



Why the 1971 Breitling 'bullhead' is charming the collectors' market

The Breitling ref 2117 'Pult Pupitre' is a quirky timepiece that's full of 1970s flair – and, what's more, it's relatively affordable. For now...

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29 June 2021



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Nothing says funky early 1970s watch design like a “bullhead” chrono. In that era, a rash of them appeared from Swiss and then Japanese manufacturers, some so similar in design you would swear some homework copying was going on, before they vanished as quickly as they came – only reappearing as heritage reissues.

“Bullhead” refers to the placement of the chronograph pushers at 11:00 and 1:00 creating “horns”, the crown being between them at 12:00 or at 6:00, sometimes both. This is achieved by rotating the movement in the case, creating an “up-down” sub-dial configuration. Some say that the pushers are easier to operate while driving but, having tried it, I would call “bull” on that. After all, racing chronos have continued in their usual alignment into the present day. The style is more in keeping with the handheld stopwatches used to time sporting events and maybe it was thought a certain “sportiness” could be conveyed by imitating that look. I prefer to think, however, that in the creative maelstrom of the early 1970s, manufacturers simply threw everything at the wall and just went with what stuck. As a “non-sticky” solution, the bullhead is still pretty cool.



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The first automatic chrono to get the bullhead treatment was the Breitling ref 2117, referred to by the brand as the “Pult Pupitre”. This curious name was created from both the German and French words for desk. The case of this 1971 creation is wedge shaped, being thicker at the top than the bottom, which, from the side, gives it the appearance of an old-fashioned sloping school desk – the ones where you could lift the lid and store your stuff.

This tilts the dial slightly towards the viewer, which does aid visibility a fraction. The 2117 used the Chronomatic Calibre 12, the upgraded version of Breitling’s first ever automatic chronograph. This had its winding crown on the opposite side of the case to normal and so, on the bullhead, the crown was shifted to 6:00, rather than sitting between the pushers, as on the later manual-wind Breitling 7101 and examples from Seiko and Citizen. (Fun fact: Omega’s manual-wound 1969 Seamaster bullhead has crowns at both 6:00 and 12.00, but the 6:00 is for a rotating inner bezel.)

This 6:00 crown position on the Breitling just adds to the overall charm and quirkiness of the watch. The dials of the 2117 are available in either a cool petrol blue or, for “peak retro”, the kind of brown usually found on Dralon curtains and sofas. Varying shades highlight the chronograph scales, while the whole thing is enlivened by bright orange hand details.

Showing how tastes change, the Pult Pupitre did not sell well in its day and was thus discontinued, making it something of a rarity. After the near-collapse and rebirth of Breitling in 1979, many cases and components for these watches entered the secondary market, so if you choose to hunt down one of these oddities, make sure all the parts are correct – you don't want a watch built out of bits. A common error is the date wheel, which should read vertically but is often seen sideways when the wrong part is used. If you see this, you should avoid the whole watch for fear of what other faults lurk unseen.

The embracing of the 1970s by the collectors' market has seen these watches become valued for their period quirks – and, to a modern eye, they look seriously appealing. Auction prices sit around the £2,500 mark, although the number going unsold suggest sellers are setting high reserves. From a dealer, expect to pay upwards of £3,500. For now...