

# Chocks Away!

## IWC takes to the skies with its new pilot's collection

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The prospect of attending the unveiling of a new IWC watch range is always something to look forward to. The past two years' Aquatimer and Ingenieur collections have won high praise and plenty of new fans, making this year's new collection one of the most anticipated of the recent watch fairs. The revamped Pilot's watches - including an intriguing tribute to French aviator Antoine de Saint Exupéry - complete IWC's progress out of the depths, off the ground and into the heavens, with typical composure and well-judged style. And not only do the people from Schaffhausen know how to make a fine timepiece; they know how to 'launch' one, too - as *QP* discovered from the back seat of an old Harvard warbird.



(Above) Three examples of the 1,931 'Antoine de Saint Exupéry' editions of IWC's Pilot's Watch Chrono-Automatic, commemorating 75 years since the publication of the aviation pioneer's book *Night Flight* (steel on leather strap, £2,650; steel on steel bracelet, £3,450; rose-gold on leather, £8,850). Fifty white-gold models are only available in the IWC boutiques and will therefore not be available in the UK.





(Above) In Wing Commander get-up, IWC CEO Georges Kern briefs the gathered press on the new Saint Exupéry chronograph at the Earl of March's Goodwood Estate - home to an ex-WWII aerodrome.

(Left) The engraved caseback of the Saint Exupéry watches is an interpretation of a famous photograph taken for Life by John Phillips in Corsica in 1944, just days before Saint Ex's final, fatal mission.

(Right) The watch that started it all: the legendary Mark IX 'Special Watch for Pilots', from 1936 - rapidly followed by the Mark X and benchmark aviator watch, the Mark XI. The new Saint Exupéry watches borrow the Mark IX's dial typography.

(Opposite page) Writer, aviation pioneer, French national hero - Antoine de Saint Exupéry's exhilarating airborne adventures didn't stop at *Night Flight*. Two more IWC special editions will follow, in tribute to *Southern Mail* and *The Aviator*, completing a trilogy of watches.



In 2004 it was exploring the Red Sea with the Cousteau divers to mark the unveiling of the Aquatimer and in 2005 it was hooning around a frozen Swedish lake in Mercedes-AMGs to honour the latest antimagnetic Ingenieur range. The chances were, therefore, that IWC had planned something really special to announce its revamped Pilot's watches. Imagine the shock wave that ran through the *QP* offices then, when we discovered that this most auspicious of occasions was not in some distant and exotic land, but good old Blighty - and at the end of January, to boot.

The nostalgic Goodwood aerodrome was the venue and the golden age of flight was the theme: outside the main hangar

were a few American Harvards, IWC's very own Junkers JU 52 and, of course, two Supermarine Spitfires. Inside, IWC CEO Georges Kern was looking every inch the 'Wingco' in an imitation Irvin jacket and sand-coloured flight suit.

With the Channel mist creeping in beneath the hangar doors, a thick aroma of tea and butties, and several lovelies in blue serge gripping Bakelite telephones in a wartime ops-room mock-up, we half expected Guy Gibson to arrive, complete with his pipe and that trusty black Labrador with the non-PC name. Instead, we were presented with no fewer than five new or revamped watches in the 'Classic' range and another five in the 'Spitfire' range (see box, overleaf), with both lines now including mid-size 34 mm models. There were no new movements and, with the possible exception of the stylish ceramic-cased split-seconds Double Chronograph, nothing especially radical; simply IWC continuing to do what they have always done extremely well. But one watch stood out from all the rest both in terms of its appearance and the story that inspired it: a delightful tribute to the author and aviator Antoine de Saint Exupéry, in the shape of an adapted Spitfire Chrono-Automatic.

### Vol de Nuit

Although his name is not especially well known in Britain (apart, perhaps, from his cult children's fantasy, *The Little Prince*), 'Saint Ex' is a legend in his native France and even more so in South America, having helped set-up the *Aéroposta Argentina* airmail company, which operated out of Buenos Aires.

Born in Lyon in 1900 at the very dawn of aviation, Saint Exupéry enlisted with the second fighter wing based at Strasbourg when he was 21, remaining with the air force for five years before moving to a civilian role with an aviation company flying airmail between Toulouse, Dakar and Casablanca.

These were the days of the true aviation pioneers when every flight was, to some extent, embarked upon on a wing and a prayer. Yet the aeroplane also brought hitherto unknown efficiency to the postal service, enabling packages and letters that previously spent weeks in transit to be delivered in a fraction of the time.

Saint Exupéry's most important role in the evolution of the airmail service was his involvement in establishing *Aéroposta Argentina* at a time when ships and railways, threatened by the speed of the aircraft, were making up time by travelling through the night. To counter this, Saint Exupéry and the fearless pilots who worked with him began the first night flights in their flimsy aircraft often under atrocious conditions and never, of course, with the benefit of sophisticated navigational equipment.

*Story continues on p.72.*





## Big Pilot

IWC's aviation heritage dates back to 1936 when it made its first flying watch, notable for a black dial and highly luminous hands and figures. This was followed in 1940 by 1,000 original Big Pilot's watch containing a pocket watch movement (see News, Issue 17) and then the Mark X, and the Mark XI in 1948, which, for many years, was the official RAF-issue timepiece.

The Big Pilot was re-introduced by IWC in 2002 and has since been the brand's flagship flight-watch, with its calibre 51110 movement - the largest automatic movement currently fitted to any production wristwatch. For 2006, the 46.2 mm Big Pilot (below; from £7,350) gets a mildly redesigned dial and hands to bring it in line with the rest of the 'Classic' collection, but it retains the essential features including the fine pocket watch movement, which gives a seven-day power reserve, the antimagnetic soft-iron inner case and the butch, riveted leather strap. Platinum and white-gold variants will be available in limited numbers.

## Chrono-Automatic

The new Chrono Automatic pilot's watch (below centre; from £2,400) gets a case-size 3 mm larger than that of the outgoing model, as well as a refreshed dial design through more elegant numbers and twin, arrow hands on the main dial. The permanent seconds hand is treated to a red tip.



## Double Chronograph

The limited-edition Double Chronograph (above; £6,150) is a split-seconds chrono' housed in a 44 mm black ceramic case (a material notoriously difficult to make), fitted with a crown and pushpieces in titanium, off-set by bold, white hands and numerals. The case's hi-tech zirconium oxide material was first used by IWC as far back as 1986, for a Da Vinci perpetual calendar. A touch of colour is brought to the Double Chronograph with the addition of a red tip on the permanent seconds hand, but otherwise this could be described as the Stealth Bomber of darkly functional timekeeping. It comes on a soft, fabric strap and just 1,000 will be available.

## Spitfire Collection

IWC made its first Spitfire watches six years ago in a limited run of 1,000 pieces based on the design of the MK XV. The name was applied to a full-production range in 2003, with the intention that the Spitfire models should still be regarded as flying watches, only with a slightly less militaristic feel.

The new range sees the demise of the split-seconds chrono' and a bigger case (up 3 mm to 42 mm) for the Chrono-Automatic (above centre; from £2,400). The twin-time-zone Spitfire UTC stays at 39 mm (from £2,400), but the hometown arc has been moved from 12 o'clock to 6 o'clock; the Spitfire MK XV becomes the MK XVI (above right) and goes up to 39 mm (the same as its 'Classic Collection' counterpart, with the same price); and a 34 mm 'mid size' MK XVI has also been introduced (above left).

## Mark XVI

The latest development of the 'original' small-sized pilot watch (originating in 1936, with IWC's Mark IX) gets predictably larger, going up in size from 38 mm to an earth-shattering 39 mm (below left; from £1,900) - it can't get much bigger otherwise it might start to look like the Big Pilot. What is interesting, however, is that IWC - which shamelessly asserts that it only makes men's watches - has included a 34 mm model in the Mark XVI line-up (below right; from £1,800), apparently for 'slender wrists'. How long before it's 'chocks away' for a diamond-set version? Let's hope it never happens.





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Having just been told that Antoine de Saint Exupéry was last seen on 31st July 1944 leaving a US airbase in Corsica on a reconnaissance flight over occupied France, it was with a degree of trepidation that your author climbed into the back seat of a wartime Harvard AT-6 for a brief flight to the Sussex coastline, during IWC's launch at Goodwood. The Harvard is a single-prop plane on which 10,000 British pilots trained before, during and after the war. It is, of course, pure coincidence that the first Harvards rolled off the production line at North American Aviation in 1936 – the same year that IWC made its first flying watch.



(Above) IWC has moved the 'hometime' 24-hour arc of the UTC model (£3,200 with steel bracelet) from 12 o'clock to 6 o'clock for the new Spitfire range.

### The Trilogy Begins

Although such operations did not become widespread during Saint Exupéry's time with Aéroposta Argentina (he worked with the company only from 1929-1931) they did establish the foundations for a safer, officially recognised night service and, of course, gave the writer some breathtaking material for his classic book on the subject, *Vol de nuit*, or *Night Flight*, which was later made into a dramatic film starring Clark Gable.

To mark the book's 75th anniversary, IWC will make 1,931 chronographs with tobacco-coloured dials and casebacks engraved with an image of Saint Ex, who disappeared on 31st July 1944 after leaving a US airbase in Corsica at the controls of a Lockheed P38 Lightning, on what was officially a 'reconnaissance' flight over occupied France. Nice detail touches on the commemorative pieces include hour numerals based on those used on the original 1936 Mark IX pilot's watch, subdial numbers inspired by Saint Exupéry's typewriter font and a discreet facsimile of the writer's initial 'A' applied at 6 o'clock.



### IWC at the movies

There has been talk of John Malkovich becoming an official IWC 'ambassador' for several years. What we didn't expect to see, however, is the enigmatic actor taking part in an eight-minute film about the brand's pilot's watches.

Malkovich, an IWC fan, plays the liveried concierge of an upmarket Boston hotel in the movie *Pilots*, which contrasts two cosseted modern-day pilots with the daring 'fly boys' of old. The climax of the film involves an exhilarating wartime dogfight where the prize is a silk stocking dropped from the cockpit of a Junkers Ju-52 by a foxy aviatrix. The film ends back in the present day with Malkovich presenting the 21st century aviators with an IWC Spitfire – just as the silk stocking floats to the ground. Although intended to be tongue-in-cheek, it is undoubtedly the most absurd production the actor has ever appeared in.

View *Pilots* at [www.iwc.ch](http://www.iwc.ch)

Of the watches being produced, 1,630 will be in steel, 250 in rose-gold, 50 in white gold and one in platinum. The latter will be auctioned along with a first edition of *Night Flight* and one of the author's drawings. All proceeds of the sale go to an Argentinian children's charity, which is doubly appropriate because of his links with the country through airmail, and his other great work, *The Little Prince*. In addition, IWC will sponsor an exhibition based around Saint Exupéry, aviation and pilot's

watches in the Air and Space Museum at Le Bourget airport, Paris, which opens on June 29th.

But it doesn't end there. Admirers of IWC's horological tribute to Saint Ex and *Night Flight* will be glad to hear that this is merely the first of a trilogy in honour of his airborne literary adventures. Watch these pages over the next two years for news of *Southern Mail* and *The Aviator* special-edition watches. ○

Further information: IWC UK, Tel: 020 7408 5777, [www.iwc.ch](http://www.iwc.ch)