

JeanRichard 'Highlands'



The Highlands' clean functionality was perfect. Absolute balance has been achieved in designing what is essentially a basic pilot's watch. The indexes and hands are highly legible and also luminous.



(Left) The Highlands' satin-finished steel case and screw-down crown ensured water-resistance to 100 m. (Right) Unlike the dial, the Highlands' caseback featured the full 'Daniel JeanRichard' appellation, plus an engraving of the brand's eponym - the legendary 17th century watchmaker credited with manufacturing the first watch of the Jura region.

Gino Macaluso tells the story of his discontinued pet project

Ken Kessler

Interviewing Dr Luigi 'Gino' Macaluso of Girard-Perregaux is a privilege: there are few watch-brand CEOs who balance intimate knowledge of horology with genuine enthusiasm, while never issuing a single whiff of hard-sell. And if there is any argument that on this occasion Macaluso was simply taking advantage of an opportunity to publicise his wares - as would any canny CEO - please note that the good doctor agreed to discuss a watch that is no longer in production. Being allowed to steal an hour of his time away from more pressing matters at the recent SIHH watch event in Geneva indicated the affection he has for the all-but-forgotten Daniel JeanRichard Highlands Automatic.

Although it figured early in the revival of the JeanRichard name, the Highlands was never a glamour item; never intended to establish the brand nor to create a following. It was merely a logical by-product of Macaluso's earlier adventures in watch sales, harking back to 1984/5, and his fondness for a certain American brand. At that time, Macaluso was in charge of Tradema Italia, a watch distribution company that included Girard-Perregaux - now all part of the Sowind Group holding company. Macaluso's passion for watches extended far beyond the commercial, and his vast knowledge created in him a respect for Hamilton, which he described as once being "the Patek Philippe of the USA."

Sowing the seeds

A colleague in the fashion industry returned from a trip to the USA wearing an inexpensive, mail-order Hamilton called the Khaki - straight military styling with no concessions to anything other than sheer functionality. Macaluso, with his Italian eye for style, borrowed the watch, and realised that it could be a fantastic product to sell in Italy - the most sophisticated watch market in the world, even back then. Fully a decade before military chic would be a major force in the watch market with players including IWC, Panerai, Tutima, Hanhart and a few dozen others, Macaluso was sowing the seeds.

Macaluso flew to the USA to visit Hamilton, then based in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and convinced the management to allow him to expand the concept. Macaluso turned the Khaki from a utilitarian base model into a concept - something altogether more funky. The range is to this day a core line for Hamilton; one that has expanded to include chronographs, GMTs, quartz, manual and automatic models, and more.

By 1992, Macaluso was in charge of Girard-Perregaux. And with G-P came the name of Daniel JeanRichard. Fourteen years on, hindsight allows us to see that Macaluso's game plan for the brand - including truncating the name to just 'JeanRichard' - has now



(Left) The Highlands came with either a very Rolex-like bracelet, or a leather or canvas strap, and a choice of dial colours including the most popular - black - as well as cream and light blue.

reached fruition, and is finally a true *manufacture*. But early on, he was under less pressure, and in a position where he could produce “a simple but sophisticated model. I chose the name ‘Highlands’ because it had a Scottish, out-of-doors feel - sporty, rugged.”

It was the entry-level range in a catalogue that, in 1996, already included the famous ‘TV Screen’ models that have become the brand’s signature case shape. The Highlands, we now realise, pointed to the future by bearing just ‘JeanRichard’, while the other models, including the aforementioned TV Screen, the Bressels and the various Chronoscopes, carried the full ‘Daniel JeanRichard’ appellation. In addition to the Highlands Automatic featured here, the line also included a beautiful chronograph. But it is the Automatic that somehow slipped past the shrewd bargain hunters of the watch world.

Defying reason

Offered in stainless steel, with either a very Rolex-like bracelet, or a leather or canvas strap, the Automatic was available in a choice of dial colours. This added to their appeal in the primary market, Italy, which already had a collecting subculture for Swatch, MHR (see *The Ones That Got Away*, Issue 17) and one or two others that offered colour variants. The choice included the most popular - black - as well as cream, navy blue, light blue, olive green and salmon pink, and they shipped with straps in complementary hues.

A distinctive detail was the upward-pointing triangle at the 12 o’clock position - a proper military marking so evocative of the watches that were becoming ever-increasingly the province of auctions. The watches featured three hands from the centre, with the seconds hand a true hacking type that stopped when the crown was in the fully ‘out’ position.

Inside was a DJR Calibre 25 51-ruby 13¹/₄” movement with a power reserve of 38 hours and a frequency of 28,800 vph, based on ETA’s 2824 calibre. All fairly standard stuff, but the package as a whole defied reason. Here was a watch with a robust and dependable movement, in a rock-solid stainless-steel case measuring 38 mm in diameter, with a screw-down crown and a dial so perfectly reminiscent of classic pilot’s issue (including nothing less than the legendary IWC Mark XI) that it’s still a perfect mid-size military-look model by 2006 standards. The illogical element, though, was its price.

Macaluso won’t go into detail, but, despite the watch only really being on sale in Italy, it’s not remarkable that he can say with a smile that it “sold many thousands.” I recall seeing them for sale at around the £250 mark, which corresponds conveniently with the quoted retail price from the only remaining sources of new-old stock: the internet. If you Google ‘JeanRichard Highlands’, in the click of a mouse you’ll see them advertised as having an original price of \$475 - roughly £270. Then you’ll see that you can buy one as pristine as the day it left the factory for as little as \$241. Even *QP*’s own Alex Doak couldn’t resist, and found one online for even less.

Although Hamilton still produces myriad Khakis with almost identical features and pricing, the Highlands had an extra frisson of style and panache. It is simply impossible to improve on, and this author suggests you start surfing for yours as soon as possible - the supply truly must be finite. When asked if JeanRichard might one day consider releasing a Highlands II, with in-house movement (and elevated price), it was clear that the thought hadn’t occurred to Dr Macaluso. What’s important is that he smiled at the notion... and didn’t say no. ○