



‘Mecha-quartz’ watches are a thing – but what exactly are they?

Full of historical pedigree, that’s what. And if you want a great vintage example of a mecha-quartz watch, take a look at Jaeger-LeCoultre...

By Adrian Hailwood

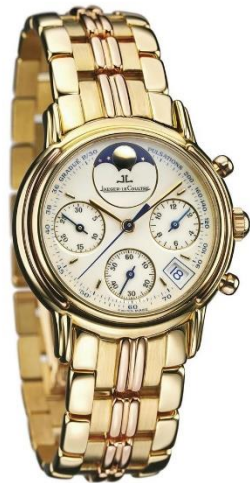
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Everyone loves a chronograph, whether dressy or sports. It says, “I am a watch with purpose. Later I will be timing something important such as a Grand Prix or a boiled egg.” Most crucially, it offers a rare opportunity to interact with our watches, even if it is just to start, stop and reset ad infinitum. It is no surprise, then, that microbrands from Furlan Marri to Undone tend to base their offerings around a chrono. But mechanical chronographs, reliable ones anyway, are expensive both to purchase and maintain. That’s why microbrands, whether new or established, often opt for “mecha-quartz”, which offers grab-and-go convenience and quartz accuracy paired with that wonderful tactile quality that only a mechanical chronograph movement can offer. And all at an affordable price. The current go-to provider of mecha-quartz chronographs is [Seiko](#), but credit for this convenient-yet-satisfying hybrid goes to [Jaeger-LeCoultre](#) and takes us back to the 1980s.

In 1987, quartz was king and fully quartz-driven chronographs had arrived courtesy of both Japan and Switzerland. Jaeger-LeCoultre decided to combine its mechanical and quartz expertise to compete with the bulkier automatic offerings just re-emerging in the form of Zenith’s El Primero and Valjoux’s 7750. What they came up with was the calibre 630, a 25-jewel movement with Côtes de Genève finishing and rhodium-plated bridges. At the heart of the movement

were two motors, one running at 1Hz to power the time-keeping function and one running at 4Hz to power the chronograph. All the other chronograph components were mechanical, keeping the same tactile feel as its older rivals.



A 1989 Jaeger-LeCoultre Odysseus watch, powered by Calibre 630

It was marketed on its slim profile, being only 3.7mm high and much more in keeping with other 1980s quartz offerings – only, with the prestige of a historic mechanical movement maker. Not only was it slim, but it was also small, allowing it to be used in ladies' watches as well as men's. In addition to hours, minutes, seconds, date and chronograph functions, the calibre 630 also offered a moon-phase indicator, although this wasn't often used and the next calibre, the more popular 631, did away with it altogether. Jaeger-LeCoultre housed the 630 in its complicated Odysseus collection, its dress-diver Kryos collection and the little-known, mid-size Herion collection as well as later Master Control chronographs. The movement found more success and recognition through collaborations with IWC in its archetypal Flieger 3741 and later watches that added alarm functionality.

With the current rehabilitation of mecha-quartz as offering the best of both worlds, it might just be time to hunt out these early calibre 630 watches and their derivatives. Coming from a rather overlooked period of vintage taste and style, prices on these once exclusive watches are ridiculously affordable. A steel Kryos chronograph will

set you back between £1,000 and £1,800 depending on whether you go strap, bracelet or bi-metal. An Odysseus in gold, with the added moon-phase complication, is around £3,500.

Remember, these are complex movements so maintenance is not cheap, and you can't just dump it out for a straight swap like the modern equivalents, so buy the best condition you can – and preferably with a warranty.

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