



# Why this £100 vintage Russian watch is a hot collectable

The Raketa “Big Zero” was made famous by Russian president Mikhail Gorbachev. It went on to gain a cult following...

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As cult classic watches go, the Raketa “Big Zero” seems an unlikely candidate. It’s simple, childishly bold, and from a country that isn’t usually associated with horology. But as with most cult watches, there are layers of backstory to uncover and for those that dig deep enough, the Big Zero soon becomes a nerd’s paradise.

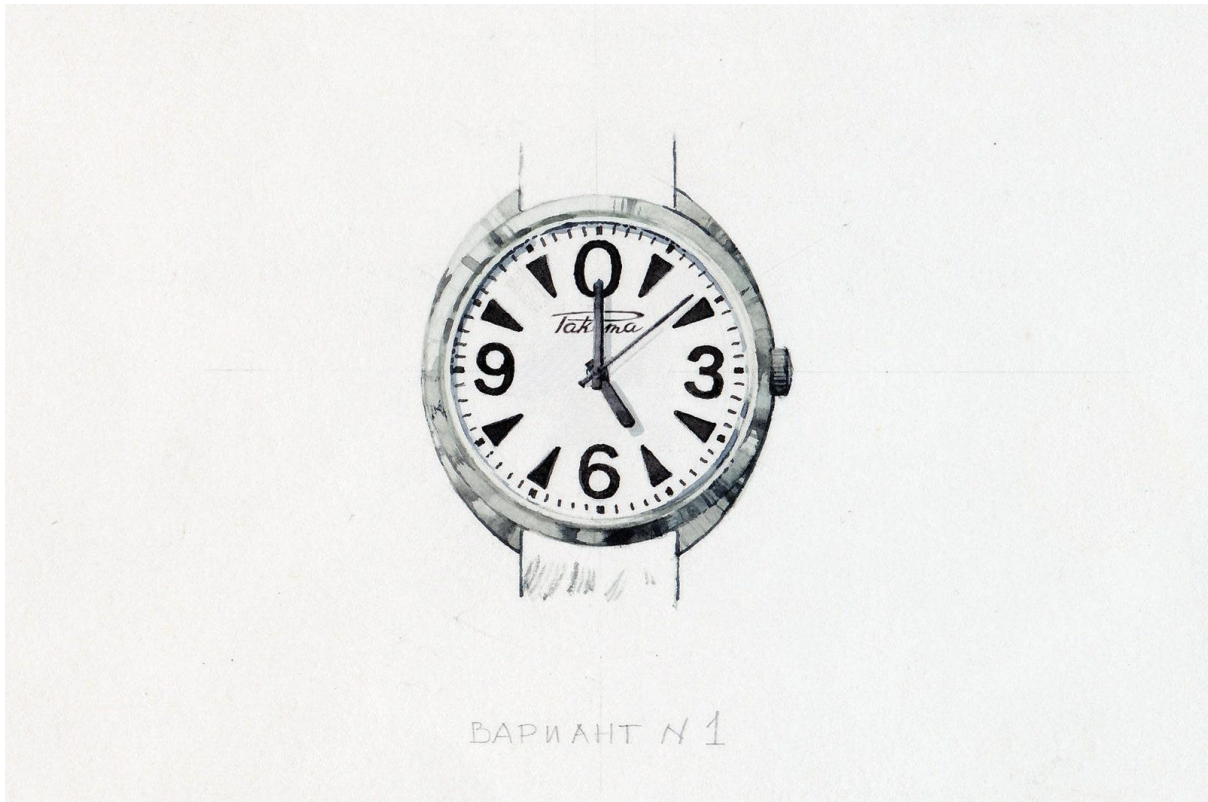
The Big Zero’s heritage is remarkably extensive. The Imperial Peterhof Factory in Petrodvorets was founded by Peter the Great in 1721, predating the likes of [Blancpain](#) or [Vacheron Constantin](#), although at this time it was a lapidary works, cutting diamonds for the imperial crown and producing hard-stone luxury goods. By 1938, the lapidary included the production of jewels for watch movements and as WWII hit, Petrodvorets produced precision components for the Russian military culminating, at the close of the war, with the creation of the Pobeda (Victory) watch brand. In celebration of Yuri Gagarin’s 1961 space flight, watches were produced under the Raketa (Rocket) name.



An original 1980s Raketa 'Big Zero'

A cult watch needs an iconic moment or wearer, either real or fictitious. The Big Zero, launched c. 1980, is linked to reforming Russian Premier Mikhail Gorbachev, who, so the story goes, wore the watch on a 1985 trip to Italy. The press spotted the distinctive dial, and the subsequent headlines made the link with Gorbachev's "Perestroika" movement (meaning "restructuring") claiming "Russia is starting from zero".

Originally conceived as a legible watch for the visually impaired, the oversized quarter numerals and tapering hour markers have become a design classic, appearing even larger against the comparably diminutive hands. Coupled with a 39mm cushion case, with minimal lugs, the watch has huge wrist-presence. Under the hood of the originals lies a Raketa calibre 2609, a simple and widely used movement yet with notable refinements such as Incabloc shock protection, Breguet overcoil and screw-adjusted balance.



A design sketch from 1979 of the Raketa 'Big Zero'

While still available for less than £100, the increasing collectability of these watches and the interchangeability of parts has created a wave of fake and franken versions. This problem is compounded by the fact that several legitimate versions exist, all with different dial details and produced by different companies. Hence the attraction to researchers who enjoy comparing and cross-referencing in an attempt to find 100 per cent original examples. Online guides exist, a good place to start being that written by Kaz Mirza of “Two Broke Watch Snobs” podcast fame. For those who want the look without the risk, Raketa are producing a modern version of the Big Zero, a true “in-house” creation with none of those doubts around authenticity.



The modern Raketa Classic Big Zero 0249. €750, [raketa.com](http://raketa.com)

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