

Motorcycle Watches



Over the years watches have been designed with all types of activity in mind, from diving to driving and from caving to flying - yet motorcyclists have been studiously ignored. Until now, that is. As JeanRichard and Jaeger-LeCoultre each launch models with bike fans in mind, **Simon de Burton** asks why it didn't happen sooner - and ponders the real potential of the market.

Imagine the disappointment: I'm 21 years old and have just drawn-up outside my girlfriend's house on a freshly acquired motorcycle. It's a Suzuki GS1000S, a veritable monster of a machine, with a reputation for having too much power for its own good. A real man's bike.

The girlfriend's eccentric father emerges from the garage on his 100cc Yamaha, his mac blowing in the wind and his unfastened pudding-basin crash helmet proclaiming 'I've Got a Tiger in My Tank'. I'm glowing with pride and ready for him to admire the mighty blue



(Above) Jaeger-LeCoultre CEO, Jerome Lambert with Valentino Rossi.

(Left) Emblazed with Valentino Rossi's lucky number 46, the J-LC Master Compressor Chronograph 46 has a stainless steel case, mechanical automatic movement with 65-hour power reserve, hour-minute-second chronograph, date, power-reserve indicator and tachymeter allowing for the measurement of average speed.



and white missile at rest between my leather-clad thighs, but without stopping he scans the bike and bursts my balloon the chiding remark: "What do you want a clock on a motorbike for? That's a bloody fool's idea."

With that he was off up the road, an opaque shape hidden by a haze of two-stroke fumes, leaving me mumbling dejectedly to myself that, actually, a clock was a rather good idea on a motorbike - especially one such as the mighty Suzuki on which you could canter across continents or cruise at two-miles-a-minute.

Indeed that clock, neatly housed in the corner of the bike's 'bikini' fairing, struck me as the epitome of two-wheeled sophistication back in 1985. Nowadays all but the humblest machines have an on-board clock and many super-sports bikes, such as Ducati's 1098, come equipped with devices that will record everything from lap times to quarter-mile sprints.

But that doesn't mean we motorcyclists don't deserve a quality watch designed just for the job. Think about it: watch brands



make great play about how they develop their timepieces to resist knocks, scrapes, water, sun, dirt and vibration, but most of the people who buy them keep them safely tucked-up beneath the cuff of a business suit. And wearing a 'driver's watch' behind the wheel of your Bentley as you sit in a traffic jam on Park Lane is hardly putting the movement at peril, is it?

But get on a motorbike. Strap a watch across the top of your leathers. Ride 200 miles through rain, hail, sleet and snow. From sea level to mountain peak. In the dark. For day after day. That's a test any watch would gain kudos by passing, especially if your steed is some British 'classic' or highly-tuned v-twin that vibrates like a hammer drill.

My ultimate specification for a motorcycle watch would be as follows: a case of at least 42 mm diameter; a highly legible, highly luminous and uncluttered dial; an automatic chronograph movement; extreme resistance to water, shock and corrosion and a resilient and quickly-adjustable strap that would allow the watch to be worn over the top of a leather jacket or on the wrist as normal. The latter is particularly important, as any rider will tell you who has experienced the

irritation of trying to separate glove from cuff in order to reveal the time while travelling at motorway speeds (especially at night).

The only watches for motorcyclists I have seen in recent years have not exactly been in the luxury league - Breil has a long-standing agreement to make the official 'Ducati Corse' watch (the latest version is the £235 'One Ducati' quartz chronograph that features an aluminium bezel with rubber guard, six hour counter, luminous indexes and a black dial decorated with the Ducati Corse shield) and Tissot has just announced that it has extended its deal with 2006 Moto GP champion Nicky Hayden for another two years.

The brand's MotoGP Nicky Hayden Limited Edition T-Race (if you can really call an edition of 11,111 pieces 'limited') costs a mere £325 and is coloured black and orange just like the livery of his Honda race bike. The dial is, of course, carbon fibre - just like many of the machine's components - and the steel bezel has a similar shape to a ventilated brake disc. Engraved with Hayden's signature on the back and 'number one,' the watch is presented in a somewhat nifty-but-naff miniature crash helmet.

J-LC Master Compressor W-Alarm 46 comes with interchangeable straps, which includes a 'Rossi Yellow' rubber version. The 246 in pink gold/titanium and the 946 in titanium, both feature a city disc, but with the names replaced by those of motor-racing circuits.



JeanRichard, MV 75 World Champion Collection, includes three chronograph models in gold, steel and titanium. Equipped with the JR 1000 movement, the case is a contemporary design, reinforced by a black carbon dial, featuring a counter arrangement similar to that of the dashboard instruments on MV Agusta motorcycles.

But now motorcycling has been taken from the tradesman's entrance right around to the front door. Thanks to the emergence of a whole new breed of exotic, highly-priced machines that are attracting wealthy buyers (who often want to buy them as much for their 'rolling art' appeal as for the purpose for which they were really intended), a couple of high-end makers have grasped the fact that there are more than a few 'bikers' who are willing to spend thousands rather than hundreds on a watch dedicated to their passion.

The MV Agusta F4 1000 (£14,000), in-line 4 cylinder with two overhead camshafts, 16 radial valves and electronic multipoint injection was created by motorcycle designer, Massimo Tamburini.



The first such brand to take a gamble on this was Jaeger-LeCoultre who, earlier this year, announced the signing of Moto GP star and living racing legend Valentino Rossi as a brand ambassador.

To mark the association, JLC has introduced special versions of its 46 mm Extreme World Alarm and Master Compressor Chronograph models dedicated to the seven-times world champion. The Extreme World is being produced in a limited edition of 946 examples in titanium (46 being Rossi's race number) and 246 in pink gold. The time zone ring around the edge incorporates the names of some of the international race circuits at which 'The Doctor' has triumphed, such as Mugello, Donington and Sepang, while the caseback is engraved with the racer's signature and an edition number. (Rossi himself, by the way, owns number 000 in gold).

The Master Compressor Chrono 'Rossi' Edition, meanwhile features a carbon-look dial, a yellow seconds hand and a tachymetre ring. A limited edition of 746 of these 41.5 mm watches will be available. Like the Extreme World Alarm, each will be supplied with two easily interchangeable straps, one made from alligator skin, the other from 'Rossi yellow' rubber. The Extreme World costs £12,300

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in pink gold or £8,400 in titanium and the Master Compressor Chrono ranges in price from £5,500.

Equally interesting is the more recent announcement from JeanRichard that it has joined forces with the Italian superbike manufacturer MV Agusta. The first fruit of the collaboration is the MV75 World Champion collection of square-cased watches based on the standard Paramount model.

The '75' in the title alludes to the number of world championship victories racked-up by MV during its glory years between the mid-1950s and the 1970s when it employed star riders such as John Surtees and Giacomo Agostini. After many years in the doldrums, the marque was revived a decade ago by the Cagiva company and went into production with a range of high-priced, four-cylinder sports bikes aimed at wealthy buyers.

Lately, however, MV (which has changed ownership in recent years) has been attracting attention with a series of ultra high-end limited edition models, such as the F4 1100 'CC,' in which the 'CC' represents the initials of MV president Claudio Castiglioni. This £60,000 machine is claimed to produce 198 horsepower, weighs 412 lbs and boast a limited top speed of 195 mph.

Given the long-standing motorsport connections of Gino Macaluso, the former champion rally driver who runs Girard-Perregaux and JeanRichard, it is not surprising that he and Castiglioni are

close friends - hence the JeanRichard/MV tie-up.

"Claudio and I have known one another for many years," Macaluso told *QP*.

"We have often spoken of the possibility of making a motorcycle watch and JeanRichard seemed to fit well with MV. We decided to start with the square Paramount design and use features that reflected some of the materials of the motorcycle. Other models may follow, but we have yet to decide for certain."

The MV75 world Champion collection comprises titanium, pink gold and satin-brushed versions, all with carbon dials and driven by the in-house JR1000 movement. The chronograph subdials are said to have been inspired by the MV instrument pod, while the case back is fitted with a crystal decorated with the MV Agusta logo. A total of 825 watches will be made - 75 in pink gold, 175 in titanium and 575 in steel. Rumour has it, however, that every buyer of an F4 1100 'CC' will get one free with his or her machine.

So, at last, some luxury watches have actually been made with motorcyclists in mind. But the sad truth is that the idea will never enjoy the same success as all those collaborations between watch brands and prestige car makers. Motorcycles - even the most exotic ones - are simply not expensive enough.

Realistically, this market really is more Breitling and Tissot territory than Jaeger-LeCoultre or JeanRichard.

Simon de Burton is the author of the annually-produced *New Motorcycle Year Book* series. The *New Motorcycle Year Book Three* is now available from leading bookshops and Amazon at a RRP of £29.95. ISBN 978-1-8589-4379-4.



Baggy jeans, loose-laced trainers and a penchant for the sporty, understated steel-case. Simon de Burton sits back with the motorcycling man of legend, *Valentino Rossi*.

It's 3.30pm on a Wednesday afternoon, and I'm heading up the staircase of the swish Morton's dining club in the heart of Mayfair for an appointment with the doctor - or, to put it more correctly The Doctor.

I find him prone on a plush sofa, dressed in standard 'yooof' uniform of baggy jeans, washed-out t-shirt and loose-laced Nike trainers. He's not wearing a white coat and there's no stethoscope around his neck, because this ain't no medical doctor, but none other than Valentino Rossi, seven times Moto GP world champion and possibly the greatest motorcycle racer that ever wore leather.

The nickname 'The Doctor,' which is emblazoned across the back of his race suit, refers to his status in Italy where only those who are masters of their profession get to be called 'Il Dottore.' And Rossi is certainly master of his.

Already estimated to be the seventh highest earning sportsman outside the US - he is believed to bank around \$30 million a year - Rossi has recently added another string to his bow by taking on the role of ambassador for Jaeger-LeCoultre which, as mentioned elsewhere in this article, has created a range of watches in the good Doctor's honour.

"I have one of the red gold versions too, but this is the one I like the most," says the impish 28-year-old as he unstraps his steel-cased Rossi-edition chronograph, marked '000' of 746, the '46' alluding to his famous race number.

"This is the one I wear most of the time. The rose gold is beautiful, but this is more understated and sporty."

Rossi, whose wiry and diminutive frame makes his masterful taming of Yamaha's 210-horsepower, YZR-M1 800 race bike seem all the more remarkable, admits that his interest in watches was more passing than passionate before he climbed aboard with Jaeger-LeCoultre - but he has clearly found subsequent visits to the Le Sentier manufacture entirely absorbing.

"I had no idea what it would be like before I went there - everyone from the boss man, Jerome (Lambert) to the people working on the tiniest components have incredible passion.

"The watchmakers are like crazy professors, coming out with amazing ideas all the time, like this new watch they've made (Xtreme Lab) that works without needing any oil or servicing.

"It is not really that much different from the way they build my race bikes in the Moto GP department at Yamaha in Japan. Just like with the watches it's all about unbelievable precision and they have different people who specialise in different things - some do the engine, some do the electronics, some do the suspension, just as they have specialists at Jaeger-LeCoultre for making parts like cases and dials.

"The two environments are very similar too, more like hospitals than factories - but hospitals where you can sometimes smell oil and hear machines."

The racer says his input was asked for in the creation of the Rossi editions, albeit in the more superficial aspects of the design such as the use of colour and caseback engraving.

"We spoke about the design, but obviously I know nothing about what it takes to make a high quality watch - but maybe the next stage is to make one that is really built for motorcycling, maybe with an extra-large case, the Xtreme World's shock absorber system and with the chronograph buttons on the opposite side of the case from the hand, to prevent them digging-in while you're riding."

Although, for obvious reasons, he doesn't wear a watch while racing, Rossi says 'normal' riders certainly need a decent timepiece - and yes, he does ride on the road, too.

So next time you pull up alongside a Yamaha XJR 1300, think twice before going for glory in the traffic light grand prix... ◯

