



Technical Specs

Model: Ref. IW500109

Movement: Calibre 51010; automatic 'Pellaton' winding system; 21,600 vph

Case: Stainless steel; 42.3 mm diameter

Power reserve: 7 days

Water resistance: 30 m

Price: £5,900

Longines Master Collection

Longines has returned in style with the Master Collection (see 'Revival', Issue 20), which includes a number of oversized models, among them a choice of chronographs. But we're looking at 'time only' models here, so you'd be hard-pressed to better the basic version with small seconds (ref. L2.640.4.78.5; £1,250). It's simply delightful: black Arabic numerals on a silver-finished 'barleycorn' dial, leaf hands, big winder, a huge 47.5 mm diameter steel case. Inside is a hand-wound L512 mechanical movement (based on the ETA 6498/2 calibre) beating at 21,600 vph, visible through a transparent caseback. And if black-on-white Arabic numerals are too plain for you, check out the version with white Roman numerals on a black dial, or maybe consider the heavy link bracelet in place of the strap. This series is one of KK's bargain ranges of 2006/7!



Omega Seamaster Aqua Terra XXL Railmaster

This gem from Omega harks back to the age when train conductors needed oversized, accurate and legible watches. An enormous beast at 49.2 mm across, it, too, features a manual-wind pocket-watch movement, like the Portuguese. But it stands out for other reasons familiar to those with a taste for the likes of no-nonsense classics like Rolex Explorers and Omega's earliest Speedmasters: the Railmaster possesses the big 3-6-9-12 of the former (and Panerai), with the 'broad arrow' hand of the latter. Like the Portuguese, this has spawned its own variants, including a version with the automatic Co-Axial movement, in 39.2 mm and 42.2 mm cases. But opt for the big fella: the 'XXL' (£1,725) is as impressive as an IWC Grosse Fliegeruhr, if size floats your particular boat.

Modern Classics: IWC Portuguese

⌚ Once upon a time, all grown men wore watches not much larger than those traditionally worn by ladies. And 'once upon a time' wasn't all that long ago: less than 15 years. A 'normal' watch was around 33 mm-35 mm in diameter, a few millimetres less for dress watches, a couple more for sport and diving watches. But one watch changed all that: IWC's Portuguese. And it did so in record time. Inevitably, that hissing you hear comes from militant *Paneristi*, who adore the Florentine masterpiece above all other oversized watches. For surely it was the reissue of the Panerai, before the house's purchase by Richemont, that made us covet watches of 40 mm, 44 mm or even greater diameters? You know - helped by Arnie and Sly? Er, no, actually.

Ken Kessler

Although there have been massive timekeepers throughout the history of the wristwatch - unsurprising when you consider that most of the earliest wristwatches were pocket watches converted to accept straps - these were usually rare, special-purpose items with little presence in the world at large: the original Lindbergh Hour Angle and Czech aviator watches from Longines, the Lange and IWC *Fliegeruhren* of WW2, Stowa diving watches and the like. While the various Panerai models stand proudly among them, the classic Luminor was only reissued in 1993 around the same time as the IWC Portuguese. But few crept outside of Italy prior to Sylvester Stallone's intervention, and they wouldn't have any impact on the world of collectors until 1996, when they appeared in *Eraser* and *Daylight*. Even so, it still took Richemont's muscle to make the brand the monster it is today.

IWC, on the other hand, had already started its testosterone-driven ascent. The return of the Portuguese was an immediate success, resulting in the 1993 limited-edition model becoming a highly prized - and now very expensive - collectable. But what was it all about? Where was the wartime melodrama that helped the Panerai and IWC's Grosse Fliegeruhr (or 'Big Pilot's Watch'). Where was the glamour of Lindbergh's transatlantic solo?

There wasn't any. It was simply about size - whatever schoolboy sniggers you may wish to suppress, or not. You read above that "most of the earliest wristwatches were pocket watches

converted to accept straps". That's *exactly* what IWC did to create the original Portuguese, so-named in honour of the country it was devised to satisfy. It was the answer to a request in 1938 from two Portuguese business named Rodriguez and Teixeira. Arriving at Schaffhausen, the pair asked if IWC (then, as now, a highly regarded brand known for technical excellence rather than mere fashion) could produce for them an accurate, easy-to-read, oversized wristwatch in a stainless-steel case, "with all the qualities of a marine chronometer". (Romantically, IWC has pointed out that, despite the loss of its empire, Portugal retains its reputation as a nation of seafarers, while Teixeira was a descendant of a famed mariner.) This was in direct contrast to the rather minuscule watches of the day. Picture an IWC Portuguese next to a Rolex Bubbleback or a Patek Philippe Calatrava, for a real Goliath vs David comparison.

IWC already possessed a range of fine movements, and opted for the calibre 74. The first Portuguese was delivered in 1939, and production was sporadic over the ensuing decades. Indeed, the so-called 'Portuguese' was never a regular catalogue item until a genuine genius at Schaffhausen - probably the late, great Günter Blümlein - decided to make it the subject of a very special celebration.

In 1993, to mark the 125th anniversary of the company, IWC re-released the Portuguese, in a version dubbed the 'jubilee'.



(Left) In tribute to IWC's founder, the FA Jones special editions are a more classical interpretation of the Portuguese range (rose-gold model featured; £9,250). The Jones 98290 movement features the famous, elongated 'Jones Arrow' balance index, visible through the caseback. (Centre) The Portuguese Chrono-Automatic (stainless steel model featured; £3,750) was launched in response to strong demand from IWC fans, and follows on from its now-discontinued bigger brother, the Chronograph Rattrapante. (Right) In a limited edition of 250 pieces, the white-gold Tourbillon Mystère was launched at this year's SIHH fair in Geneva (£56,500).

It was a stylistic masterstroke that ranks with the first steel-and-gold watches and the first Reverso. A severely limited edition, it quickly sold out. IWC had touched a nerve, and men's watches would never be the same again.

To satisfy demand, and to capitalise on the creation of a whole new concept, IWC followed the Jubilee with myriad other variants, the most coveted being a minute repeater from the mid-1990s. Since then, the range has encompassed chronographs, assorted calendars, more minute repeaters, automatics and even smaller 35 mm models, which rather defeated the purpose, like the 40 mm Panerai's for wimps and wusses. If you're going to bother with a Portuguese, go for the industrial strength 42.3 mm as a minimum.

With the family now a mature collection of its own, the choices are wide. The most popular are definitely the convex-dial chronographs and the 5000 calibre, which contains the exclusive IWC Pellaton winding system - a gorgeous movement. Styles range from modernist to classic; steel, gold or platinum cases;

dials mainly with Arabic numerals and 'railway' subdial chapter rings (named after their resemblance to the divided double lines of a rail track); and, increasingly, complications such as the moonphase and tourbillon.

But I do hope, for those of you who fall in love with the charm of the Portuguese, that it's not too late to acquire one of the prettiest 'Portuguesers' yet, the FA Jones - a tribute to the delightfully named founder, Florentine Ariosto, who came from the States to found the International Watch Company at Schaffhausen in 1868. The watch features the legendary hand-wound Jones 98290 movement, small seconds, Breguet hands, an onion winder and Jones' signature on the dial. Produced in a series of 500 in platinum, 1,000 in rose gold and 3,000 in steel, it will probably be hitting the auction catalogues in 2009.

As for the role of the Portuguese vs Panerai in establishing a new norm in watch diameters, you won't hear a single complaint or argument from the Richemont Group, thanks to one delicious irony: IWC and Panerai are now part of the same family. ○