

Quicksilver

TAG Heuer's concept watches induced reactions ranging from blank stares to instant desire on their debut at BASELWORLD 2003. QP handles with care

Theodore Diehl

⌚ When the first quartz-controlled wristwatches appeared on the market many years ago they were exceptionally expensive, often costing much more than a regular mechanical Swiss watch. After a short time the prices dropped as the technology matured. When the initial shock had passed, the industry was quite pleased with the quartz development since the vast number of quartz-based calibres that were being offered made it child's play for designers to create a boundless series of shapes and forms to fit every taste. Quartz wristwatches, or at least those without specialised functions, became low-priced fashion items, and many people bought several of them in various shapes and colours to match their favourite clothes or even their mood. The rest is history.





Photo: Alastair Latdlow

TAG Heuer have married a true mechanical classic with state-of-the-art quartz technology to create a stunning concept watch.

After the revival of the mechanical watch industry, the separation of the quartz and mechanical worlds was fairly strictly adhered to. Major houses did offer quartz watches for the few customers who requested them, but almost under a cloak of secrecy. Quartz wristwatches were often not even mentioned in catalogues for fear of diluting mechanical watch brands' PR image. Not any longer, however. It is a more or less public knowledge that companies such as Rolex (working together with the Swatch Group) and even firms such as Patek Philippe are spending large sums on the future development of electronic wristwatches or hybrid mechanical/electronic calibres. (These products might not

even be released during our lifetimes, but, for established brands, looking 50 years ahead with R&D is not uncommon.)

Creating the future

For the consumer, the creation of uniquely European- and Swiss-designed and built electronics has given quartz added value, much in the same way that hand-made amplifiers, speakers and players are highly regarded by high-end audio enthusiasts. Quartz is out of the closet, and is definitely heading up-market. One of the companies who have for a long time believed strongly in the dual development of quartz and mechanical watches are TAG Heuer, who



presented two wonderful products at BASEL-WORLD this year, both of which will definitely be earmarked for great things when they emerge from the development phase. The release dates for these watches have not yet been established, but be assured that QP will bring you further details soon.

The biggest attention-grabber for me was the Monaco Sixty Nine concept watch, which quite literally combines the classic Monaco mechanical wristwatch with a digital quartz-based chronograph in a single flip-over case design that evokes the full-throttle outlook of the late 60s. Although seemingly large, it still fits the wrist nicely and makes everyone do a double take, especially when you flip over the highly technical yet easy to use hinge construction to change from digital to mechanical timekeeping. The use of the Monaco dial face and styling on the one side with a high-tech digital readout accurate to 1,000th of a second built on the direct advice from TAG Heuer's own Formula 1 timekeeping depart-

ment puts this watch in two centuries at once. Although the watch has not yet reached the regular production phase, it is already the talk of the town and seems destined for success.

The Microtimer Concept Watch is a follow-up to the extremely popular Micrograph Formula 1 presented in 2002, which was awarded the *Grand Prix d'Horlogerie de Genève* in November of that year. There is quite a difference between them though. First, the new Microtimer contains the first Swiss electronic movement capable of measuring 1,000th of a second, with the addition of lap-time memory and best-lap calculation. Agreed, the thousandths of a second will say more about your reflexes after a night on the town than the speed of the winner, but you *can* measure them, and that is what is so cool! (I know, I know, it is a guy thing, it is genetically wired into my brain, I cannot help it!)

And on top of this is the ultimate in hi-tech materials: Liquidmetal. Developed originally for the



TAG Heuer's re-issue of the original Monaco met instant acclaim, not least for re-igniting the enduring link with Steve McQueen.



The thousandths of a second will say more about your reflexes after a night on the town than the speed of the winner, but you can measure them, and that is what is so cool!

aerospace industry, Liquidmetal Technologies of California have patented a method to produce metal in which the atoms align themselves into an amorphous state; that is to say, they no longer align themselves into the normal crystalline-like structures typical of regular metal. The result is a material that is much more scratch-resistant than normal. I tried to scratch the surface of a piece of Liquidmetal during a visit to TAG Heuer

in Marin and, believe me, it took some work to accomplish. Although I sincerely doubt that any future owner of the Microtimer will be looking to intentionally damage it, he or she can be sure that the new timepiece will not get scratched during everyday activities, whether that means going for a leisurely drive or fighting for the remote control when watching the Formula 1 on the TV. ●