

Technical Specs

Model: AMVOX1 R-Alarm, ref. 191 T4 40 (limited to 500 pieces)

Movement: Calibre 918; automatic; 28,800 vph

Functions: Hours, minutes, seconds, alarm, rotating flange

Case: Titanium; 44 mm diameter

Power reserve: 45 h

Water resistance: 50 m

Price: £6,700 (basic steel AMVOX1, ref. 190 84 70, £4,690)



Blancpain Reveil GMT

Jaeger-LeCoultre is no slouch when it comes to making upmarket versions of the Memovox, but you have to go some way to top Blancpain's Reveil GMT if you want an alarm watch bursting with complications. Combining a GMT with an alarm isn't uncommon, so Blancpain spiced-up the mix with a power reserve, an on/off indicator, a small seconds hand, a 24-hour reference time dial and one you'll really appreciate if you've ever been let down by a hotel wake-up call: an indicator for the alarm's power reserve. It took Blancpain four years to perfect the design – an accomplishment achieved in collaboration with Breguet – and the new movement, calibre 1241, contains a daunting 407 components. A small 24-hour dial at the 9 o'clock position shows the reference time and the push-button at 8 o'clock activates the alarm via a column wheel. Uniquely, the alarm hands positioned at 3 o'clock are indexed to the main hands, while the automatic movement also rewinds the alarm. Pictured is the new titanium model (ref. 2041-1230-64B, £9,290), launched in July. Having perhaps taken a leaf out of Jaeger's book when it came to case material, titanium boasts remarkable acoustic qualities compared to steel or gold. Awaken in style, say we.

Vulcain Cricket Golden Voice

Of late, Vulcain has been exploiting its legendary Cricket with all manner of variants, from cloisonné dials to GMTs. We adore the re-edition of the earliest model (the Classic 1951), but simply re-introducing the half-century-old milestone wouldn't do justice to its role in horology. Vibrating as well as ringing, the new Golden Voice (steel model pictured, £2,700) uses the latest chapter in the Cricket's history: calibre V-10. First developed in 2002, this hand-wound movement has two barrels – one each for the movement and the alarm – and provides a 42-hour power reserve and 12-second striking period – enough to awaken anyone bar a 16-year-old after a night on Diamond White. Better still, the Golden Voice movement was entirely developed and assembled in-house, thus satisfying demand for *manufacture* status. For the first time in the history of Vulcain alarm watches, the Golden Voice collection offers an indication of the 'vibrate reminder' on a rotating dial; the time of the vibrate reminder adjusted using the stylised 'V' symbol. Very cool: a *manufacture* movement, nifty details, utterly authentic historical validity. Nope, the Memovox doesn't have it all to itself.



Modern Classics: Jaeger-LeCoultre Memovox



You have to hand it to Jaeger-LeCoultre: ask a bunch of enthusiasts to name a mechanical alarm wristwatch, and you can bet that the majority will say "Memovox". Although the estimable Vulcain Cricket preceded it by a few years, that brand's low-key profile allowed Jaeger-LeCoultre to become the *de facto* flag-bearer for this particular function. Then again, alarm-watch enthusiasts will tell you, too, that the Memovox is more upmarket... with all respect to Vulcain.

Ken Kessler

Jaeger-LeCoultre developed the 'wrist alarm' in 1949 as a direct response to the Cricket's success. Prior to Vulcain's efforts, most alarm watches were too gentle and wouldn't actually awaken the wearer. The noisy little Cricket could, at least, rouse a *light* sleeper.

Jaeger-LeCoultre's rival Wrist Alarm, with the calibre 489 movement, was launched officially in 1951, but the fun started 1953-1956, when it was followed by the Memovox with the 815 automatic movement – believed to be the first ever self-wound alarm wristwatch. By the end of the decade, Jaeger-LeCoultre was able to add a date display, using the 815 with a module to create the 825.

Tear-in-eye moment: amidst these early versions was my now sorely missed Memovox, which turns out to have been something of a rarity. (QP also acquired a rare Memovox at Christie's last Christmas sale; see Issue 17.) Manufactured in 1963, it was a slim, steel-cased, manual-wind watch with date. In mint condition, its details included only the name 'LeCoultre' on the dial (attesting to its origins as US market model), a Rolex-like fluted gold bezel and – nicest of all – a glossy dove-grey dial. I once wore it to the Jaeger-LeCoultre works, and my host couldn't take his eyes off it.

Years later, a whining and indefatigable collector-friend convinced me to part with it, at a ridiculously low price. Anything

for a quiet life, I let him wrest it from my collection. I learned this month that he gave it to his son. And that it's worth four times what he paid for it.

Upper echelons

In 1969, 10 years after the launch of the model with date, Jaeger-LeCoultre released the Memovox with the superior calibre 916, doing away with the hammer mechanism and adding a rotor that wound the watch bidirectionally. Manufactured until 1983, it paved the way for a series of watches that kept Memovoxes and countless variants in continuous production. Even 1989's upscale Grand Reveils, with their new calibre 919, are merely Memovoxes with a smarter name.

Grand Reveils, however, allowed the Memovox to move to the top of the desirability scale amongst those who consider precious metals and higher prices to be virtues, adding as well the sort of complications previously denied a time/date-only model. After all, aside from the occasional rare variant, such as the now-desirable diving model (the military-look Polaris ref. E859 of 1965-1970), Memovoxes had been noted for their simple, almost plain elegance. They never suffered pretence, and the line was always as pure as other serious models of genuine purpose, like Rolex's Milgauss or Heuer's Regatta. The Grand Reveil, however, changed this steak-and-fries into *filet mignon avec frites* by adding a perpetual calendar, moonphase, and



(Above) Aside from the relatively new AMVOX1 Alarm, the current Memovox calibre (918) is also found in the rugged Master Compressor case (steel model pictured; £4,920). Here, the crown at 2 o'clock winds and sets the alarm; the crown at 4 o'clock adjusts the time and date; and the crown at 10 o'clock adjusts the inner bezel.

(Above) From 1965, the famous diving Memovox from Jaeger-LeCoultre, called 'Polaris'.

(Right) At the highest end of Jaeger's alarm spectrum is this platinum-cased Grand Reveil perpetual calendar, containing calibre 909/1 (limited to 100 pieces; £33,900). The switch at 10 o'clock allows you to select either an audible or vibrating alarm.

24-hour clock. And it foreshadowed the luxury sector the Memovox would inhabit in the 21st century; gone were entry-level (by J-LC standards, that is) base models. The millennial change was marked by the introduction of a new movement, calibre 909, beating at the more modern 28,800 vph, like the 919 in the Grand Reveil and the 918 in the Master Reveil of 1994.

But what of the actual sound of a Memovox? Early alarm watches produced more of a buzz than a ring, and it helped to actually wear the watch, as you could feel the watch vibrate on the wrist. This effect was achieved through the use of a hammer striking the caseback. Jaeger-LeCoultre's Memovox, on the other hand, provided a slightly more melodious action, still a bit buzzy but less hornet-like - no, make that cricket-like - than early Vulcains. The Grand Reveil, however, made the Memovox lineage somewhat closer in sound to a minute repeater by incorporating a gong to make a richer, more musical ring. Apparently, the alloys used are bronze-based, but Jaeger-LeCoultre stays *schtum* about the precise mix.

Modern iterations

For those that wish to own a non-vintage Memovox, the main option circa 2006/7 is the Master Compressor Memovox in pink

gold or stainless steel (from £4,920). It houses the latest iteration of the Memovox Calibre - the alarm hammer striking on a hanging gong. Master Compressors are seriously butch, incredibly robust and inescapably cool. And interestingly, Magali Mettrayer claims to have been inspired by the Polaris Memovox of 1965 when she first designed the Master Compressor line a few years ago.

Ironically, though, the most 'pure' of the current Memovoxes, from an historical standpoint, is the AMVOX1 Alarm from the partnership between Jaeger and Aston Martin. However much they like to credit its look as inspired by things automotive - ad-speak for "it looks like the dials on a dashboard" - this stainless steel (from £4,690), titanium (from £5,850) or platinum (£15,450) treasure actually looks more like a 're-edition' of the much-coveted Polaris! Our opening image is this year's titanium 'R-Alarm' edition, launched in homage to the Le Mans Aston Martin Racing team's DBR9 - adorned in team colours with a guillochage dial-centre echoing the car's radiator grille.

Its future is secure: the Memovox may not be as important to Jaeger-LeCoultre as the Reverso, but it certainly earns its keep. But wouldn't the company be performing a great service to both its customers and the watch itself if a simple version in a plain case was reissued to mark its 50th anniversary? ○