



BC4 Flight Timer features the automatic winding Oris 690 movement, based on ETA 2836-2, which includes central hours and minutes with separate small seconds, date display, plus an addition time zone showing hours and minutes. The case is a multi-piece stainless steel construction with the option of leather strap (£1,750) or steel bracelet (£1,800).

# Air Traffic Control



Oris touched down at Baselworld with its new BC4 Flight Timer, part of the BC4 collection. Just the thing for pilots, business types and travellers who simply must have those extra time zones plus compass for when they get lost. QP straps in for a test flight.

**Christopher Hourmouzios**

No, BC4 is not a date, it refers to the vertical big crown at two o'clock that jumps out at you, demanding to be twiddled, and which turns the inner dial ring to show one of three time zones. (The date is at 6 o'clock.)

## Part of the fuselage

The big hands display local time with the small seconds on a subdial at 9 o'clock, and then the second time zone appears at 3 o'clock, showing the hours, minutes and a day/night indicator. And the big crown also operates a compass, but you will need to see the sun to orientate yourself with the hour hand.

This is a big, heavy, automatic timepiece: chunky stainless steel with a 42.7 mm diameter. A tad weighty for those with a slimmer wrist, but Oris fans and watch enthusiasts in general will love the

attention to detail and the combination of retro and trendy design.

Oris adapted a lot of aviation input into developing the Flight Timer so it could be used by professionals, among whom are the British Blue Eagles Helicopter Display team, Oris's aviation partner.

For instance, the dial has a printed pattern based on a helicopter's sound and temperature insulation material. And the big crown harks back to the days when pilots were so cold in unheated cockpits they required thick gloves, making it hard to adjust watches with small crowns.

In addition, the sandwich construction used to build aeroplane wings has been applied to the BC4's case, which has been shaped like a flight instrument, a themed echoed in the design of the



small second display. And another nice touch is the strap's easily adjustable folding clasp, a nifty device alluding to the design of an aircraft safety belt.

So, lots of innovative features but why should I buy this aviation-inspired model rather than those of rival brands? Oris maintains that, although it is charging higher prices for more sophisticated products, it still gives excellent value. The Flight Timer costs £1,750 with a leather strap and £1,800 with a metal bracelet.

### Avoiding turbulence

The company claims that, so far, it has not been affected by the credit crunch. In fact, sales for the first half of this year were up 22% on the same period in 2007. Although it is expecting to feel the impact at the end of 2008 or even next year. It believes its success could be a combination of buyers' trading down from Breitling and IWC and the company having a good product aimed at the right people.

These are globetrotters and bankers who work in different time zones. Its core buyers are aged 28-35, but the higher price tag attached to the Flight Timer will hopefully broaden the watch's appeal. The target market is mainly men, about 80% for the BC4 collection. But women, especially in Italy, the US and more and more in the UK, are wearing big watches. Oris' biggest watch market is the US followed by Japan, China, UK, Italy and France.

It's spot on in the UK where watch sales in general, according to the latest Mintel report, show strong growth and consumers want technical innovation, unusual design, mechanical models, oversized dials and sporty looks.

The company has been producing pilot's watches, especially the big crown line for about 20 years. "This is a classic series which has been very successful," says CEO Ulrich Herzog. First came the BC Original and then the BC2 with a sapphire crystal, although this was discontinued because people generally preferred the round, sexy-looking plexicrystal.

Then the BC3 pilot's watch took off with a young and more modern approach to the design, with a new, much-improved readability for the dial. "We decided two years ago to develop a new collection based on a contemporary approach to pilot's watches, working closely with the British pilot Polly Vacher and the Blue Eagles."

The company was founded in 1904 and after a few ups and downs, Herzog led a management buy-out from the then SMH (which later became the Swatch Group) in 1982. He describes the lead-up to the historic decision to buck the trend and never make another quartz watch: "I first went to Japan in 1985 and I saw that the young Japanese liked to control their watches mechanically, despite all the LCD and quartz models available.



The large protuberant crown is used to set the second time zone.



They liked to wind them, hear the tick, see the craftsmanship.

"Japan is always five years ahead of Europe and I decided that this was a market for us. We put a collection together, Japan became our biggest market and in 1988 we devoted our production to mechanical watches, which some of our competitors thought were a thing of the past. Then we developed our own movements, improved the design and introduced an alarm, regulator and complicated models.

"The three elements in our watches are the technology in the movement; the design and use of materials such as carbon, titanium and rubber; and the link with fashion and trends, which you have to watch all the time."

### Other fields

Besides aviation Oris has three other worlds: motor sport, diving and culture, especially jazz.

In motor racing, Oris sponsor the Williams Formula One team and this year launched the

TT3 Formula Gold limited edition with carbon dial, selling for more than £6,000.

In diving, its latest watch is the 49 mm titanium and aluminium Regulateur, its biggest ever watch, worn by the firm's ambassador, Carlos Coste, the Venezuelan free-diving phenomenon who can reach a depth of more than 100 metres!

In the jazz world, Oris have made some funky models in memory of Louis Armstrong, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis and, most recently, Dizzy Gillespie. The next one will be in honour of a "great living musician, to be launched in Basel in 2009".

And what about a BC5 Flight Timer? But any information about prototypes from Herzog, understandably, stays in the hangar.

Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm going in search of some British sun so I can find out where north is with my Flight Timer. ☺