

# Grand Carrera



Original Carrera, 1964. The first TAG Heuer mechanical chronograph had its inspiration in the grueling and legendary road race, the Carrera Panamericana. Its high-performance functionality appealed to many F1 icons such as Joe Siffert, Jacky Ickx and Clay Regazzoni.



If carbon footprints could be measured in standard shoe sizes, the one we left behind after the launch of TAG Heuer's Grand Carrera would have been an 18 at least: a limo from London; a private jet from Luton; a luxury people carrier to the hotel; a minibus to the circuit du Var; laps in Formula 3 cars; laps in Formula One cars; a chopper to Le Castellet circuit; joyrides in road-going Ferraris and Lambos with F1 drivers at the wheel - global warming? Not my fault, guv'nor.

Simon de Burton



Grand CARRERA Calibre 6 RS (Rotating System: Small Seconds). Silver, brown or black dials with either a steel or alligator strap. The COSC-certified automatic movement is within a 40.2 mm timepiece. Alternatively the Calibre 6 RS, Steel & Gold provides an exclusive luxury version with 18ct. gold bezel and 18ct. steel/gold bracelet.

But, eco-friendliness notwithstanding, there was really no other way to announce the arrival of the latest offspring in a line that began with one of the greatest driver's watches of all time, the Heuer Carrera chronograph. Jack Heuer himself came up with that one way back in 1962 while watching - and officially timing - the 12 Hours of Sebring. In a quiet moment he found himself chatting with the legendary endurance-driving Rodriguez brothers who held Heuer in thrall with their tales of the wild and crazy Carrera PanAmericana cross-Mexico car race, the spirit and atmosphere of which genius Jack somehow managed to absorb, take back to Bienne and encapsulate in a wristwatch. The Carrera was launched in 1964, and quickly found its way onto the wrists of such star drivers as Clay Regazzoni, Niki Lauda and Jacky Ickx.

My modest watch collection includes a TAG Heuer Carrera, one of the very well executed reproductions of the original that was introduced a few years ago. It is hardly rare or valuable, but it is probably the one watch I would not want to be without because I love its looks, its functionality and, I admit, the resonance of the name 'Carrera'.

Many chronograph enthusiasts regard the Carrera in just the same way, as something of a legendary watch - so it seemed like a bold statement when TAG Heuer's president and CEO Jean-Christophe Babin told *QP* at the Grand Carrera launch that he had high hopes for the new model becoming as much of an icon as its illustrious ancestor.

If this watch manages to last for 43 years in an almost identical form (as the original Carrera has, albeit with a long break in production) I might be tempted to eat my hat, slippers, pipe and pension book - but Babin and his team have put a huge amount of effort into creating the Grand Carrera as a watch that will evolve with the times yet retain its distinctive character.

### The new Calibres

It has initially been made available in three versions: a basic time and date model, the Calibre 6RS; a two timezone GMT model

with large date, the Calibre 8RS; and a chronograph with date, the Calibre 17RS.

Porsche car fans will agree that the only correct place for the letters 'RS' is beside the word 'Carrera' when used to describe the Stuttgart marque's fabulous 'RennSport' competition-based cars conceived during the early 1970s - but in this instance, TAG Heuer's use of RS in relation to its Grand Carrera refers to the most interesting feature of the range, its 'Rotating System' display.

This is TAG's first set of mechanical movements to have a rotating display, which is claimed to show 'functional information' in a clearer, more easily readable fashion than the traditional subdials we all know and love. Or know and hate when our eyesight starts to wane.

R and D began on the Grand Carrera project more than two years ago with a brief not to substitute the traditional Carrera but to expand the range, exploring new techniques and mechanisms along the way to give it a symbiosis with the high-tech world of modern motor racing. The result is the series of functions already mentioned, although not everything beneath the skin is actually brand new - the Calibre 17RS, for example, is produced using a version of the chronograph movement found in the square-cased Monaco that has been modified to make it compatible with the rotating disc display system.

Whether or not you like the look of the Grand Carrera, however, is perhaps less relevant than another feature of the watches with which I was immediately struck: these things are fabulously well made in terms of detailing and crispness of finish, particularly bearing in mind the fact that the basic model retails at just £1,995 and the chronograph at £2,495. For your money, you get Cotes de Geneve decoration, nicely executed and polished bevelled edges on the Rotating System apertures and an expensive-looking three-dimensional appearance thanks to the raised and applied baton markers and TAG Heuer dial logo. The cases are impressive too, with their curved and faceted horns and sapphire crystal backs.



## Think you know how to drive?

To get us into the motoring spirit with which the Carrera name has so long been associated, TAG Heuer treated a few of us to a day of adrenaline-pumping, thrill-making, fear-inducing fun prior to the Grand Carrera launch with a day at the AGS Formula One driving school on the French Riviera.

AGS, based at the 2.2 km Circuit du Var in Gonfaron, is a full-time Formula One operation that builds, services and tests a range of historic and contemporary Grand Prix cars and, most excitingly, organises F1 driving lessons at a starting price of around €1,100.

### The basics

It began in the classroom where the already nervous pupils were made even more so by being told that they don't know how to drive - not a short circuit racing car, at least. The fastest drivers, we are told, are the ones who know how to use the brakes as well as the accelerator. Rather than the familiar light 'progressive' braking, race cars at this level require you to stamp on the anchors as hard as possible and as late as possible, before easing off to let the car glide around a bend before mashing the throttle once everything is more or less straightened up and full traction is restored.

With the engine hanging out of the back, racing cars are inherently unstable. Effectively they are pendulums just waiting to be set in motion by ham-fisted use of the steering and throttle, weight needs to be constantly redistributed between the front and rear, using just the right combination of braking and acceleration. Brake too hard while the steering wheel is turned, for example, and a spin is almost guaranteed as the back-end lightens and the front end acts as a pivot. And once it's gone, it's gone.

### Take to the track

We rookies were then allowed to take to the track in Opel Lotus single seaters. These are, essentially, the same as Formula Three cars and in the wrong hands they are certainly dangerous, but after four laps and with confidence soaring, yours truly emerged from a bend with too much zeal and ended up on the grass in an ignominious cloud of dust and clods of earth.

*Simon de Burton did - until he attended the TAG Heuer Formula One School at the Circuit du Var.*

Shortly after we were back in the classroom for one last briefing before the true F1 machines were unleashed. Mine was to be a four-year-old, AGS-built 3.5 litre V8 with paddle shift gearbox and 650 screaming horsepower propelling a framework of titanium, carbon fibre and rubber with a combined weight approximating to that of an egg box.

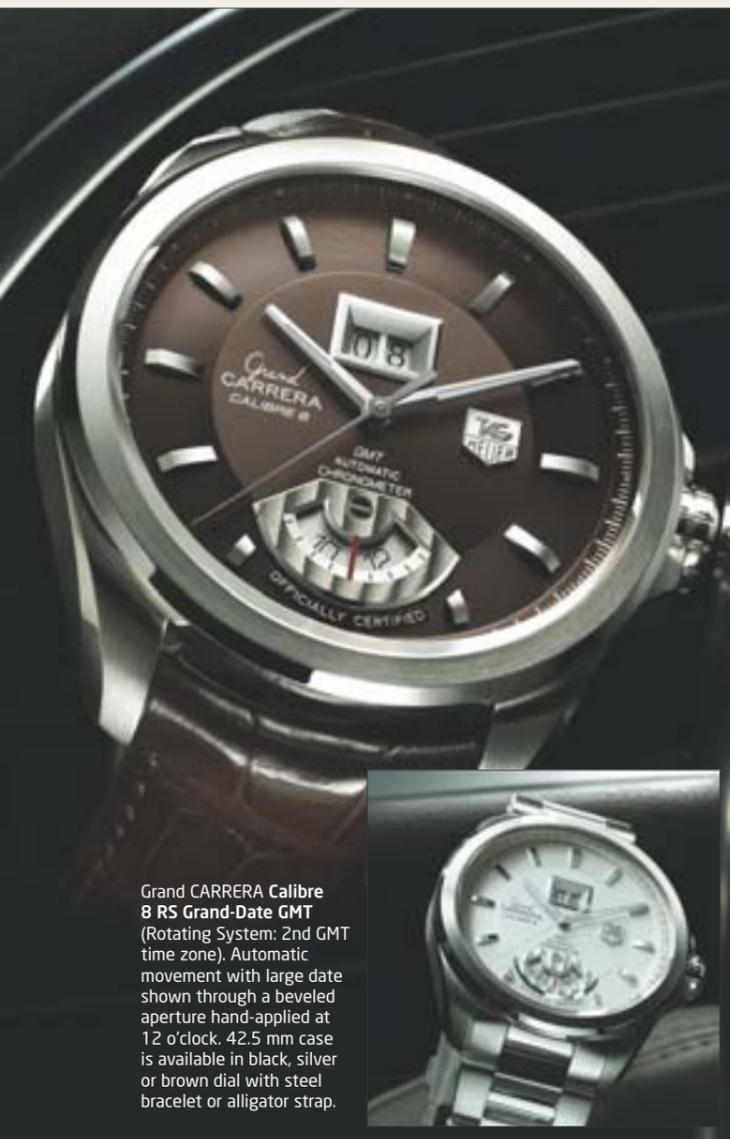
### On your marks, get set...

One particularly terrifying part of driving one of these is the actual 'launch' from the pit lane - the technique is to build the engine up to around 6,000 rpm (at which point it is churning out more than 300 horsepower) while simultaneously releasing the clutch pedal. This results in no forward motion whatsoever until approximately the last millimetre of travel is taken up, at which point - YIIIIIIKES!!!! - you're driving a Formula One car!

Awesome. Blindingly quick. Spine-tinglingly loud. Sauna hot. Brakes like a giant hand. Cornering like a go-kart, but better. G-Force like a fighter jet. It's all that and more, yet surprisingly smooth, simple and fuss-free to drive - particularly if you remember one of the more important statements from the classroom sessions: "When you suddenly feel like you're going really fast, you're probably within two seconds of crashing."

Well, it felt pretty rapid to me, but fortunately I managed to preserve my dignity and bring it back to the pits in one piece. Thank you TAG Heuer - it was a dream come true.





Grand CARRERA Calibre 8 RS Grand-Date GMT (Rotating System: 2nd GMT time zone). Automatic movement with large date shown through a beveled aperture hand-applied at 12 o'clock. 42.5 mm case is available in black, silver or brown dial with steel bracelet or alligator strap.



Grand Carrera Chronograph Calibre 17 RS (Rotating System: Small Seconds and Chronograph minute counter). COSC-certified chronograph with a 43 mm case is decorated with "Côtes de Genève" and diamond polished facets and available with steel bracelet or alligator strap.

## Producing an icon

Looking surprisingly fresh after a night of launch event partying with Jamiroquai frontman and 'friend to the brand' Jay Kay that continued until dawn, Babin explained some of the thinking behind the introduction of the Grand Carrera.

"With the development of the Rotating System disc and its use on the Grand Carrera we believe we have created a potential icon that will become just as well known as the original Carrera," he told *QP*.

"This is a system that people will soon be able to recognise from 10 metres away, yet it will also be possible for us to use it as a platform for all sorts of different functions and complications - perhaps we could adapt the Calibre 360 movement to work

with it, incorporate an alarm or adopt the inner moving bezel as used on the SLR. The world is certainly moving fast at the moment, but we want to evolve the Grand Carrera gradually so that it will never be out of date.

"The intention is that the watch speaks to slightly more mature people than the ones who might buy a Carrera Tachymetre, people of a higher financial status who may not want such an overtly sporty-looking watch," added Babin. The Grand Carrera range is due to go on sale around now - look out for the specially-developed advertising campaign and, no doubt, lots of giant-sized images of Lewis Hamilton sporting the top-of-the-range chronograph version. ○

**Further information:** AGS Formule 1 offers a wide range of racing car 'experience' programmes ranging from a 15-lap passenger ride in a two-seater F1 car at €330 to 15 self-drive laps in F3 and F1 cars with paddle-shift gearboxes at Euros 5,100. To learn more, see [www.agsformule1.com](http://www.agsformule1.com) or call +33 (0) 4 94 60 97 00. TAG Heuer has created an exhibition and photographic book entitled 'Dream Machines Driven by Generous Hearts' and featuring portraits of more than 70 personalities from around the world, ranging from Pink Floyd drummer Nick Mason to F1 star Lewis Hamilton. All proceeds from the sale of the book will be donated to Save the Children. Full details can be found at [www.tagheuer.com](http://www.tagheuer.com).