

# Watchismo's

# TIMEWARP



Mitch Greenblatt

## TIME-SPACEMAN CONTINUUM - Spaceman Watches of 1972-1977

Leaving New York one chilly winter day, late in 1999, I found myself come unstuck in time and arrive in Basel at the dawn of 1972.



### The universe in a Neuchâtel

My time travel led me to a world filled with hundreds of Spacemen, sitting undisturbed in the Zeno factory with no plans of visiting the moon anytime soon. This grounded crew was actually a secret stash of vintage Spaceman watches I unearthed at the Zeno Watch Co., a former distributor of the timepieces designed by André Le Marquand, an architect from Neuchâtel. The futuristic watches had fallen out of style during the 80s and 90s but I was ready to fly them out of their dark Swiss graveyard and back onto the wrists of space-age sentimentalists like myself.

In the late sixties Claude Lebet, owner of the Bulle based watch brand Catena asked Le Marquand to create a timepiece inspired by man's conquest of the moon and the astronauts who made it there. Mr. Le Marquand provided him with his first wristwatch design called, what else, the "Spaceman".

The Spaceman was unlike anything seen before and Catena introduced the fleet at the Basel Fair of 1972. The large oval case appeared to be docked on your wrist held by a triple-forked Corfam strap by DuPont. The case also had a coned dome crystal half concealed by a coloured metal visor that allowed viewing of the dial to only the wearer. All hands and markers were perfectly seventies orange with models in a variety of colours only possible during that special decade.

The watches were powered by automatic and manual winding mechanical ETA movements and were distributed by a variety brands, among them Jules Jurgensen, Fortis, and Zeno. The success led to the development of new Spaceman a few years later, an audacious design by Le Marquand and appropriately named, the "Audacieuse".



▲▼ Oval Spaceman, 1972.

Designed in 1968 by André Le Marquand and produced by Catena SA Bulle.



Continued overleaf.

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## The final frontier

The new Audacieuse was angular yet aerodynamic, looking more like an early miniature prototype of a B2 Stealth Bomber than a watch. The extreme design was square with a hooded dial, similar to the original semi-sideview concept. The straps were oversized and wide as the case itself, available in stainless steel or coloured leather.

A few very rare models with mechanical jump hour digital displays were also out there and a few quartz-digital "Spacesonic" were produced until the Spaceman series came to an end in 1977. Having completed his mission, the Spaceman stepped aside for the next giant leap in timekeeping - light emitting diodes (LED) and liquid crystal displays (LCD).

My close-encounter with the past was fuelled by reading Pieter Doensen's rare book, "Watch - History of the Modern Wrist Watch". This has been my launch pad to the world of vintage-modern watch design and technology and it has been described as the "the first comprehensive study of the collectible modern wrist watch". Flipping through the book, one can feast their eyes on Richard Arbib's Hamilton Electrics of the fifties & sixties, Roger Tallon's LIP Mach 2000 of the seventies and a multitude of other horological advancements over the past fifty years. But it was the futuristic charm of Andre Le Marquand's Spaceman that first abducted my interests. ☺



▲ Audacieuse Spaceman, 1974.

Second in the series, with an asymmetric shape and leather strap.