



#### Technical Specs

**Model:** Ref. W20091X7

**Movement:** Calibre 8630, automatic

**Case:** Stainless steel with 18 ct yellow-gold bezel

**Crown:** Steel, octagonal, set with a faceted spinel

**Water resistance:** 100 m

**Price:** £4,875

#### Audemars Piguet Royal Oak

Also evolved into a family of watches, Audemars Piguet's Royal Oak is Gérald Genta's greatest claim to fame. Most importantly, it is also said to be the best-selling 'high end' watch ever. Like the Santos, it manages to be both sporty and elegant at the same time; functional yet tasteful. And, like the Santos, its most readily identifiable points include a pronounced bezel with visible screw heads. But it's round rather than square, with an eight-sided bezel, so the effect is markedly different. Although it's only been around since 1972, the Royal Oak has true icon status, especially amongst golfers known for their liberal sense of aesthetics. According to historian Lucien F Treub, AP only expected to sell 1,000 Royal Oaks when first marketed. It has now probably sold 200 times that. Available in every possible metal and with movements ranging from quartz to full-on tourbillons, the Royal Oak may also be the most versatile watch form on the market.

And when you look at the extremes, from the original simple version (ref. 15300ST.00.1220ST.02 pictured; £6,350) to the Schwarzenegger-inspired 'T3' Offshore, through the space age 'Concept' piece to the new gem-clad ladies' pieces, well, let's just say the Royal Oak can handle more variants than a Hummer.



#### Hublot Big Bang

If the Santos hadn't appeared, nor the Royal Oak, it is unlikely that Hublot would have had the impetus to produce what is probably the hottest watch on the market today: the Big Bang. Hublot wasted no time in introducing variations on the theme, the company's boss Jean-Claude Biver having a field day with the mixtures of materials and functions. Hollywood loves it, rappers and fashionistas adore it, and there are waiting lists for even the basic models. Considering its youth, the Big Bang went straight from Biver's mind to 'Watch of the Year' in numerous publications in record time. Like the Royal Oak, the timing was impeccable: its oversize dimensions, its intrinsic ability to be both 'bling bling' and tasteful, the clever use of precious metals and rubber straps... the Big Bang didn't just create a new look, it elevated Hublot to 'must have' status. From the latest crop shown at Baselworld, we love the Mag Bang (pictured; £17,750), an ingenious blend of titanium and ultra-light magnesium - a material never seen before in a watch case. Even the nickel-silver components in the La Joux-Perret chronograph movement, including the bridges, baseplate and screws, have been replaced with titanium. The result is a watch that weighs just 72 g.



# Modern Classics: Cartier Santos

⌚ If mere longevity is enough to bestow credibility on a wristwatch, then Cartier's Santos must have the highest standing of them all: it has been around, in one form or another, for over a century. But despite its elegant shape, it was designed for a pilot from the outset, which ramps up the credibility even further. Unlike most watches that claim to have paid their airborne dues, the Cartier Santos actually 'flew' before it was made available to the public. Indeed, seven years would pass between the time that Louis Cartier presented the prototype to the man whose name it bears, and the moment it went on sale.

Ken Kessler

Unlike celebrities whose names are attached to watches because they happened to wear them in movies, pioneering Brazilian pilot Alberto Santos-Dumont *earned* the honour of his name on a watch. His story is too varied and colourful to cram into a few paragraphs; suffice it to say, a Hollywood biopic would not be unreasonable. He immodestly considered himself 'the first sportsman of the air'. Regardless of the timing (he's certainly one of the rivals to the Wright Brothers for the claim of first controlled, powered flight) there's no questioning that he was one of the first to pilot dirigibles and planes, and any history of either flight or of pilots' watches would have to feature Santos-Dumont prominently in Chapter One.

Son of a Brazilian coffee magnate domiciled for a while in Paris, Santos-Dumont met Louis Cartier in the late 1890s, becoming a close friend of the French jeweller. At a party early in the new century, the Brazilian remarked to Cartier that trying to tell the time with a fob watch was impractical while flying. Cartier responded to Santos-Dumont's dilemma in 1904 with the *ur* Santos, a collaboration with the great Edmond Jaeger that some might consider the first viable wristwatch. It isn't - Girard-Perregaux, Patek Philippe and others had the jump on Cartier with specialist pieces - but it's a contender. The claim is strengthened by those who believe that it popularised wristwatches for men, as most early wristwatches were designed for women.

#### Daring design

Santos-Dumont was a trendsetter with influence among his peers. Perhaps it's stretching the point to suggest that Santos-Dumont singlehandedly created the craze for wristwatches, but there's no doubt whatsoever that his contribution to the form is as considerable as Little Richard's part in the birth of rock'n'roll. In 1906, Santos-Dumont provided the necessary pizzazz by wearing his Cartier watch while establishing a new flying record, and the crowd took note. By 1911, the watch was in the Cartier catalogue and as of 1913 it was known as the Santos-Dumont, later shortened to 'Santos'.

Surprisingly few were sold during the watch's first six decades - certainly under 1,000 and probably as few as 800. But in 1978, Cartier relaunched the watch with great fanfare, having realised its genuine iconic status. The Parisian jeweller reintroduced the Santos in the now-familiar but then-radical bimetallic form, thus crediting it with introducing mixed metals (though Rolex might have a thing or two to say about that). Probably for the first time as well, the screw heads were exposed through the bezel, turning them into a design feature. Consequently, the Santos remains one of the most distinctive wristwatches ever made; as identifiable as a Rolex Submariner.

As with the Cartier's other milestone, the Tank, and Jaeger-LeCoultre's Reverso and Patek Philippe's Calatrava, the Santos



(Left) This year's bold evolution of the Santos 100 sees Cartier relishing ladies' newfound love for chunky timepieces (in white-gold with round diamonds; £18,400). (Above right) The exquisite all-steel Santos 100 (£2,325). Note the effective contrast between the polished bezel and brushed-finish case. (Right) In extra-large, but still nowhere near the colossal proportions of the Santos 100, this is the classic Santos de Cartier galbée watch, with bracelet to match the famous screwed-down bezel (£2,950).

has been around for so long and has been so successful that it has evolved into a family of timepieces. And like the Tank, Reverso and Calatrava, its custodians have been careful to ensure that the evolution process has always respected the watch's DNA. It has appeared in various sizes, with mechanical and quartz movements, in curved cases, with maroon dials, in platinum, in pink-gold, on straps and bracelets. At one point, it was *the* choice for rock musicians, alongside its brother watch, the Cartier Panthere.

### The bigger, the better

Celebrating its first century in 2004, Cartier made the move that transformed the watch to far greater effect than any of its previous incarnations. It is now a well-established fact that trends in the 1990s ensured that watch sizes have increased permanently, with even the Calatrava now appearing in oversize form. When Cartier upsized the Santos, it was probably hoping for little more than an increase in appeal to wearers who might otherwise have found a normal



Santos a bit too small by current standards. What happened was much, much better than anticipated.

Religiously preserving its looks while upping its dimensions to 40 mm, Cartier created a watch that actually suited the large size better than the small. Architects, car designers and, yes, jewellers will tell you that scale and form don't always mesh; what works in tiny dimensions might not necessarily succeed when scaled upward, and *vice versa*. Luckily for Cartier, in the Santos 100, the extra millimetres transformed the watch from merely elegant to ice cool - almost as if the watch was a century ahead of its time.

Still square with rounded corners, and proudly showing its screws through its bezel, the Santos 100 is a dead ringer for the original in all but dimensions. We like the new chronograph housed in the impressive Santos 100 case (pictured on main page), but the classic version in steel with a gold bezel is irresistible and the all-pink-gold version is to-die-for. Starting at £2,325 for the stealthy all-steel, the Santos 100 is actually a bargain.

But this author is prepared to go even further in his praise for a genuine masterpiece: for not only is this the first Cartier I'd be caught dead wearing, it's also the first square watch I'd allow to grace my wrist. This thing is a stunner. ○