

# Respect Overdue

There's more history than you'd expect behind Eberhard and its star-turn, Chrono 4

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(This page) Chrono 4 was the first chronograph in the history of watchmaking whose counters were arranged in one row. Here, the original horizontal arrangement (prior to Temerario's vertical style) can be seen on the pink-gold ref. 30060 'Bellisimo' (€6,220), whose case has softer lines to those in the core Chrono 4 range.

(Opposite page) Eberhard's new head-turner: the ref. 31047 'Temerario' (€3,600), which turns Chrono 4's linear-counter concept 90 degrees to the vertical. From the top, one can read continuous seconds, 24-hour time, elapsed hours and elapsed minutes.



Because of the UK's notoriously ultra-conservative watch market, we've been denied some of the most interesting marques Switzerland has to offer over the years. Among them - and it's a brand that truly hardcore chronograph lovers revere as much as Leonidas or Lemania - is Eberhard, a brand with over a century's history and a couple of collections so disarmingly hip that it hurts. It has finally announced availability in Great Britain, which means one less excuse for "having to go to Milan".

It was inevitable that founder Georges-Emile Eberhard, born in St Imier in 1865, would become a watchmaker. His family traced its Swiss ancestry back nine centuries - grounds enough for assuming a life in horology - while his father was a watchmaker who passed on his skills to young Georges-Emile. Prodigy that he was, he founded the brand that bears his name in 1887, when he was only 22.

If a Savile Row address best suits bespoke tailors, and you just have to be located in Bologna for your Balsamico to have any credibility, then you can't do much better than La Chaux-de-Fonds for watchmaking. That's where Eberhard set up shop with a colleague named Rosselet. Producing a range of pocket watches, including chronometers and chronographs, the company changed its name to Eberhard & Cie in 1892, moving to an impressive building in La Chaux-de-Fonds in 1907. During the following years, Eberhard would establish itself as a brand known for serious and dependable timepieces for sport and professional use.

Between 1919 and 1926, Georges-Emile's sons Georges and Maurice took over the reins, launching the brand's first wristwatches, notable for hinged attachments for the straps. Their main lines included a variety of calibres, and they established a strong export market, including Italy, where they've always been amongst the most cherished brands for sport watches.

Achievement followed achievement, with the 1930s in particular seeing an early automatic chronograph, single- and two-button chronographs, flybacks, split-seconds models, chronographs with three subsidiary dials and others that are now taken for granted by connoisseurs. In a majority of cases, Eberhard can claim to have been the innovator. And if you want fiscal evidence of the respect with which these pieces are held, check out the auction results for Eberhard's early rattrapantes.

After WWII, Eberhard grew more commercially aware, launching a ladies' range (supported to this day) while continuing to refine its chronographs, including, in 1968, one with a 36,000 vph movement. The company moved to its current headquarters in Bienne in 1975, and within a few years undertook - quietly, it seems - a key role in re-establishing mechanical wristwatches in the face of the battery-driven juggernaut. Now it's high time that Eberhard's achievements were appreciated outside of Italy and one or two other enlightened markets.

(Below) The 'Extra-fort' range was originally launched by Eberhard immediately post-war. It was revived half a century later, and this year sees the 1950s-style chronograph endowed with a rattrapante function (€8,230) - a complication that made Eberhard's name in its 1930s heyday. The 333 watches are based on ETA's Valjoux 7750, with an additional split-seconds module.



(Above) Eberhard's elegant Traversetolo ref. 21026 (€1,180), based on a hand-wound Unitas movement.



(Above) One of the Temerario's three patents filed was for this unique crown access device, activated by exerting pressure against a small lever situated on the caseback. Two other patents pending are for verticalising the counters, and for a unique clasp-deployment mechanism.

(Right) Chrono 4 Temerario with steel bracelet (€3,850), sporting a black dial with white counters - a particularly striking combination, especially given the novel dial arrangement. Note the unusual positioning of the chronograph pushers: start and stop at 11 o'clock, reset-to-zero at 1 o'clock.



## Rebirth

For many collectors, the brand's rebirth came with the Tazio Nuvolari collection - a range of oversized chronographs that remains a staple series in the firm's catalogue. Eberhard had already produced watches that presaged the current craze for 'branding' and commemoratives, having issued in 1984 a limited edition honouring the Freccie Tricolore aerobatic air squadron. Celebrating its own centenary in 1987, Eberhard issued the Navymaster chronographs with "1887-1987" on the dial. But in 1992, the company marked the 100th birthday of the man many consider to be the gutsiest racing driver of all time.

This is not the place to discuss the relative merits of Fangio, Schumacher, et al. Suffice it to say, the story of Tazio Nuvolari is epic. When Eberhard launched a black-dialed chronograph bearing Nuvolari's shield - a tortoise, no less - it must have touched a nerve: the watch spawned an entire family of chronographs, rather than merely disappearing at the end of the centenary year. For many, this is the core of the current Eberhard line. But in 2001, the company surprised everyone with what has surely become the brand's signature model.

With the Chrono 4, Eberhard pulled the sort of stroke that must have had rival producers deploring their unadventurous design teams. Eberhard, with patented techniques and much hard work, created a new 'face' for the modern chronograph by providing four subsidiary dials *in a row*. Across the lower half of the

dial from 8 o'clock to 4 o'clock were counters for 30 minutes, 12 hours, a 24-hour timescale and real-time seconds. Although based on an ETA 2894 calibre, the extra module needed to align all four subsidiary dials made the watch unique. And anyone else coming out with the same would - in these days of switched-on enthusiasts - look like a fifth-rate copycat.

To twist the knife it stabbed in 2001, Eberhard added a new version in 2005, the Chrono 4 'Temerario'. This clever beast turned the movement on its side, creating a vertical row of counters in a tonneau format. It was an immediate - and inimitable - hit.

But Eberhard's catalogue is a monster running to over 180 pages. And almost ignored is one of the leading contenders for Best Value Men's Watch: the sublime, oversized Traversetolo, based on the massive Unitas calibre that powers everything from base-model Panerai to the early JeanRichard Bressels. There's also the cushion-shaped Boucanier, the Scafodat diving watch, the classic Palazzo. Look at what you've been missing!

With 2007 representing the company's 120th anniversary, one would anticipate a surprise or two at the next Basel watch fair. Eberhard may not be the first name that rolls off your tongue, but it has always been a brand to, er, watch. "Innovation with tradition" is its slogan. I suspect Eberhard's about to prove its aptness yet again. ◯

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