



# Chronoswiss

by Nick Wiseman

In the watch world, one of the bravest and boldest things to try is the launch of a new brand with no history or heritage to support it. Many try, but most fade away into insignificance. With some considerable aplomb, Chronoswiss have managed it. With the world's first tourbillon regulateur, they have finally etched their name into the pyramid of horological greats.

The unique philosophy and creative endeavour of Chronoswiss has remained consistent since the enigmatic Gerd R Lang launched the brand in 1983. He has remained its sole owner, has inspired other watch manufacturers and has set a precedent for them to follow – not only as an owner but also as a master watchmaker of a new watch house.

## The beginnings of greatness

Born in Hanover, Gerd R Lang learned the roots of his chosen profession as a watchmaker in his hometown of Braunschweig in Germany. From this he gained an apprenticeship at the Gross firm in Burg/Fehmarn.

It was Lang's obsession and fascination with chronographs and stopwatches that enabled the young watchmaker to shine, and he subsequently took up employment with Heuer in 1964. At that time – the mid-'60s – there was nowhere better than Heuer for chronograph innovation. Just look at the classics that were produced – Carrera, Autavia, Camaro and of course the Monaco. In fact, Lang collaborated on the filming





of “Le Mans” with Steve McQueen, and was also official timekeeper at various Formula 1 races.

Ten years in total he would work for Heuer, but when quartz dominance began to crush the Swiss industry, Lang was an obvious casualty. In a strange twist of fate, his loss of employment inspired him towards the next level of his life’s work.

### Going it alone

Convinced that the quartz invasion of the public mindset would not prevail, Lang strongly believed

in the true art of traditional watchmaking. He bought up surplus stock of watches and watch works, and opened a repair service for mechanical watches. Inevitably, this led to Lang producing his own watches – Chronoswiss was formed.

Although the company was based in Munich, Lang insisted that only the best Swiss movements were to be used for his watches and chronographs. In the face of such adversity in the quartz-driven climate, even Lang was surprised when his supply of watches ran dry. The rest of the watch-making



world was astonished. Lang’s first batch of watches produced in 1983 now remain in museums or prestigious watch collections.

The great Heuer of the ‘60s and ‘70s nurtured and groomed Lang in the art of chronograph making but let him go when they did not believe in the future of the mechanical watch – how ironic that they were now all but bankrupt. They would eventually sell their soul and be bought by Tag, but none of this affected Lang. His belief and philosophy carried him through the hard times, and he

now intended to make Chronoswiss legendary. Lang is among a handful of watchmakers who have been credited with the resurgence of the mechanical timepiece.

In 1987, Lang launched the regulateur hand-wound wristwatch – the first serially manufactured wristwatch with a regulateur-type dial. The typical Chronoswiss case was born, its distinguishing characteristics and features being a screwed and channelled bezel, an onion-shaped crown and screwed strap-lugs. All





Chronoswiss models have a sapphire crystal back. Although this seems very conventional now, it was highly unconventional – indeed very striking and cutting edge – in the early '80s. In 1988, Lang launched the automatic regulateur, which drew historical comparisons with the early pendulum clocks used by watchmakers to regulate watches. He would later introduce other dial variations, particularly black, inspired by the growing trend of military-looking timepieces.

### The Holy Grail

It could be argued that Gerd Lang has a certain affinity and sentimentality towards the regulateur. This is further confirmed by the world's first automatic regulateur single-push button chronograph

– known as the chronoscope – which was launched in 2002.

It came as no surprise that Lang intended to convert and adapt his regulateur to fit a tourbillon movement. The fact that it was even discussed, let alone finally realised, was only made possible by Progress Watch of Biel, Switzerland. Progress developed a tourbillon movement that was 75% cheaper than its closest rivals. Previously, only the rich and elite watch collectors would own one, and only the most prestigious and historical of the watch manufacturers could produce them. To everybody else, collectors and watch houses alike, the tourbillon remained mythical. It was yearned for and coveted, but remained illusive.

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The tourbillon was patented in 1801 by one of Switzerland's favourite sons, Abraham-Louis Breguet. It is a complex piece of precision engineering, which results in the escapement of a watch rotating on its own axis. The object of this is to cancel out variations in running regularity that can be caused by the watch being in different positions.

Progress delivered 50 tourbillon movements to Chronoswiss, which were then modified and adapted to fit Lang's regulateur. The subtle but decisive difference is the small cage at 6 o'clock, which replaces the sub-seconds dial on Lang's original regulateur. Fulfilling Breguet's concept, it houses the classic balance, which screws together with its hairspring and its escapement section. The technical progress is embodied by such features as the use of a ball bearing and a balance frequency of 28,800 semioscillations per hour to stabilise the working. It also has a power reserve of 72 hr and, consistent with all Chronoswiss watches, a clear glass back.

### A lean future?

Chronoswiss believe that the bicentenary of the tourbillon is a fitting occasion to pay it tribute and, with the unique feature of the regulateur dial, it is a worthy homage to Breguet. All this is well and good but the story may yet have another twist. Lang's patience had been tested upon waiting for delivery of the tourbillon movements, and the economic troubles of Progress

had been well documented by Swiss and German journalists. Constant rumours and suggestions of bankruptcy and takeovers were normal throughout Progress's quest to bring people 1,000–2,000 tourbillons per year. It seems ironic that the first-time availability of a tourbillon with a genuine realistic price should occur when the necessary funding and commercial backing begins to lack conviction. We are not suggesting a conspiracy, but it was certainly no surprise when Bvlgari bought Progress shortly afterwards. The obvious rumour began to circulate – that Bvlgari would keep the tourbillon movements for themselves and their sister brands, Gerald Genta and Daniel Roth.

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So where does this leave Lang and Chronoswiss? If the speculation and whispering rings true, Chronoswiss could find themselves with the unique distinction of producing probably the cheapest tourbillon of all time – a distinction that would certainly cause no harm, but, more to the point, one that would propel the regulateur tourbillons already in circulation to super-rare cult status. Just like the precious few watches that Chronoswiss first realised in 1983, the tourbillons are a rare breed. ◉

Harpers Jewellers have two steel tourbillon regulateurs currently in stock retailing at £16,875.

Tel: 01904 632634, [www.harpersjewellers.co.uk](http://www.harpersjewellers.co.uk)