

Wyller Zagato

⌚ We all know that cars and watches go together like a horse and carriage, but most luxury brands prefer to associate themselves with automobile marques of equal standing to their own. So if you weren't quick enough to stake a claim to a prestige name in the way that Breitling, IWC and Jaeger-LeCoultre did, how do you get in with the moneyed car guys? **Simon de Burton** discovers that Wyler is the latest to adopt a wily method first used by Chanel a couple of years ago...



There are a few traditional routes to successfully marketing an expensive watch which will appeal to automobile fans - one is to link up with a high-end car maker (Breitling for Bentley, IWC and AMG, Jaeger-LeCoultre and Aston Martin, etc.), another is to ensure your timepiece gains cult status among petrolheads (TAG Heuer Carrera, Rolex Cosmograph Daytona, Omega Speedmaster) and a third is to associate it with a famous driver (like Richard Mille and Felipe Massa, Audemars Piguet and Rubens Barrichello or Chopard and Jacky Ickx, for example).

But back in 2005, Chanel rather cleverly introduced an additional way which I believe, no one else had previously thought of: the brand's designer, Jacques Helleu, decided to produce a special version of the J12 evoking the celebrated Italian coachbuilder Carrozzeria Touring which became famous during the 1950s for its super-light, or 'superleggera' car bodies wrapped around an innovative tube framework.



The Wyler-Zagato is the first wristwatch to bear the hallmark of the famous Italian atelier. The case is made from highly resistant titanium with a shock absorbing design.

Helleu took queues from the lightweight materials used in cars including the BMW 328 and the Spanish-built Pegaso by designing a J12 that featured aluminium for parts such as the case back, winder, chronograph push pieces, bezel and bracelet in order to reduce weight by 45 per cent over the standard ceramic version. By adding a tachymetre scale and, of course, the word 'Superleggera' in sporty red, the J12 was transformed into a 'driver's' watch.

Channel of association

As a marketing ploy, it was decidedly smart - not least because, although the word superleggera has appeared on numerous cars throughout the decades and is instantly associated with the world of high-performance cars, it is not a brand name so Chanel had no need to worry about any costly or potentially complex licence agreements.

The once-famous Wyler, revived in 2002 by Marcello Binda (the grandson of Innocente Binda who started distributing the watches in Italy in 1906), has now followed Chanel's lead by forming an alliance with the Zagato coachbuilding company of Milan to produce a special edition version of its distinctive and beautifully made chronograph model.

The partnership was announced at the Geneva motor show just before this year's Baselworld and

enhances the automobile connection that Wyler established by creating a titanium tourbillon watch to mark the centenary of the first Paris-Peking automobile race. The original event attracted a five-car entry list and was won by the Itala of Prince Scipione Borghese.

The road less travelled

That same car competed in the 2007 re-run and Wyler, which was the official watch of the event, strapped one of its Peking-Paris editions to the wrist of driver David Ayre who bravely wrestled the giant, 7.4 litre beast all the way back to Paris to take 10th place out 134 competitors. He and his co-driver wife, Karen, received a 'true grit' trophy for their efforts.

The 8,000 mile journey over some of the world's roughest navigable tracks was an ideal way of highlighting Wyler's historic reputation for making watches which have always been super-tough thanks, in part, to the use of the patented Incaflex balance wheel which has a pair of flexible, half-spiral arms joined at the wheel's axis. During the 1950s and '60s, the brand made a habit of demonstrating the resilience of its products by dropping them off high buildings - one was lobbed off the top of the Eiffel Tower and another jettisoned from the roof of Washington's Seattle Tower, apparently with no ill effects.

It will be many years before the Peking-Paris race takes place again, so Wyler's Zagato link-up now represents its main connection to the car world.

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Combined design

Launched in October at Atelier Zagato near Milan, the Sfr.35,000 Wyler Zagato uses the same titanium case as the brand's tourbillon and chronograph models - it's a shock-absorbing design in which the movement is housed in a water-resistant titanium shell that is cushioned between the bezel and case back by a carbon-fibre resin frame. This is fixed on four titanium screws with neat-looking, visible springs which Wyler says gives the movement a form of shock protection similar to a car's suspension (a similar system was used on Parmigiani's Bugatti watch). The winding crown is also protected by a clasp that secures at both ends.

Although the case design is clearly along the same lines as that of existing Wyler models, the dial is entirely different having been created by Zagato's styling team. Made from brushed aluminium, the bottom third is left bare and evokes the famous 'double bubble' roofs found on many Zagato body designs. A satin black, grooved plate covers the remainder of the dial which features a power reserve indicator which - you guessed it - is modelled on a car's fuel gauge with 'E' and 'F' markers.

The use of livid red colouration, seemingly 'de rigueur' for car watches these days, is seen on the seconds hand and the distinctive but rather Zorro-like Zagato Z initial applied to the dial at nine o'clock. The look is completed by applied hour markers, an applied 'Wyler' and, of course, the brand's distinctive rubber, tyre-tread pattern strap. Like many other car-inspired watches, it is presented in a box designed to look like a tool kit.

A motor response

Yes, more than a few motoring cliches have been incorporated into this watch, but I still find it extremely



The Wyler Geneva Paris-Beijing Tourbillon was released to coincide with the 100 anniversary of the Italian car race. The case design has the movement suspended in a shockproof titanium holder, framed in a lightweight carbon-fibre resin case middle. The aluminium tourbillon bridges are also mounted on springs to offer double shock protection for the personalised WT001 calibre hand-wound movement.



appealing. I like the fact that it is not, for once, a chronograph, and I love the eight-day, hand-wound manufacture movement. To me, this speaks even more of Zagato than does the outward appearance of the watch - it's spare, clean, symmetrical and beautifully finished in an industrial rather than fancy way. The twin barrels are visible through the display back, as is the edition number, which is also repeated on the reverse of the case itself.

And speaking of edition numbers, this watch is going to be about as rare as a Zagato-bodied Aston Martin DB4 - just 25 are being produced. But this is clearly just the start of an on-going partnership, which will result in further watches with Zagato-designed dials and features that will, presumably, be made available in greater numbers. I hope so, because it's refreshing to discover a watch house that is willing to let its automobile partner do something a little more creative than merely writing its name on the case or dial. ○

Further information: www.wylergeneve.com, www.zagato.it



What is Zagato?

Zagato was set-up at the end of WW1 by Ugo Zagato who wanted to apply some of the techniques discovered during the massive leap forward in aviation technology to the construction of lightweight, aerodynamic sports cars. His streamlined designs used on pre-war Alfa Romeos epitomised the quintessential art deco look of the period, but it is for the post-1950s cars such as the Lancia Appia GT, Fiat 8V and Aston Martin DB4GT that Zagato is best remembered. As well as lightweight aluminium bodies, Zagato also pioneered the use of a skeleton of fine tubing on which to support them. The firm continues to create outstanding designs for limited edition models and Zagato-bodied cars often become 'instant classics'. Examples include the Alfa Romeo SZ of the late 1980s (known as The Beast), the Bristol 405 and the Maserati Bi-Turbo. Zagato even managed to make a Volvo look mean when it produced a coupe based on the staid 240 model back in the 1980s. Its latest creations include the Maserati GS, Spyker C12, Diatto and Ferrari 575 GTZ. For the less well off, a pair of nifty Zagato-designed driving shoes is also available.

Powered by a self-winding movement with an 8-day power reserve, achieved by two-barrel spring operating in series.

