



Collecting

Part One: Fashion and Case Metal

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Rarity is king, I was once informed by a world-renowned dealer. While certainly a valid point, I have since discovered that collecting is akin to *haute cuisine*, with many other ingredients involved in acquiring that ultra-desirable piece. Rarity is important, but just one of the spices. And as *QP's* auctions pages frequently remind us, value is equally if not more tantalising to the palette. In the first of a new series focusing on the investment wristwatch, *QP* looks at how fashion and case metal can affect value and influence the collector.

1. Fashion

Perhaps the biggest factor in collecting is fashion: if it's cool, then expect the price to be hot! Think fashion, think Rolex Daytona. Hardly rare, Daytona prices have been escalating ever since 1989 saw the introduction of the first automatic model. Celebs, racing drivers, gigolos... you name them, they all have one. If you're really cool it will be vintage, but any model will do, as long as it's in steel. Even today, waiting lists are testament to the fervour with which this watch is collected. Who needs Viagra when you have a Daytona - perhaps the perfect compliment to a Ferrari?

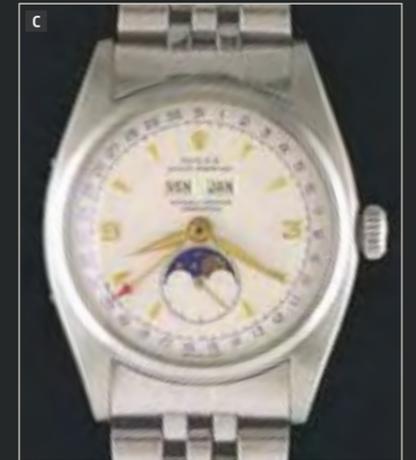
Recently, the endorsement of Frank Muller by A-list princes and princesses has made the brand an essential accessory, although Jacob & Co. watches have certainly stamped a similar claim to the wrists of said new-age royalty. Blinging watches are all the rage with pimps and rappers, but I suspect it is another transient fad. In terms of collecting, sparkle-sparkle has never really captured the hearts, save perhaps the über-bling '70s gold Daytona with diamond dial and bezel. Best you get rid of those Jacobs now.

Panerai has also managed to elevate its watches to the upper echelons of collectability, and in a relatively short time too. Endorsed by the muscle of Hollywood's Sly and Arnie, the rise and rise of this brand has been phenomenal. The brand's success has no doubt been catalysed by its ultra-desirability as a fashion statement. Need proof? Just look at how many clones are being made by other brands.

Of course, this fashion is all about BIG. The demand for smaller watches has almost disintegrated. While credit is due in part to the emergence of Panerai, there is another behemoth that has helped set this trend: the Audemars Piguet Royal Oak Offshore. Just take a walk around the pit lanes at an F1 Grand Prix: fast cars, gorgeous women, and Offshore chronographs.

The vintage market is just as susceptible to the changing winds of fashion. As a general trend, white metal and large proportions are very much *en vogue*, especially sports models. Patek Philippe's Jumbo Nautilus has seen values rise considerably in the last few months and with its 30th anniversary coming next year, I expect this to continue.

Highly collectable, and highly fashionable: the Rolex ref. 6263 Daytona. This example from 1974 is worth between £8,000 and £10,000.



A So-called 'Steve McQueen' Rolex Oyster Perpetual Date Explorer II (ref. 1655), with characteristic orange 24-hour hand - a '70s watch becoming more and more fashionable. This example was sold for \$10,005 by Antiquorum in September 2005.

B Rare 'double red' Rolex Sea-Dweller Submariner 2000 (ref. 1665) produced in the 1970s. Sold at Antiquorum's 30th Anniversary auction in 2004 for SFr.13,800.

C Far more valuable in steel than its gold counterpart, the Rolex Oyster Perpetual ref. 6062. Production of this reference started in 1950. To be sold by Antiquorum at its special Rolex sale in Geneva on April 1st, and expected to fetch a big price.

D Very rare stainless-steel perpetual calendar Patek Philippe from 1944, sold at Sotheby's in 1996 for £573,500.

E Patek Philippe ref. 1415 HU (Heures Universelles) - the most expensive Patek wristwatch ever sold at auction. The case-metal is ultra-desirable platinum, the year was 2002, the price was SFr.6,603,500.

Previously out-of-favour '70s watches have become very desirable - especially Rolexes. Prices for 'orange hand' Explorer 2s and 'double red' Sea Dwellers have doubled in the last 12 months. But the trend is not just with Rolex. Funky Omega Seamaster chronographs are enjoying renewed interest and prices for both the Audemars Piguet Royal Oak and IWC's original Jumbo Ingenieur have started to escalate after some stagnation over the last few years. Even models in the more affordable middle market are accumulating value; vintage Heuer Monacoes and the Longines twin-crown divers watch, for example. Early Omega Speedmasters have just started to gain value too (see Issue 13) and this interest is sure to elevate values rapidly.

The changing winds of fashion carry with them casualties too. The oversize sports-watch infatuation has led to the extermination



The changing winds of fashion bring casualties too. The oversize sports-watch infatuation has practically eliminated the petite 'dress' watch.

F Auction value of Patek's Jumbo Nautilus has risen dramatically in the past year. This ca 1976 example sold at Christie's in June 2005 for £7,200 - way over its estimated range of £3,000-£4,000.

G From 1970, the Omega Seamaster chronograph - a classic example of gaudy 1970s design, which is becoming increasingly coveted by collectors.

of petite watches and 'dress' watches. Smaller Pateks, Rolex bubblebacks and even that benchmark of vintage collections, the Rolex Prince have all suffered. Values are either down or have not moved. Though it must be pointed out that large Calatravas (and the even rarer 36 mm bubbleback Rolex) have bucked the trend for dressier watches by gaining value.

2. Case metal

The case metal, which so lovingly preserves the movement within, affects values drastically for collectors. Rarity enjoys a proportional relationship: the scarcer the metal throughout the market, the more valuable the piece.

With Patek - number one brand for the investor - steel is perhaps the most elusive, being ultra-chic and rarer than platinum. While prices will almost certainly be higher for precious metals in most cases, the current trend for steel models to sell higher than their gold counterparts is not just a Patek paradox. A vintage Rolex Oyster moonphase (ref. 6062) for instance is far more valuable in steel than its gold counterpart. Similarly, a vintage Vacheron chronograph (ref. 4178) often realises twice the value of its gold equivalent.

When it comes to Patek complications, world-record prices usually accompany rare platinum and steel pieces. Indeed, the highest price paid at auction was for a Patek World Time in platinum; sold for SFr.6,603,500! Steel gets in the act too with a 1944 ref.1591 perpetual calendar having sold for over half a million pounds by Sotheby's in 1996.

The fashion for white metal, commensurate with large size, certainly helps to achieve these extraordinary prices; a trend that, despite the trade's best efforts to convert the buyer back to gold is stronger than ever. Rare steel Pateks are blue chip: just 'buy and hold' your investment.

Naturally, the question arises of what will supersede steel as the next desirable case metal. If steel, white gold and platinum are more popular today, will yellow and pink gold become the objects of desire for the next generation? While possible, most of the prestige manufactures will probably deliberately limit their steel watch output, maintaining rarity. And platinum, by way of the extra expense required to produce it, is always rare.

Today, it is no longer a simple choice. There is titanium, tantalum, aluminium and let's not forget

plastic and, for those a little more daring, even rubber! Second guessing the fashion needs for the next generation is pretty much aimless. Harry Winston Rare Timepieces even bypassed trends altogether, to producing its Z1 and Z2 pieces in a brand new material called Zalium.

There is also the global market to consider. The white-metal fixation is very much a European and North American attitude. In the African market the king of the hill is still a yellow-gold Rolex President (that's a Day-Date to us). This is true also of the Middle East and Indian markets. A steel sports watch just does not cut the mustard in downtown Mumbai. You need a Montblanc pen, gold and diamond cufflinks and at the very least a bi-metal Datejust (diamond dial is a prerequisite of course). If the concentrated efforts of the Swiss manufactures is anything to go by, China is potentially the largest market in the world. They have only just awakened to the vintage market, so it is with some anticipation that collectors await to see which metal they desire.

What is for sure though is that with the market for rare and fashionable timepieces expanding disproportionately to the amount of watches available, values will just keep on escalating. ◉

H Another 1970s model becoming ever more popular is the classic, Steve McQueen-endorsed Heuer Monaco. This ref. 1133 G sold at Antiquorum in 2005 for \$4,485.

I First launched in 1954/5, IWC's antimagnetic Ingenieur has been interpreted in many ways - the most iconic of which was 1976's 'Jumbo' Ingenieur SL, designed by the legendary Gérald Genta. This design was revived last year in concert with Mercedes-AMG to enormous acclaim, immediately boosting the collectability of the original SL.

Next issue: Part 2 - Dials, limited and special editions, and prototypes

Further information: Imran Khan runs www.preciouswatch.com, which specialises in vintage Rolex.