



Confessions of a Travelling Watch Collector

QP advises keeping an
eye open on your travels

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Unexpected pleasures are often the most satisfying. And what beats turning a corner, only to find the sort of watch store that takes an hour or so to cover? Not on a main street – hardly even a street at all – Niedersächsische UhrenBörse nestles to the right and just behind Hannover’s Maritim Grand Hotel. Indeed, it was a showcase in the hotel’s lobby that alerted me to the proximity of watches – vintage and new, military and civilian – with the sort of price tags that, were they in sterling instead of euros, would still be bargains.



Herr Muller (top left) prides himself on being able to offer a wide range of affordable mechanical watches, including those of his own NUB brand (top right).



Opened in 1996 by Gunter Muller, NUB (as it says on the store's own watches) exist to provide "beautiful watches for a reasonable price," a slogan reflected in both the new and vintage timepieces they sell. For the previous 25 years Muller had worked in management and marketing, then deciding that he was ready to spend the years leading up to his retirement surrounded by the objects of his desire. He started by selling off parts of his own collection, amassed over 30 years; the display of 30 or 40 of his choice pieces proved to be an instant draw.

A quick count of the watches filling windows on two sides of the store, plus three showcases inside, yielded a stock of over 300 watches ranging from oversized wristwatches converted from pocket watches, to nearly new, pre-owned pieces at bargain prices. Had I not already owned one I would have left the store €600 lighter and with an as-new Eberhard Traversetolo with box and papers. Even brand new, it was only a grand.

These new watches come from "friendly dealers" who do not mind parting with new stock, and the older pieces are trade-ins from a wide range of

collectors who love NUB's hobbyist attitude. For one thing, it is virtually a quartz-free zone; for another, the shop will take watches in for sale on consignment. Muller delights in matching up collectors with other like-minded souls, keeping lists of clients according to their specialities. When one has something to sell, or is searching for something in particular, he just consults his lists and plays matchmaker.

"Germans are partial to Rolex, IWC and Omega," he told me, "and they have no purist problems with pocket watches converted into wristwatches." He pulled out a box with three examples of the latter, with Minerva, IWC and Omega featuring prominently throughout the store's stock of these oversized timepieces.

Although the store's wares are 80% vintage and only 20% new, Muller admits that one of his goals is "to get people away from quartz by selling nice mechanical watches for affordable prices." All of the vintage watches are serviced and come with a 12-month guarantee thanks to German law, and the store boasts an onsite watchmaker and access to a master watchmaker off the premises.



On offer

Over a couple of visits, I have been staggered by the choice: an IWC Mark XI, a 1972 Heuer chronograph for the German army, an 18-ct. rose-gold Rolex bubble back, a mint Bulova Accutron SpaceView, Jaeger-LeCoultres, Hamiltons – if it ticks and it is in good nick, they will stock it.

And then there is the NUB brand: handsome, non-nonsense mechanicals reminiscent of Nautische Mühle, Zeno and Bell & Ross. I could not resist an oversized model with a fully-luminescent dial à la Chronoswiss and a nice manual Unitas movement

for only €500, while the company offer an automatic GMT for a similar price, and time-only automatics with ETA movements for under €200. I did not bother to count, but I reckon that the NUB range contains something like 40 models.

Herr Muller is now semi-retired, but he still keeps an eye on his young charges, Herr Scherzer and watchmaker Herr von Hasselbach, both of whom share the same boundless enthusiasm for mechanical timekeepers.

Now, what did I come to Hannover for again? ●

Further information: Niedersächsische UhrenBörse, Theodor-Lessing-Platz 1c, 30159 Hannover, Germany. Tel: +49 511 325 000