



# **Audemars Piguet Royal Oak Concept CW1: this is what the future looked like in 2002**

When it launched in 2002 the bold and brash Audemars Piguet Royal Oak Concept CW1 it took the Royal Oak line in a new direction

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12 November 2021



When a watch brand launches an anniversary edition of one of their core models, you tend to expect a clear call-back to the original that began it all. Not so [Audemars Piguet](#), for the twentieth anniversary for the Royal Oak, this oh-so-traditional watchmaker released the Offshore Chronograph to the delight of watch buyers and the disgust of General Genta. Bigger, bolder, and brasher, it took the Royal Oak line in a new direction that perfectly connected with the tastes of the times.

Ten years later they turned their anniversary imagination dial up to 11 and released the Royal Oak Concept 1, (CW1), a watch that made the offshore look like a tame reimagining of the 1972 original. Produced in 150 examples over two years, this concept was less a reference to the past and more a vision of what watchmaking of the future could look like – a vision that has largely come to fruition and spawned a succession of ground-breaking concept follow-ups.

While the use of new and exotic materials is not a recent phenomenon and micro-machining techniques such as spark erosion, while far from common, are no longer news-worth, back in 2002 the CW1 was a revolutionary watch. The base plate and bridges were crafted from titanium, as was the distinctive, super-lightweight and shock-protecting tourbillon bridge. While the crown still controlled the functions, the selection of either winding or time-

setting was not done through pulling out the crown, rather by pressing a button at 4 o'clock which cycled through the options on at display at 6. A 12, the Dynamograph indicated the level of torque in the mainspring allowing the user to keep this in an optimum state.

If all this starts to sound like the description of a Richard Mille, there is a reason for that. The calibre 2896 was developed by Renaud & Papi, two former AP employees who started their own movement supply company in 1986, focussing on high-end complications. While they are now 78 per cent owned by AP, they also work for other brands, specifically Richard Mille. Both the function switching of the crown, and the torque indicator are functions that have appeared in subsequent RM models.

As for the case, the use of Alacrite is unique within the watch world. Designed for use in aerospace components and turbine engines due to its light weight and strength and the medical industry due to its tarnish resistance and bio-compatibility, Alacrite is an alloy of cobalt, with chromium, tungsten, nickel, iron, and carbon, with trace levels of manganese, silicon and phosphorous. The high surface hardness makes the case scratch-resistant and capable of taking a mirror-polish. While the octagonal bezel and visible hexagonal bolts remind us that this is still a Royal Oak, the case extends top and bottom into massive slant-sided, hooded lugs that covered the attachment of the Kevlar strap.

Launched with an initial purchase price of £200,000, the Concept 1 has held its value remarkably well, testament to its iconoclastic looks and technology. For the first 10 years, secondary market values pretty much matched retail and now, almost 20 years on, it has fallen back to a little over half of this.

Rarely appearing at auction, in 2018 Phillips achieved £100,000 for one and a year later, with

the buoying effects of a charity sale, they reached £135,000. This is very much in line with prices in the secondary dealer market.

If price is what you pay, and value is what you get, then these watches could be said to represent good value. A unique case material, class defining movement technology and the founding watch of the concept series, they are a true landmark in watchmaking.

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