

Technical Specs**Model:** Glycine Airman 17, ref. 3865**Movement:** Automatic ETA A07.171**Functions:** Hours, minutes and seconds; 24-hour hand; date**Special features:** Top ring adjustable with 4 o'clock crown**Jewels:** 24**Power Reserve:** 46 hours**Case:** Steel; sapphire caseback; 46 mm**Price:** £1,500**Breitling Navitimer Cosmonaute**

While Glycine's Airman precedes it by a decade, Breitling's Navitimer Cosmonaute (£2,785) is probably the more famous 24-hour watch. I guess you can't escape company size and success. Anyway, the Cosmonaute - named after Russian spacemen despite a Yank providing its debut - was developed in the early 1960s when Breitling was swept up with a number of other brands in the mania that was space exploration. A natural evolution of the Navitimer was a space-going version featuring a 24-hour dial, since, as Breitling succinctly puts it, "Night and day are all but meaningless in space; this dial style prevents possible confusion between noon and midnight." Astronaut Scott Carpenter was the first to test it in space, on 24th May 1962 during his orbital flight aboard *Aurora 7*. In addition to 24-hour read-out, the Cosmonaute is a flyback chronograph. Available in a selection of dial colours and metals, the Cosmonaute comes in a 41.5 mm case, has a minimum power reserve of 42 hours and features the Navitimer's signature circular slide-rule.

Chronoswiss Timemaster 24H

Relatively speaking, the new kid on the block is Chronoswiss' handsome Timemaster 24H (£3,999), part of the semi-retro Timemaster series. This range found immediate favour because of the wonderful styling and legibility: knurled-edge bezel, fat 'onion' winding crown, in-your-face luminosity and oversized hands, plus highly legible digits. The 44 mm steel case houses Chronoswiss' hand-wound C.674 movement (based on ETA's 6497) boasting almost 48 hours of power reserve. The 24-hour modification is exclusive to the Munich brand, and unlike the Airman and Cosmonaute, the 24H features 12 noon at the top of the dial and midnight at the bottom. Currently available with an all-black dial or half-black/half-Superluminova, and a selection of straps or bracelets.



Modern Classics: Glycine Airman

⌚ Twenty-four-hour dials are one of those experiences that watch enthusiasts have to try at least once. They're like manual gearboxes, varifocal glasses or Marmite: you'll either love them or hate them... as I learned when I wore one during an 11-hour flight with a nine-time-zone shift and arrived thinking that midnight was 6am. What's undeniable, though, is their appeal to professionals, especially pilots: when you work on a 24-hour clock, nothing beats a 24-hour read-out. And amongst the genre's granddaddies is Glycine's genuine classic, the Airman.

Ken Kessler

The Airman's heritage is enviable, for Glycine - which celebrates its centenary in seven years - was among the first watch companies to produce an in-house automatic movement and, in 1952, a watch with air-tight monocoque construction called the Vacuum.

Eugène Meylan, an engineer whose name now graces an homage in the form of a Glycine dress watch, founded the company in Bienne by acquiring another young firm. He immediately set out to create an innovative brand with high-end appeal. Over the decades, Glycine manufactured small, precise movements for ladies' watches (deliciously ironic when you consider that the company now produces one of the largest wristwatches on the market) housing them in gold and platinum cases, often clad with gems. Again, not what you'd expect as a precedent for militaria and sport watches.

More influential to the lineage of the Airman was the arrival in 1934 of a series of chronometers. Though the depression and WWII combined to hinder Glycine's development, the company survived, and one of its most productive periods would be the immediate post-war years. Having relaunched itself right after the war with a complete range of automatic watches, Glycine was poised to participate in the burst of inventiveness that saw the arrival of Omega's Constellation, the earliest Rolex sports watches, Blancpain's Fifty Fathoms, Breitling's Navitimer and

many other horological milestones. In 1953, concurrent with those historically notable pieces, Glycine launched its Airman, to immediate acclaim.

As well as professional aviators, its market included the first notable generation of world travellers; the direct by-product of the phenomenal growth in commercial air transportation. With transcontinental crossings taking hours rather than days or weeks, the importance of watches able to communicate the time-zones increased logarithmically. The lasting appeal of this type of watch is inarguable: along with Rolex's GMT-Master and the Navitimer, Glycine's Airman has never been out of production, and now spearheads the company's entire oeuvre.

Iterations

Glycine worked closely with both civil and military pilots to establish the design and features of this watch. Of course, legibility was paramount and Glycine addressed this with distinct hands for each function, including a broad arrow for the main hours and a separately coloured hand for the secondary time-zone, as well as thinner seconds and minutes hands. Additionally, the Airman boasted two concentric 24-hour rings, the outer ring engraved on a rotating, lockable bezel activated by a crown at the 4 o'clock position, with the date viewable through an aperture at 3 o'clock.



(Left) Offering similarly garish legibility to Chronoswiss' Timemaster 24H, the special 500-piece 'MLV' edition of Glycine's Airman (E720) has a Superluminova dial and a revolving top ring plated in satin black PVD. (Centre) The Seventies-style ovoid case and coloured indexes combine to delicious effect on the Airman Double 24 (£1,330), limited to 300 pieces. (Right) The recent 'Silver Circle' edition of the Airman 7 (£1,950), whose three dials are driven by three separate self-winding movements: an ETA 2893-2 at 3 o'clock for local time and a second time-zone; an ETA 2671-2 at 10 o'clock for a third time-zone; and an ETA 2671-2 at 8 o'clock for the fourth time-zone.

Over the decades, the Airman kept up with market demands, including quartz-driven models, but the general renaissance in men's mechanical watches, especially oversized timekeepers, seemed made-to-order for the Airman. Forty years after its birth, the Airman was hot once more.

Directly responsible for the current Airman 17 - our choice of the contemporary models - was the Airman 2000, launched in 1998. Model ref. 3764, the Airman 2000 was fitted with an ETA 2893-2 movement in a 42 mm stainless-steel case. The following year, the Airman line was enlarged to 46 mm, while the freak of the family, the Airman 7, appeared in 2002 with three independent automatic movements in a massive 53 mm case, able to indicate four time-zones. To reassure doubters, its sapphire-crystal caseback allows viewing of the three movements. And to delight the more crass elements of the market, it is now available covered in diamonds.

But Glycine has responded to the global demand for retro-purism with a close replica of the first Airman of the 1950s. Launched as the Airman 8, ref. 3831, it was an immediate hit that proved the viability of the Airman as a complete range. It was joined in 2004 by the Airman 9, which added a chronograph to the basic

model and a year later, Glycine succumbed to the juggernaut that is bling-bling by adding the Airman 7 in 18 ct rose gold.

For the purist

But those are mere detours and aberrations. For the watch enthusiast's needs, they're perfectly served by the Airman 17 ref. 3865 (£1,500) with an ETA A07.171 automatic movement boasting 46 hours of power reserve. Its functions are identical to the original: display of hours, minutes and seconds, second 24-hour hand, date display in a window. The movement features a rhodium-coated oscillating weight on a ball bearing decorated with 'côtes de Genève', rhodium-coated perlage-decorated bridges and blued screws. And if 46 mm is a little too hefty for your wrist, the Airman 18 offers a 38 mm carbon copy.

While 24-hour dials require some readjustment on the part of the user - hands positioned at the '6 o'clock' vertical actually read 12 noon on an Airman - the whiff of professionalism is reassuring. Glycine's Airman is a no-nonsense precision instrument with a genuine claim to aviation suitability. Which, by definition, makes it as admirable, commendable and genuine as a Rolex Submariner. In other words, "Respect." ○