



The latest in a legendary lineage:
TAG Heuer's new Carrera
Tachymetre (£1,495).

Speedster

The 40-year connection
between TAG Heuer's Carrera
and a breakneck race across
the Mexican desert

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Back in 1964, one of the most evocative events in the history of motor racing became just that: history. La Carrera Panamericana – a 1,934 mile break-for-the-border dash, first held in 1950 to inaugurate Mexico's Panamerican highway – had proved simply too dangerous for its own good. One survivor was Jack Heuer's Carrera chronograph and the race that it celebrates. *QP* profiles a legend in its own lifetime.

Accidents are par for the course in motorsport, but following its fifth consecutive, carnage-filled year, La Carrera Panamericana was banned in 1954 by the same Mexican government that had instigated the race in the first place. Its legendary status refused to die, however.

In 1962, the Rodriguez brothers – two of the race's more gung-ho veterans – had so enthralled the 30-year-old Jack Heuer with their pit-lane tales that he was inspired to create a new watch model called 'Carrera' – the wonderfully onomatopoeic Spanish word translating to 'rush', 'chase' or 'race'.

It was to be the first Heuer watch to receive a model name, although Porsche had already seen the value in the word 'Carrera' and began using it on their 356 Speedster after taking third place in the 1954 Carrera Panamericana. This success played a major part in establishing the marque's sporting credentials. Heuer – who observed that the word "has a good ring to it... dynamic, elegant, easily pronounced in all languages and charged with emotion" – began work on his new sports chronograph in 1963, unveiling it the following year to instant acclaim.

As with the established Omega Speedmaster and Rolex Daytona, the new Carrera was intended as an honest working tool with a clear, concise dial, the minimum of graduations and (back in those days) only available with a hand-wound movement.

Rich lineage

To celebrate the iconic Carrera's fortieth birthday, TAG Heuer this year launched a special 'anniversary' version which the firm tells us is "not a servile copy of a model from an earlier era; it is quite simply a further development."

The fact is, it would be quite difficult to make a truly servile copy of the original because the 1964 Heuer catalogue listed no fewer than five variations on the Carrera theme: the 12, the Tachy, the Black, the 45 and the Deci. Some had three registers and used the Valjoux 72 movement; some had two registers and used the Valjoux 92. The 45, now the rarest of the lot, ran a single register through a Landeron 189.

In 1966 the 'Dato' appeared (with date aperture), but 1969 was the year of the model's greatest advance when it received the groundbreaking Calibre 11 self-winding chronograph movement which Heuer had developed in conjunction with Breitling, Buren Watch and Dubois-Duprez.

The Carrera continued in myriad versions (some not immediately recognisable as Carreras because of their cushion-shaped cases) until the sale of Heuer in 1984 saw model names dropped, in favour of numbers. Eventually the 'classic' designs were struck-off



altogether. In 1996, however (by which time the company had become TAG Heuer and was soon to be acquired by LVMH) the Carrera name was revived on a model that emulated the dial and 37-mm case of an original, but used a Lemania 1873 movement.

This was replaced two years ago with a larger 39-mm case and different dial options – currently available in no fewer than nine different versions. Just like the old days, really.

Resurrection of the race

This year not only marks the anniversary of the Heuer Carrera; it is also the fiftieth year since the Carrera Panamericana was banned. However, like the Italian Mille Miglia, which was stopped in 1957 for the same reasons, the race is once again a firmly established fixture on the historic motorsport calendar.

It was resurrected in 1988 and, unlike the first race that ran north to south, the modern versions begin at Tuxtla Gutierrez in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas and finish on the Texas border at Nuevo Laredo. There are categories for small sports cars to large saloons, all of which must have been made

before 1965, and around 100 competitors take part. Each two-person team pays \$340 for a Mexican race licence and a \$4,500 entry fee, which buys them food on the way and a good night's sleep at the end of each of the six days.

Yet, unlike the Mille Miglia – now more of a time trial than an out-and-out race – the Carrera Panamericana is a wild and crazy festival of downright speed, fraught with natural obstacles and potentially fatal incidents. Do not forget: this is Mexico.

Tough going

Little has changed since the 1950s, highway-wise, and the abrasive, volcanic ash covering much of the road surface can still destroy a set of tyres in a few hundred miles. There are still plenty of vultures too, just like the one which smashed through the front screen and out of the back of Karl Kling's Mercedes-Benz 300SL Gullwing at 100 mph in 1952, prompting later team cars to be fitted with 'buzzard bars'.

As QP went to press, Andrew Prill was preparing to race his fifth consecutive Carrera Panamericana in a highly modified 1957 Porsche 356. "Of all the historic

(Previous page) 1974 heralded a new design for the Carrera, becoming thicker and more 'futuristic' in shape, but retaining its ergonomic lines with a slightly oval bezel and a case that concealed the horns. This version, with the 'Chronomatic' movement, was produced until the end of the 1970s.

(This page, left) Carrera Nacre (£2,095), launched this year as part of TAG Heuer's New Women Collection. Also available with diamond-encrusted bezel (£3,995).

(Right) Carrera Twin Time (£1,250) displays two time-zones, on a slightly enlarged dial, harking back to the model's historic style.

(Right) A Ferrari Testarossa competing in the Carrera Panamericana road race. The first edition of 'La Carrera Panamericana' was held in 1950, starting at Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, and finishing at Ciudad Cuauhtémoc in Chiapas. It was 35 years before the race was revived, after its 1954 ban.

(Below) From 1965, one of the first special dial models. This was the year that Heuer equipped its Carrera chronographs with different measurement scales for a varying range of applications. This example has a tachometer; a function repeatedly integrated in subsequent evolutions of the timepiece.

car events in the world, this is undoubtedly the best," he enthuses. "There is simply nothing else like it because Mexico is the only country that will allow flat-out racing on public roads. The speeds achieved by some of the most highly tuned cars are phenomenal – and the sound of five-times Carrera winner Pierre de Thoisy coming through the long straights of the La Buffa stage at 175 mph in his '54 Studebaker is something everyone should experience!"

Since speed is of the essence, competitors spend months before the race tuning, rebuilding and tweaking the cars, which, although ostensibly old, are often capable of speeds well in excess of 150 mph. Keeping them on the road and in one piece is, however, not always so easy. The route starts in the Tropics at sea level and rises to 10,000 feet within 72 hours, so as well as negotiating treacherous, unmetalled mountain roads entirely devoid of safety barriers, the teams also have to alter the cars' fuel-air mixture with monotonous regularity to keep engines running sweetly.

"Correct preparation of the car is vital," explains Prill. "The majority of people who drop out do so on the first day. The Carrera will find fault with a car in seconds and one that isn't up to the job will simply be destroyed. It is a race which anyone with an interest in historic motor-sport should aim to take part in."

Prill's usual wristwatch, by the way, is a 1966 Rolex Submariner. But for the race he naturally wears his much-cherished '66 Heuer Carrera. "It wouldn't feel right driving the Carrera Panamericana without it." ◉

Further information: TAG Heuer, Tel: 0800 037 9659
www.tagheuer.com La Carrera Panamericana:
www.lacarrerapanamericana.com.mx



“I can almost smell the Castrol!”

In association with Getty Images Gallery, TAG Heuer celebrated the fortieth anniversary of its iconic Carrera watch with an exhibition of over 100 motorsports photographs drawn from the imagery agency's extensive archive. Exclusively selected by British funkster and car connoisseur Jay Kay, and celebrated columnist, historian and QP contributor Nick Foulkes, the showcase ran from the 29th October to 13th November at Getty Images' new gallery in Fitzrovia, London.

Founded in 1995, Getty Images remains the first and only publicly traded imagery company in the world and maintains a long-established reputation for working with some of the world's best sports photographers. As a motoring enthusiast and TAG Heuer owner, Jay Kay, of Jamiroquai fame, relished the opportunity to delve into Getty Images' library: "I can almost smell the Castrol! Stunning pictures of when 'real' cars raced and drivers had oily faces..."

Co-curator Nick Foulkes shares a similar passion for the bygone days of motor racing. "Looking through this archive is a delight for someone as chronically nostalgic as I am... Back then, style, speed and *savoir faire* were never far from the grandstand, pit lane and racing circuit."



Jacky Ickx waits for a mechanic to finish during the first day's practice at the British Grand Prix, Brands Hatch, 1970.