



The QP Bookshelf Part 8:

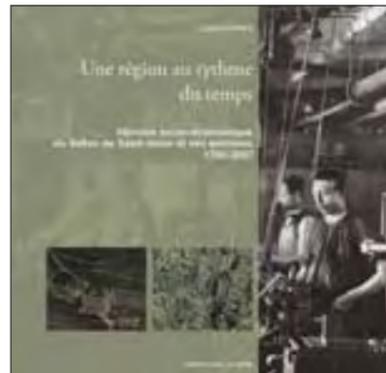
Autumn Pageturners



With the approaching autumn months (and indeed the majority of our current 'summer') ensuring lots of 'indoor time', a batch of new watch books is vying for your attention. And so knowledgeable and mature are watch collectors circa 2007 that standards have been raised to a point where mere gloss just won't do. We're seeing the arrival of, along with the usual brand histories, more books on individual models, general studies of the history of watchmaking, more collectors' guides and even the odd biography. Recently, along with the delicious history of the Hamilton electric watch, *The Watch of the Future* (see p.78), we've received a massive study of the Saint-Imier watchmaking region, and a couple of luscious but ultimately frustrating picture books. Enjoy...

Ken Kessler





A Region In Time

By Laurence Marti

Hardback, 384 pages, £49.95

Published by Longines, 2007

ISBN 2-9700558-1-3

Available only from Longines UK,

Tel: 023 80646 203

If there's an industry award for the best watch-related book of the year - or even decade - then this magnificent achievement isn't just a contender, it's a shoo-in. Massive in every way, with a footprint

the size of an LP sleeve, it covers in depth what its subtitle defines, "The socio-economic history of the Swiss valley of Saint-Imier and the surrounding area, 1700-2007." This daunting undertaking is the work of a sociologist-cum-historian, and it is - despite the academic breadth and depth of the work - a fascinating study of the watchmaking industry at every level.

Above all, it is a remarkable display of largesse on Longines' part, for the company clearly gave Dr Marti free rein, allowing her to refer to any brand that needed mentioning - not just Swatch Group siblings. Timed to coincide with Longines' 175th anniversary, Dr Marti produced, in record time, a gigantic volume that marries the aesthetic values of a lavish coffee-table book with the gravitas of a university-level textbook. In *A Region In Time* (and full marks for the English translation), she describes and analyses the development of the local worker base, their skill culture and the creation of the watchmaking industry in the valley of Saint-Imier and its surroundings.

While I am not about to suggest that this is the recipe for a gripping read (unless you're either a sociologist or a watch enthusiast of near-psychotic zeal) it is utterly absorbing, due to precisely what might be deemed a deterrent by some: the flood of minutiae. It is peppered with anecdotes, small details, facts so obscure that they'd be considered too esoteric even for a History of Watchmaking candidate on *Mastermind*.

While its major intent is to look at 'the bigger picture', with Longines at its centre, Dr Marti has resisted the trap of becoming a mere Longines mouthpiece. Indeed, you will learn how Saint-Imier was a hothouse for the formation of many brands; Chopard, Heuer, Breitling and Blancpain all took their first steps there. As Dr Marti emphasised at her book's launch in March at Longines' Saint-Imier HQ, it is a region of great dynamism, where ideas have flourished as a result of 'soft' innovation, structured around the existing resources of surrounding villages. Liberty to experiment meant watchmaking developed rapidly. But, yes, this book does also remind us how, "among the historic producers, Longines is the only company, still in operation, which was born, grew up and reached maturity in Saint-Imier." Which is as it should be: many watch enthusiasts have yet to recognise the immense achievements of Longines.

Depending on the depth of your passion for watches, you might find this book is worth owning just for the copious and detailed listings and tables distributed throughout the book - not just the appendix. At your fingertips is a list of the "Friendly Societies in the district of Courtelary in 1903"; such august groups including the Saint-Imier Watchmakers' Friendly Society, or the Case-Fitters Friendly Society, Tramelan. And how about a list, by geographical origin, of Longines' suppliers in 1915? Purchasing companies? Fluctuations in the number of watchmakers in the region?

There are but two small complaints. The first is that there's no index *per se*, except for the gorgeous illustrations. The second is that, with only 3,000 copies printed (in both French and English), it is bound to end up on eBay soon at a hugely inflated price. So act quickly and call Longines: this book is a treasure.

Eterna - Pioneers In Watchmaking

By Gisbert L Brunner and Christian Pfeiffer-Belli

Hardback, 250 pages, €69

Published by Ebner Verlag, 2007. ISBN 3-033-00985-9

Available from www.eterna.ch

To mark its 150th anniversary, Eterna has commissioned as "a birthday present to itself" a simply terrific brand history that strikes a perfect balance between text and image. Equally, it manages to remind all and sundry of Eterna's illustrious past without reeking too much of self-promotion. Make no mistake: Eterna has a truly admirable history, and its recent comeback is well deserved. Written by those giants of the German watch press, Gisbert L Brunner and Christian Pfeiffer-Belli, *Eterna - Pioneers In Watchmaking* joins an ever-increasing library of admirable and desirable single-marque histories from Tissot, Tiffany, Girard-Perregaux and others that capture the spirit of each brand while setting the record straight.

As the company states with pride, "Eterna is one of the few Swiss watch brand names that has managed to survive every major crisis in the capricious watch industry. The archives and the watch collection of the Grenchen enterprise are therefore exceptionally rich." Among the company's milestones are wristwatches that pre-date the Great War; a combined watch and cigarette lighter produced from 1928-1938; railway watches; an early role in the development of electric watches; the first alarm watches, pre-dating Crickets and Memovoxes by three decades; the brand's signature ball-bearing-mounted rotor, Eterna-Matic, first produced in 1948; the supremely thin Delirium and Linea Museum (the latter a mere 0.98 mm thick!); and much, much more.

Brunner and Pfeiffer-Belli weave the stories of the company and the founding Schild family into an entertaining tale punctuated by one of the nicest elements of the book: utterly enthralling period advertising. In an era when 'brand ambassadors' have all but taken over the marketing of watches, it's interesting to note that Eterna could boast no less than Yehudi Menuhin, Gina Lollobrigida and Brigitte Bardot. Compare that trio to the D-list celebs, lobotomised footballers and anorexic WAGs that pass for ambassadors nowadays.

For this enthusiast, the crowning glory of the book is the KonTiki saga, recounted here in some detail. As a boy of nine, long before I knew about the connection to an all-time great wristwatch, I was captivated by Thor Heyerdahl's epic voyage thanks to a well-thumbed paperback copy of its account. With this volume, Eterna's involvement is on record.

Taking us up to the present, the book covers the arrival of Porsche in 1995 as its new custodians, the appearance of the 'retro' models, the reinvigoration of the KonTiki line and the recent return to *manufacture* status. Take my word for it: this is one helluva story.





Longines Watches

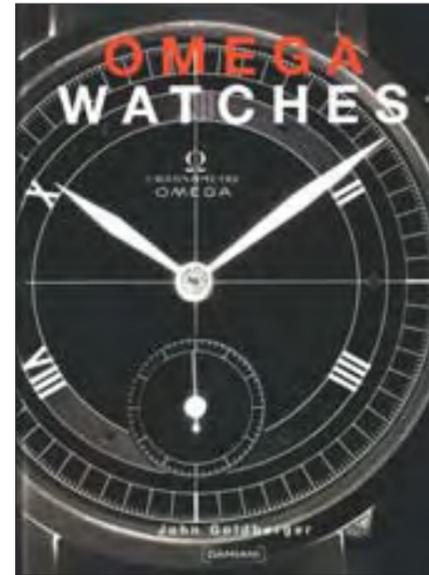
By John Goldberger

Hardback, 308 pages, €89

Published by Damiani Editore, 2006

ISBN 88-89431-40-5

Available from www.damianieditore.it



Omega Watches

By John Goldberger

Hardback, 256 pages, €88

Published by Damiani Editore, 2005

ISBN 88-89431-27-X

Available from www.damianieditore.it

Here we have a brace of luxurious photo studies of vintage watches by collector/photographer Goldberger that will make you want to scream. He comes so close to producing ideal collectors' books that you want to slap him for not following through with a greater sense of organisation.

But aren't these merely photo collections and therefore more like art books than guides? Well, yes and no. They're art books in the sense that the photography is just about as good as it gets, the production values are five-star and you will pore over the shots for hours. For the Omega selection, Goldberger opted for one watch per page, with some having a smaller detail shot on a lower corner. The Longines title's more consistent layout employs a massive portrait of a given model on the right-hand page of a spread, with the left-hand page containing a half-dozen detail shots and the watch's individual quirks serving as captions. It's this format that lifts the Longines book's educational value way above that of the sparse-to-the-point-of-taciturnity Omega book.

Regarding both, what is so unnecessary is the relative lack of order of watch types or chronology, despite the chapter breakdowns in the Omega title. Perhaps this was deliberate, to create a sense of variety, but I would have preferred a sequence of watches by type, in chronological order. The total absence of dates in the Omega work - regarded by most collectors and enthusiasts as the most important detail when discussing a new 'find' - and the general feeling that both titles were produced more for the author's ego than the readers' pleasure also detracts from their worth. They are, after all, primarily his collections. But the images remain irresistible.

Wisely, Goldberger avoided the odious practice of including values in either book. Leave that to the auction catalogues, or those who care more about price than quality. Moreover, even veteran enthusiasts will delight in the knowledge that some of the watches he's shown are so uncommon that, apparently, the respective marques don't even have examples in their museums. Gripes about data and order aside, these are must-have volumes if you care enough about either marque to want to drool over divine rarities.

Militari Da Polso

By Leopoldo Canetoli with Eugenio Zigliotto

Hardback, 184 pages, €45

Published by Studio Zeta Editore, 2007. ISBN 88-86381-07-7

Available from studiozetamministrazione@interfree.it

A decade ago, Studio Zeta published what became one of the most sought-after watch books of the era. Almost impossible to find, issued only in Italian, mainly consisting of photos - what was the appeal of *Militari Da Polso*?

Aside from the obvious - it was fun staring at page after page of unrestored, often-knackered military treasures - it was one of very few titles then available dealing with the subject. Others have come and gone, some so academic that it hurts and some so disorganised as to be worthless, while the Italian volume's desirability simply increased to eBay proportions in the interim.

Above all, *Militari Da Polso* was filled with nuggets of information, not least a six-page section enabling collectors to decipher military markings on the backs of watches from all the key countries with interesting military offerings: the Austro-Hungarian empire, Canada, Chile, China, Czechoslovakia, France, Germany, Japan, Great Britain, Italy, Holland, Peru, Poland, Spain, Sweden and the USA. And, yes, the UK has the greatest number of encoded serial numbers and identifiers, attesting to our forces' former greatness.

Now, 10 years on, comes a second edition no less, rather than a mere re-print (though even that would have a few thousand watch enthusiasts jumping for joy). The book retains its two sections, historical watches and current 'military-style' offerings, and it's the latter that has been principally updated. The former section does include a few more vintage items (probably pieces discovered since 1997), while the book's last 50-or-so pages are all new, with profiles of some brands that weren't even around in 1997, such as TCM. Additionally, IWC, Panerai and Longines have increased coverage.

Alas, the book is only available in Italian, but you would be amazed at how useful it is by virtue of the profusion of cognates, just in case you don't speak the language. You don't need a dictionary to tell you, for example, that 'spirale Breguet' means a 'Breguet overcoil', or that 'cronografo' is 'chronograph'. And as for those legendary identification tables, a typical entry shows you how easy they are to interpret. Take this one: '6bb' is defined as 'Codice NATO per orologi da polso della RAF'. That means 'NATO code for an RAF wristwatch'. (Those of you who didn't know that 'orologi da polso' is Italian for 'wristwatch' can go to the back of the class.)

For a mere €45, you can now have a fresh copy of a book I was once offered £200 for by a raving, salivating watch casualty. And now I no longer have to scour second-hand bookshops in Italy to find copies for my watch-collecting friends. ◯

