with a luxurious black leather strap and white dial. A small window at 12 o'clock allows the automatic movement to be viewed.



With classic style and elegant simplicity, the Bell & Ross Vintage 123 has a timeless appeal. The uncluttered, luminous dial, 37.5 mm brushed steel case, 100 m water resistance and 42-hour power reserve all add to its understated charm.

## The Bell & Ross Vintage 123 Automatic

Another watch house that has enjoyed a meteoric rise this decade is Bell & Ross. Founded in 1992 by a group of designers with backgrounds in the aviation and space industries, Bell & Ross is now based in a state-of-the-art manufacture in La Chaux-de-Fonds, a Teutonic building cut into the Jura foothills that could have been lifted from a Gerry Anderson set design.

Behind the doors of this modern facility the company assembles a collection of timepieces designed to function under the most demanding circumstances (as worn by bomb disposal experts, if you believe the puff).

Most recognisable among these is the BR Instrument series with its oversized, square-faced case designs and wrenched-from-a-Spitfire-cockpit looks. These sought-after modern classics carry list

prices that put them in competition with the Breitlings and IWCs of this world, but unlike those horological titans, Bell & Ross also offers a number of entry-level pieces to appeal to the first timer.

The Vintage 123 Automatic is a case in point. It sports the pared-back, utilitarian design typical of the brand, and is fuelled by ETA's 2895 self-winding movement. This equips it with small seconds and date displays, nestled together at 6 o'clock where you might expect to find an Arabic numeral. The watch will serve you down to a depth of 100 m - water-resistance is one of the company's four design principles, the others being precision, readability and performance.

Prices for this stainless steel timepiece start at £1,000 for the leather-strapped model, making it a fine investment for the aspiring horolophile.

## The Oris Classic Date

Third on our list of introductions is Oris - although introductions seem a little unnecessary, given the company's 105-year history and stable of prestigious associations (the Oris Chronoris of the 1970s began a relationship with Formula 1 that continues today with the Williams F1 team). What may not be so well known, however, is that Oris watches all house one of a portfolio of 35 mechanical movements, the majority of which are automatic and distinguished by a patented red rotor visible through the case back.

Slotting well within our price bracket is the Oris' Classic Date, a stainless steel

piece available with either a black or silver patterned dial. At only £500 (or an even more impressive £480 for the version with leather strap), it's the least expensive of our selection, but don't for a moment think that this equates to compromised quality. Oris has a hard-earned reputation for creating reliable timepieces designed for the rigours of the daily grind.

That said, the Classic Date doesn't lack sophistication. The numerals have been delicately engraved, while the hour and minute hands extend lithely across the dial like the flight of a conductor's baton. ☺

The automatic Oris Classic Date is water resistant to 50 m and features black guilloche round dial with applied Arabic numerals and luminous hands. The stainless steel polished case has a see-through crystal skeleton case back.

