



How the ‘consciously anachronistic’ Chronoswiss Régulateur helped define 1980s watch style

Quartz might have been the buzzword of the 1980s, but don’t disregard the great leaps forward made on the mechanical side, too – including Chronoswiss’ masterful use of the “Regulator” dial layout

By **Adrian Hailwood**

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It's no secret that this column seeks, in its own small way, to rehabilitate the 1980s with regard to watches. Though they have been dismissed as the decade style forgot, awash with unremarkable quartz, we can dig deeper into the 1980s to find that some quartz watches were indeed remarkable and stylish, but some very cool innovations were still occurring over on the mechanical side.

The "Regulator" dial layout has been used, in recent years, by such diverse manufacturers as Patek Philippe, Kari Voutilainen, IWC and Christopher Ward. It imparts an eye-catching quirkiness coupled with a certain 'old-world' charm – a charm that comes from the dial layout being more than 300 years old. Sometimes referred to as a "Watchmaker's Regulator Clock" to differentiate it from others that attracted the same name, these clocks were used as a reference point for setting or regulating watches that the watchmaker was working on.

The minute hand is on its own in the centre of the dial with the hours and seconds shown on separate sub-dials, usually above and below the minutes. These clocks were dedicated to precision, having no additional functions other than the time. It is often suggested that the dials were separated to aid visibility of the minute hand. This is to miss the point; hours, minutes and seconds are not naturally found together in the middle of the dial – they have

additional gearing added to bring the hands together. To remove any potential impediment to accuracy, these extra wheels were omitted, meaning that the hands remained separate. Such clocks could be accurate to within a few seconds per month and so the position of the second hand was crucial for setting of the time. The only reason the minute hand appears to dominate the dial is its isolation and extra length, reaching out to the edge of the dial.

Despite its antiquity, this dial did not appear in serial wristwatch production until as late as 1987 and this was the work of a brand newly created in the early 1980s: Chronoswiss. After losing his job with the German subsidiary of Heuer due to the quartz crisis, Gerd-Rüdiger Lang launched his own brand in 1983, focusing on complicated mechanical movements. Early watches included tourbillons, repeaters and chronographs, but it was the launch of the Régulateur in 1988 (Lang had developed it a year earlier) that defined the company's output in the following years. A world away from the sleek quartz of the Omega Constellation or the colourful plastic from TAG Heuer's newly released Formula 1 range, the Chronoswiss Régulateur was consciously anachronistic; a fluted "onion" crown, coin-edge bezel and exposed screws reeked of classicism. The white dial, with its blue steel leaf hands could have been lifted from a pocket watch 200 years older. Most importantly, it was mechanical – initially hand-wound, but quickly updated to the exclusive C.122 movement, based on the old Enicar calibre 165.

Chronoswiss is producing its latest interpretation of the regulator dial to this day, both in futuristic forms and a continuation of the original 1980s model. For those who want to chase down the original ground-breaking watches, you will be pleasantly surprised at their affordability. Somewhat elusive on the auction scene, when they do appear you can expect to pay £1,500-£2,000 with only a little over that to purchase from a dealer. With so many other brands adopting the style since, it's great to credit the original.