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# SPOTLIGHT

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**A TEST OF THE  
TRANSOCEAN  
CHRONOGRAPH  
UNITIME,  
PLUS A HISTORY  
OF BREITLING**



**FROM THE  
PAGES OF  
WATCHTIME  
MAGAZINE**

# BREITLING





# See the WORLD

*Breitling's new Transocean Chronograph Unitime shows the time in 24 time zones at a single glance. How did this global traveler perform in our test?*

BY JENS KOCH  
PHOTOS BY NIK SCHÖLZEL

## Pros

- + Attractive design
- + World time is simple to reset.
- + Precise rate

## Cons

- The time of day is hard to read.
- The watch may be uncomfortable on a smaller wrist.





world-time watch shows the time simultaneously in the world's time zones using two rings. One ring is marked with the names of cities representing the time zones, and the other with hour numerals. To see the time in any of the time zones, you find the corresponding city name and read the hour numeral that is next to it.

Breitling introduced its world timer, the Transocean Chronograph Unitime, last year at Baselworld. The watch has a patented world-time mechanism and a *manufacture* movement, the B 05, which is based on the B 01 chronograph movement that Breitling introduced in 2009.

The Unitime traces its roots to a 1950s model of the same name. This self-winding watch with world-time indicator and date display, whose birth coincided with the start of the jet age, was designed for frequent travelers such as airplane pilots.

The new Unitime, with its pale brown calfskin strap, has an attractive, vintage

look. But the extremely large diameter (46 mm) and the high-quality processing of all components establish this model as contemporary. We liked the well-designed hands, the applied indices, the carefully polished case, the impeccably cut strap and even the buckle's prong, which is milled from a solid block of metal. There were, however, considerably more tool marks than we expected to see on the inner surface of the buckle, which has the brand's logo engraved in raised relief.

The prong-buckle closure suits the vintage design. In our opinion, this type

*THE WORLD-TIME FUNCTION OF  
THE UNITIME IS THE MOST  
COMPLEX ADDITIONAL FUNCTION  
GIVEN TO CALIBER B 01 SO FAR.*



*The wide hoop around the movement holds the rings for the world-time display.*



TEST *Breitling Transocean Chronograph Unitime*

of closure is easier to use than a double-folding clasp. Only a very short piece of metal comes in contact with your skin. Unlike a folding clasp, nothing can press uncomfortably against a bony wrist joint. The softly padded calfskin strap also adds to the wearing comfort. But this watch doesn't fit properly on a smaller wrist, where it has a tendency to slide back and forth.

We also found that the daytime legibility could be better. There's not enough contrast between the steel hands and the silver-colored dial. And the numerals on the 24-hour disk, as well as the names of the cities, are by necessity printed in rather small type. However, the date display is easy to read. At night, luminous material on the hour and minutes hands combines with glow-in-the-dark dots at the hour indices and a double luminous dot at 12 o'clock to provide good legibility.

Using the Unitime is quite straightforward. Everything is set using the crown, which is not threaded and is easy to

grasp. The watch's world-time function operates quite simply. When you travel to another time zone, you pull the crown out to its first position, then turn it forward or back to simultaneously adjust the hour hand, in one-hour increments, the city ring and the 24-hour ring, while automatically adjusting the date to the local time. The central hour hand always points to the time in the zone that you've spun to the top of the dial. You adjust the time display with the crown pulled out to its second position using the hour and minutes hands. The seconds hand stops to allow synchronization with a radio time signal and the 24-hour ring turns along with the central hands, while the city ring stays in place. The chronograph's pushers run smoothly and require just the right amount of force to operate. To reset the date, reposition the hour hand in one-hour increments, which also changes the world-time display. You can move the hand in either direction, so you can reset the date quite quickly even

*The chronograph pushers run smoothly and have only a little play.*

**SPECS**

**BREITLING TRANSOCEAN CHRONOGRAPH UNITIME**

**Manufacturer:** Breitling Chronométrie, Allée du Laser 10, CH-2300 La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland

**Reference number:** AB0510/A732

**Functions:** Hours, minutes, seconds, date; chronograph with counters for 30 elapsed minutes and 12 elapsed hours; displays 24 time zones

**Movement:** Manufacture caliber B 05, automatic, COSC-certified; 28,800 vph, 56 jewels, fine adjustment via index and eccentric screw, Kif shock absorption, Glucydur balance, 70-hour power reserve; diameter = 40 mm

**Case:** Stainless-steel case with domed sapphire crystal that's nonreflective on both sides, fully threaded stainless-steel back; water resistant to 100 meters

**Strap and clasp:** Calfskin strap, stainless-steel prong buckle

**Rate test:**  
(Deviations in seconds per 24 hours)  
With chronograph switched off / on

Dial up	+1	+2
Dial down	+1	+3
Crown up	+2	+1
Crown down	+6	+5
Crown left	+4	+6
Crown right	+2	0
Greatest deviation of rate	5	6
Average deviation	+2.7	+2.8

**Average amplitude:**

Flat positions	293°	271°
Hanging positions	277°	235°

**Dimensions:** Diameter = 46 mm, height = 15 mm, weight = 131 g

**Variations:** With stainless-steel bracelet (\$11,200); rose-gold case with crocodile strap with fold-over clasp (\$30,965)

**Price:** \$10,715

TEST *Breitling Transocean Chronograph Unitime*



*The handsome clasp with Breitling's logo*

though there is no rapid-reset mechanism. Resetting the time zone doesn't change the positions of the minutes and seconds hands: the watch's movement simply continues to run. The time zone can even be reset while the chronograph is switched on.

Breitling's world-time mechanism works well. The only possible mishap could occur if you were to pull the crown out too far when you are resetting the time zone. This would put the crown in the time-setting position, where it stops the seconds hand. If you turned the crown then, you would unintentionally shift the position of the minutes hand. This mistake cannot occur on a world-time watch that uses two pushers to move the time zones forward and backward.

The Unitime has a feature seldom seen on world-time watches: indicators – in this case, red suns – that show which countries observe daylight saving time. The suns are placed one hour to the right of the city names, marking the points at

which the wearer should read the hours during daylight saving time.

But Breitling doesn't solve several other fundamental problems that beset world-time watches, for example, time zones that differ from their neighbors by only half an hour, as is the case in India, Venezuela and parts of Australia. Furthermore, only 24 cities are shown on the dial, so you must know that Detroit is in the same time zone as New York. You'll also need to know that you have to set your watch to Mexico City if you want it to show the correct time in Chicago.

Several other difficulties complicate matters. Not all countries in a particular time zone follow the same policy with respect to daylight saving time: Europe, for instance, observes it, while most African countries don't. Another problem arises when individual countries decide to make changes in their timekeeping policies. Russia, for example, may soon decide to reinstate spring and fall time changes, which it suspended in 2011, when Presi-

dent Medvedev decreed the country would remain on daylight saving time permanently. Needless to say, no world-time watch can automatically respond to these unpredictable, human choices.

**THE WATCH'S CHRONOGRAPH** function dates back just four years. That was when Breitling, realizing that ETA movements and components would soon be in short supply, introduced chronograph caliber 01, its first in-house movement. This debut was followed by variations with a second time zone (caliber 04) and a hand-wound version, caliber 02, with a 24-hour display. (Caliber 03 has not yet been unveiled.) The world-time function of the Unitime is the most complex additional function given to caliber 01 so far.

Caliber 05 has vertical coupling, a column wheel and bidirectional winding. The movement has a stop-seconds function, the date switches instantaneously, and the escape wheel is protected against shocks. Its system of fine adjustment, via



## SCORES

BREITLING TRANSOCEAN  
CHRONOGRAPH UNITIME

**Strap and clasp (max. 10 points):** The calfskin strap is neatly crafted and the attractively polished prong buckle is adorned with the brand's logo in raised relief, but tool marks left by the milling machine were seen on the inner side. **8**

**Operation (5):** Everything can be reset using the easily grasped crown. The chronograph's pushers run smoothly. **5**

**Case (10):** The case is neatly crafted and polished; the sapphire crystal is handsome and highly domed; the pushers have only a little play. **9**

**Design (15):** The attractive vintage design harks back to Breitling's history, but the watch's size gives it a contemporary look. **14**

**Legibility (5):** There's not enough contrast between the hands and dial, and the lettering on the world-time display is rather small. Luminous material contributes to good legibility in the dark. **3**

**Wearing comfort (10):** The strap is soft and supple, but this large watch doesn't fit well on smaller wrists. **8**

**Movement (20):** With vertical coupling and a column wheel, this *manufacture* movement boasts state-of-the-art construction. World time is displayed effectively. **18**

**Rate results (10):** A very slight gain with and without the chronograph switched on; the greatest deviation among the various positions remains within an acceptable range. **8**

**Overall value (15):** The high quality of this watch, as well as comparison with its competitors, confirms that the cost-benefit ratio is good. **13**

**TOTAL: 86 POINTS**

## THE UNITIME TAKES DAYLIGHT SAVING TIME INTO ACCOUNT AND THEREFORE OFFERS AN ADVANTAGE OVER MANY OTHER WORLD-TIME WATCHES.

index and eccentric screw, isn't on a par with the best of haute horlogerie, but this movement has nonetheless proven its worth because the accuracy of all Breitling calibers is COSC-certified. We especially liked the long (nearly three-day) power reserve: if you take off your Unitime on Friday evening, you'll find it merrily running when you reach for it again on Monday morning. Breitling has extended the length of its guarantee to five years for watches that house the brand's own movements, a decision that testifies to the company's confidence in its products.

The Unitime's movement is hidden beneath the steel caseback. This decision is hard to understand, especially since the Transocean Chronograph without world time has a transparent back. It is the only Breitling model manufactured in unlimited series production that is so equipped. Perhaps the explanation relates to the wide metal hoop that surrounds the basic movement and holds the rings for the cities and the 24-hour scale.

This holder is adorned with a sunburst pattern. The rest of the movement is embellished in the usual manner: sunburst on the rotor, Geneva waves on the bridge for the self-winding mechanism, polished heads on the screws, and beveled and polished edges on the round outer sides where the beveling and polishing can be easily accomplished by machine. The stamped steel levers of the chronograph mechanism aren't quite so attractive: they're polished, but they look as simple as their counterparts on the ETA 7750.

Breitling makes its own plates. Its watchmakers insert the jewels and as-

semble the movement. The balance wheel, which has five spokes, was also made in house. This means that Breitling matches each balance with its hairspring. This process is extremely important for the accuracy of the watch's rate. Very exact measuring devices must be used to assure that each hairspring is wed to the right balance.

We were, therefore, quite curious to see what rate values our Witschi timing machine (a Chronoscope X1) would find. The test proved that this Breitling chronometer deserves its COSC certification. With a calculated average gain of 2.7 seconds per day, it came very close to perfect timekeeping. The rate was nearly identical when the chronograph was switched on. The greatest difference among the several positions was five seconds with the chronograph switched off and six seconds with it running: both values are within the tolerances permitted for an officially certified chronometer. The amplitude declines rather far in the hanging positions with the chronograph switched on, although it never drops critically low.

Of course, another important number for every watch is the one on its price tag. We were pleased to see that Breitling isn't setting extremely high prices, as are some manufacturers. The Transocean Chronograph Unitime costs \$10,715, which is an appropriate price for a *manufacture* chronograph with a refined world-time display and high-quality craftsmanship. With the sole exception of its less-than-ideal daytime legibility, there's no reason not to take the Unitime along on future journeys around the globe. ○





*Raquel Welch  
wears a Breitling  
in the 1967 film  
Fathom.*

*Breitling*

Chronographe de bord 8 jours avec totalisateur d'heures et arrêt facultatif. Toutes épreuves thermiques et vibrations.

8 Tage Bordchronograph mit Stundenzähler und unabhängigen Stoppen. Alle thermischen und Schwingungsproben.

Chronograph 8 days with hours of trip recorder and optional arresting device. Test thermal and vibrations tests.

G. LEON BREITLING S.A., MANUFACTURER OF WATCHES, BREITLING, SCHAFFHAUSEN (SUISSE)

# Flying Through Turbulence

*Through 125 years of ups and downs in the watch business, Breitling has persevered and innovated to solidify its status as a pioneer of chronographs and watches for aviators.*





SIEGE EJECTABLE.  
SUPERSEIZ.

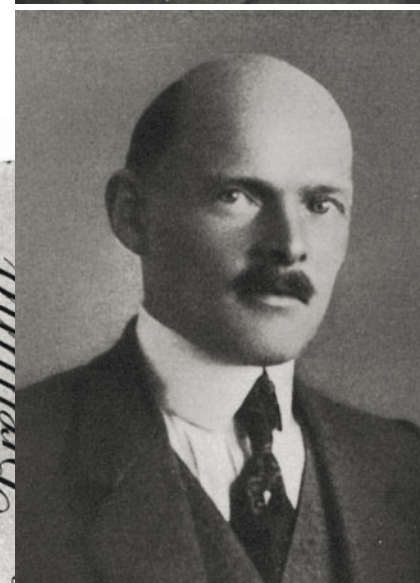
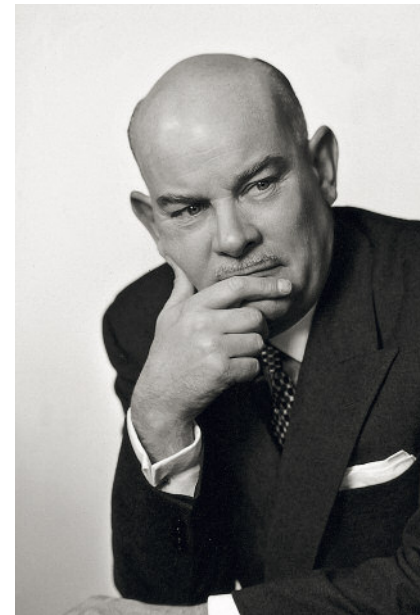
Ernest Schneider took over the Breitling brand in 1979 and soon piloted it to new heights.

BY GIBBERT L. BRUNNER



Breitling has weathered numerous crises in the course of its long history, but if not for the intervention of the Schneider family in 1979, this traditional company, which was founded in 1884, might have become a casualty of the quartz crisis like so many of its competitors. The brand, which celebrated its 125th anniversary in 2009, would not have even reached its 100th. A look in the pages of *L'Information Horlogère Suisse*, a newsletter for the Swiss watch industry, reveals that Breitling had completely suspended operations in 1978 after laying off 24 workers, 18 in La Chaux-de-Fonds and six in Geneva. The reasons are understandable, considering the turbulence of the era and the serious illness of the firm's leader, Willy Breitling. Breitling sold the firm to Ernest Schneider, proprietor of the Sicura watch firm. In April 1979, the two men signed an agreement that allowed Schneider to take over the well-known names "Breitling" and "Navitimer." Willy Breitling died just one month later, ending one era of Breitling watches and beginning another.

The next phase began on November 30, 1982, when the firm relocated to Grenchen and officially registered under the name, "Breitling Montres S.A." Schneider, who held a degree in engineering and was an amateur pilot, had not been idle in the meantime. With his extensive experience in microelectronics, he initially decided to apply modern quartz technology to the watches made under the illustrious Breitling brand name. The strategy was successful, ushering in years of growth for the brand, and enabling it to continue its tradition as a supplier for the aeronautics industry. The company has long since been entrusted into the capable hands of Schneider's son, Theodore, the owner, and Jean-Paul Girardin, the CEO. Together they have presided over Breitling's most recent milestone, the introduction of its first in-house movement, Caliber B01. This self-winding movement supports the complication that has characterized the firm's history for more than a century: the chronograph.

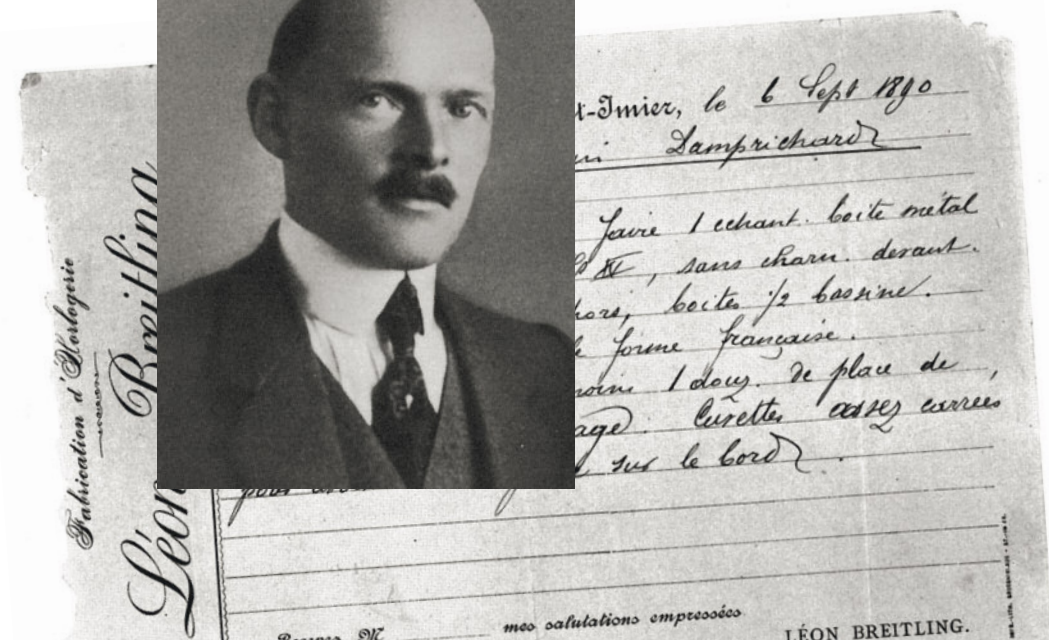


Top to bottom: Willy Breitling (1913-1979), who took over Breitling in 1932 and sold it to Ernest Schneider in 1979; the company's founder, Léon Breitling (1860-1914); Léon's son and successor Gaston Breitling (1884-1927)

FROM THE BEGINNING, BREITLING  
CONCENTRATED ON THE  
MANUFACTURE OF CHRONOGRAPHS,  
WHICH WERE INCREASINGLY IN  
DEMAND FOR ATHLETIC, MILITARY  
AND INDUSTRIAL APPLICATIONS.

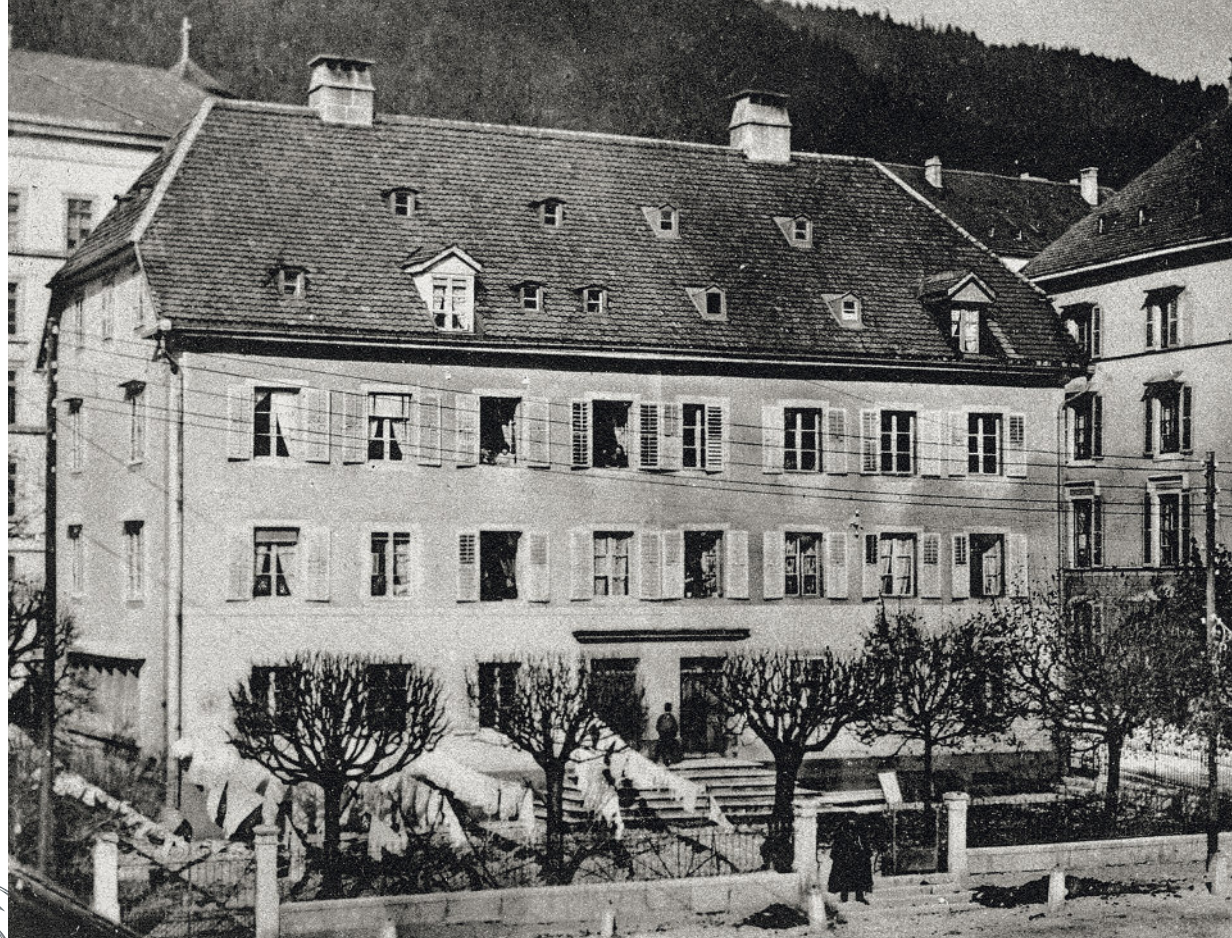
**COMPANY FOUNDER** Léon Breitling was born on January 26, 1860 in Saint-Imier, in the Jura region of western Switzerland, to parents of German extraction. A large portion of that town's population made its living from watchmaking, and many worked at home, so it is no surprise that Breitling became skilled in making mechanical components for timepieces at a very young age. Despite the crises that plagued this era, young Léon discovered an unquenchable love for his craft, which prompted him to begin a watchmaker's apprenticeship. When he opted for a freelance career in 1884, Switzerland was in the throes of a severe recession and many of his contemporaries were leaving the country to seek a better life in America. But Breitling could not be persuaded to join them. Instead, he opened a little atelier, where he specialized in the construction of modules for mechanical watch movements. The G. Léon Breitling watchmaking firm went on to create its own timepieces, many of them chronographs, which were increasingly in demand for use in sports and military and industrial applications. The numerous medals and certificates that Léon received at trade fairs and expositions confirmed that his product portfolio was warmly received.

The business quickly outgrew its small space in Saint-Imier. In his search for larger quarters, Breitling turned his attention to the up-and-coming town of La Chaux-de-Fonds, which was closer to his suppliers. He purchased a suitable plot of land on Rue Montbrillant and built a new factory building there that was completed in 1892. The business now had a new home and a new name:





Léon Breitling established his workshop in the left wing of this building in Saint-Imier.



Leon G. Breitling S.A. Montbrillant Watch Manufactory. The factory employed approximately 60 people, plus additional watchmakers who worked from their homes.

Léon Breitling died on August 11, 1914, at the comparatively young age of 54, and his son Gaston, who was also trained as a watchmaker, inherited the company. Gaston Breitling was also well educated in the commercial aspects of his father's business. He understood the necessity of continuing to develop new, attractive products, and believed that the brand's main strength was in making watches that could measure brief intervals of time. Breitling, therefore, decided to focus more on these types of products, creating dials for a wide variety of practical applications. Some were calibrated with scales that enabled their users to determine average speeds or to measure distances based on the different speeds of light and sound. Another was the dial on the patented "Vitesse" stopwatch, which traffic policemen could use to clock motorists who exceeded the speed limit. When Breitling's first wristwatch chrono-

graph became available around 1915, it was very positively received by military men. These chronographs were also ideal for use in sporting events, to time races and other athletic competitions.

As was customary at the time, many of these dials were left unsigned. A few of them were adorned with the word "Montbrillant." Others bore insignias like "Sprint," "Koko" or "Vitesse." The name "Breitling" first appeared on a dial toward the end of the 1920s.

When Gaston Breitling died unexpectedly on July 30, 1927, there was no appropriate heir apparent in the family to take over the company, so outside managers ran it for the next several years, which included the market crash of 1929 and the subsequent Great Depression. Breitling, like practically every other business, struggled to stay afloat during those years of declining demand, but its executives were ultimately able to acquire enough orders to keep it alive until Gaston's only son, Willy Breitling, came galloping to the rescue in 1932. Willy, with an education in both the technical and commercial sides of the watch business,

began steering the family business toward his own vision of its future.

Breitling's catalogs from the 1930s displayed an interesting spectrum of chronographs, stopwatches and deck watches. The collection included more than 40 different models, and the total number increased steadily. The firm was among the trailblazers of two-button chronographs, and also distinguished itself by introducing and popularizing the 12-hour counter. Even the Catholic church benefited from the inventiveness of the gents on Rue Montbrillant, who gave the name "Unedeu" to a counter with a three-digit tally. A parish priest could keep this device discreetly in his pocket and use it to count the penitents that entered his confessional.

In 1939, Breitling delivered large numbers of chronographs to the British Royal Air Force for use aboard aircraft, which would lead to Breitling becoming one of the world's best-known suppliers of timepieces for airborne applications. Pilots, aircraft manufacturers and airlines relied on Breitling's cleverly designed instruments.

**IN 1941, BREITLING INTRODUCED** a wristwatch chronograph, the distinctively styled Chronomat. Protected by several patents, the watch contained the Venus 175 chronograph caliber, which provided a counter for 45 elapsed minutes and also supported a diverse array of calculating functions. However, wearers needed some practice to become adept at operating the logarithmic scales with the aid of the fluted, rotating bezel. Putting two calibrated stretches end to end was equivalent to adding their logarithms (i.e., it

# CHRONOGRAPHES ET COMPTEURS

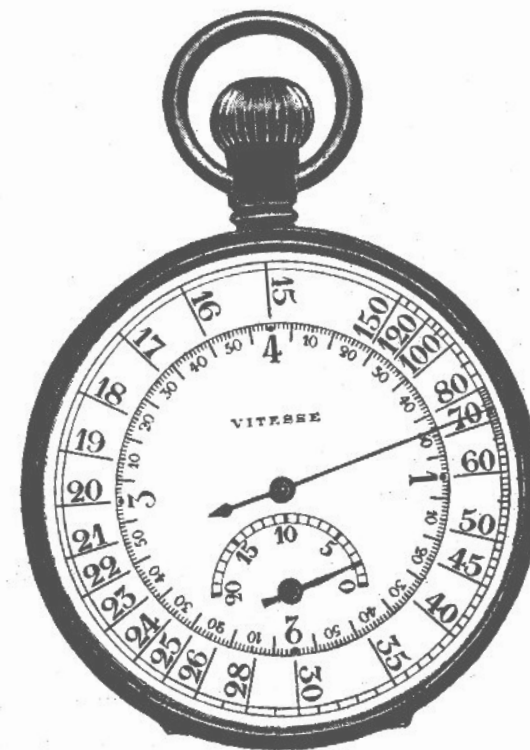
enregistrant 10, 30 et 60 minutes

TACHYMÈTRES

ET  
PHONOTELÉMÈTRES

Montres absolument  
garanties

Plus de 100,000 chrono-  
graphes et comp-  
teurs en usage dans  
tous les pays.



## Léon Breitling

Montbrillant Watch Manufactory  
CHAUX-DE-FON (Suisse)  
Fabrique à Montbrillant

A wristwatch  
chronograph from  
1915



An early Chronomat  
with a counter for 45  
elapsed minutes,  
circa 1942





BREITLING RANKED AMONG  
THE TRAILBLAZERS OF  
CHRONOGRAPH WATCHES  
WITH TWO PUSH-PIECES.



The Duograph from 1944 had an ultra-slim movement despite its split-seconds mechanism.

multiplied the numbers); subtracting one from the other yielded the quotient of the two numbers. Once the wearer learned to operate this miniature mechanical computer, he could perform complex calculations in seconds with a flip of the wrist.

A comprehensive catalog, which listed some 250 watches for widely diverse uses, was published in 1946. The focus was naturally on chronographs, and leading the parade was the elaborate Duograph, with its split-seconds function for intermediate time-reading. Classic three-handed wristwatches were, of course, also available. All of the watches contained calibers manufactured by the movement-blank giant Ébauches SA because Breitling did not manufacture its own watch movements.

Commercial and private aviation experienced a rapid upswing during the early 1950s. Boeing, Lockheed, Douglas and 25 commercial airlines equipped their fleets with Breitling's onboard instruments. The era of commercial jet travel began when the de Havilland Comet flew from London to Johannesburg on May 2, 1952. This was the same year in which Breitling developed the Navitimer, a watch that combined a chronograph with a navigational computer. Equipped with even more calculating options for pilots than the Chronomat, its logarithmic scales for flight-specific calculations gave it its name, which fuses the words "navigation" and "timer."

Breitling added a version of the Navitimer with a 24-hour dial in 1962. In May of that same year, this distinctive "Cosmonaute" chronograph flew into space on the wrist of astronaut Scott Carpenter. It easily withstood all the rigors of outer space and returned to Earth having performed with flying colors.

In 1952, the year of the Navitimer, Willy Breitling made a decision that would have far-reaching consequences for his business, dividing his commercial activities between two venues. Breitling et Montbrillant, the production site for watches, remained in the Jura region, while G. Léon Breitling SA, Compagnie des Montres, the firm's headquarters and sales division, resettled in Geneva, where it was closer to the markets. This decision

was prompted by faster-paced times, in which product innovations were necessary for brand recognition and growth. The American market, which Breitling had entered in the 1940s, demanded it. Standing still would have meant losing ground.

Advertisements in *Life* magazine triggered a steep increase in demand. The moviemaker 20th Century Fox presented the Navitimer in several films, including 1967's *Fathom*, which featured Breitling's Co-Pilot model on the wrist of actress Raquel Welch, and 1965's *Thunderball*, in which Sean Connery's James Bond consulted his Breitling Top Time, a model created primarily for a younger clientele.

DESPITE ALL BREITLING'S efforts,

sales of traditional hand-wound chronographs declined noticeably in the mid-1960s. Breitling and its archrival in the Swiss-made chronograph market, Heuer, were hard pressed to cope with this situation. Their mutual predicament impelled Willy Breitling and Heuer's Jack W. Heuer to collaborate on a special project: the development of an automatic chronograph, a type of watch that had never before been built. Both companies were so-called *établisseurs* — meaning they produced completed watches but did not manufacture their own movements — so Breitling and Heuer invited two other Swiss firms, the ébauche specialist Büren and the chronograph specialist Dubois Dépraz, to join the partnership. The U.S.A.'s Hamilton Watch Company, which had become the majority share-



The Navitimer, launched in 1952, ranks among Breitling fans' favorite models.

The Navitimer's dial has scales used by pilots for navigation.







*The Chronomat B01  
launched in 2009.*

AS OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM,  
ALL OF BREITLING'S  
MOVEMENTS ARE COSC-  
CERTIFIED CHRONOMETERS.

holder of Büren, became involved at the beginning of 1966.

The first prototypes, which performed well in tests on the wrist, debuted in the spring of 1968. The winding and chronograph mechanisms of the 31-millimeter-wide and 7.7-millimeter-thick Caliber 11, which was known by the nickname "Chrono-Matic," functioned so well that it was quickly readied for serial manufacturing. The haste was necessary because of competing developments in Switzerland and Japan. The need to order dials, cases, push-pieces and winding crowns from outside suppliers had enlarged the circle of those in the know about the top-secret project, so the developers didn't want to wait for the 1969 watch fair in Basel to introduce it to the public. On March 3, 1969, journalists were invited to the Hotel Intercontinental in Geneva and to the posh Copter Club at the Pan Am Building in New York for the unveiling of Breitling's Chrono-Matic watch. The event was sponsored by the Federation of the Swiss Watch Industry (FH), whose president, Gérard F. Bauer, emphasized in Geneva that, "at a time characterized by increasingly severe foreign competition, this innovative product demonstrates that the industrialists have the determination and the ability to remain competitive, and to do so in the most active, most forceful and most aggressive sense of the word. This proves that three watch companies, without giving up their own personalities, can collaboratively achieve a technical feat that none of them could have accomplished on its own."

The project had cost 500,000 Swiss francs, which was a gigantic sum at the time. After four years of collaboration, Breitling sent the Chrono-Matic into the market, where it vied with Heuer's own automatic chronograph. During its first four years, Breitling sold an estimated 300,000 pieces, initially outfitted with Caliber 11 and later animated by the faster-oscillating version, Caliber 12. And 300,000 units was quite a large number in those days.

The era of the world's first and only modular chronograph, with automatic winding by a microrotor, lasted exactly

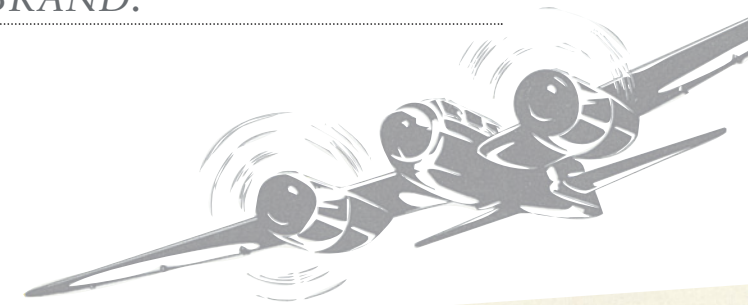


*The Cosmonaut,  
a Navitimer  
with a 24-hour  
dial, was worn  
into space in  
1962.*

*One of the first  
automatic chronographs:  
the Chrono-Matic  
from 1969*

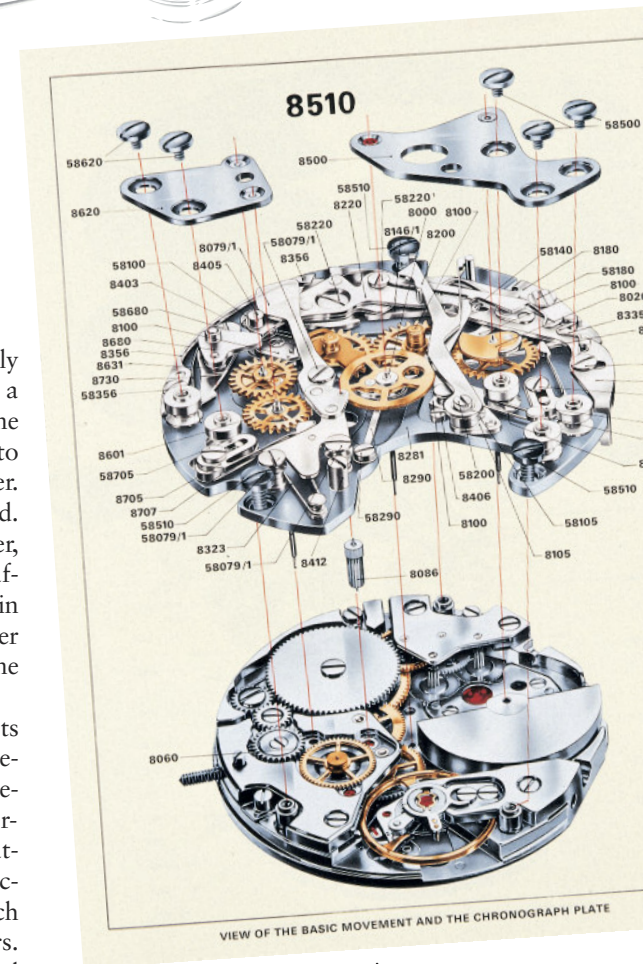


BREITLING FOR BENTLEY WAS  
INTENDED TO UNITE THE DYNAMISM  
OF THE WATCH BRAND AND THE  
PRESTIGE OF THE  
AUTOMOBILE BRAND.



one decade. It ended much more quietly than it had begun: in January 1979, a year that would prove to be a fateful one for Breitling, the decision was made to terminate production of the caliber. "Electronic" was the new magic word. And here we return to Ernest Schneider, who jumped aboard this bandwagon after the Breitling takeover. For example, in 1983, Breitling launched the Navitimer GMT, a quartz chronograph with one analog and two digital time zones.

However, when the firm reached its 100th anniversary in 1984, Breitling returned to its longtime tradition of mechanical horology, launching a new version of the Chronomat, revamped to satisfy modern tastes. The model was a success, and provided a base upon which Breitling could build in the ensuing years. That self-winding watch easily withstood accelerations up to 20 Gs, which helped it to become the official instrument of the Italian flying squadron Freccce Tricolori. Breitling followed it up with a divers' watch, with a helium-escape valve and the ability to descend to 1,000 meters, in



*An illustration showing  
the parts of Caliber 8510*



Breitling produced a Navitimer with an LCD display in 1977.



Caliber B01 is fitted with a column wheel.



1986. The Emergency watch, which followed in 1988, was equipped with a built-in emergency transmitter that helped rescuers to locate the survivors of a plane crash or shipwreck.

These examples demonstrate that diversity was the basis of Breitling's strategy after its acquisition by the Schneider family, whose philosophy was to preserve the brand identity without losing sight of modern innovation. Breitling also took a first step toward broadening its watchmaking competence in 1997, when it took over Kelek, one of its important suppliers. But even more important was an unprecedented campaign for quality and precision. This was prompted by complaints from agents and specialized dealers that the quality and reliability of the movements in Breitling's watches did not always meet the brand's professional standards. To rectify that situation, the company set up new facilities in La Chaux-de-Fonds at the start of the 21st century. The new guiding philosophy was that no watch would be allowed to leave Breitling's sparklingly clean and light-flooded ateliers without first having earned an official COSC rate certificate.

Strict quality control applies to all phases of the production. "For example, we use an apparatus that we developed ourselves to check each and every mainspring and its barrel," says CEO Jean-Paul Girardin. "Although we buy nothing but the best, 11 or 12 percent of the springs and barrels fail to uphold our standards." Springs whose characteristic curves deviate from the acceptable range are eliminated. "Before we send our movements to COSC for testing and certification as genuine chronometers, they've already passed through 10 different control phases." The percentage of these movements that don't make the grade at COSC is small. To prevent unwelcome surprises after the movements have been cased, Breitling subjects the completed watches to similarly meticulous testing.

**BREITLING'S SUCCESSFUL** cooperation with the British luxury automaker Bentley had essentially already begun in 1998, when Volkswagen bought Bentley



This Chronomat model, released in 1984, is one of the brand's best-selling items.

The Breitling for Bentley GMT Chronograph, introduced in 2008



The improved Emergency from 1995, with built-in miniature transmitter

Motors Ltd., founded in 1919. The takeover gave Bentley's designers considerably more freedom than would have been possible under the brand's previous owner, Rolls-Royce. And thus the paths crossed for two traditional businesses that, by coincidence or fate, each used a winged "B" as its trademark.

The dialog acquired concrete form in 2002. "Bentley needed financial support for a comeback at the legendary 24 Hours of Le Mans, which the brand had won a total of five times — in 1924 and from 1927 to 1930," Girardin explains. After several rounds of negotiations, a contract with a term of several years was signed in 2002. "Only on this basis does it make sense to invest in an independent line of watches," Girardin adds. "Neither Breitling nor Bentley wanted merely to market a classical Breitling wristwatch with the 'Bentley' name added to its dial. Breitling for Bentley would have to be very special in order to unite the dynamism of the watches and the prestige of the automobile brand."

The effort was apparent when Bentley presented the Continental GT that same year. The instruments aboard this vehicle showed Breitling's unmistakable handwriting, and the brand's insignia adorned the clock on its dashboard. The following year, Breitling served as sponsor of the more-than-600-horsepower-strong Bentley racecars, which sped to a double victory at Le Mans. This milestone inspired a limited-edition chronograph with a 24-hour dial, called the Bentley Le Mans.

"Suddenly our Breitling for Bentley watches appeared in articles written by automobile journalists where we, as an original brand, had almost never before been represented," Girardin says. As far as distribution was concerned, Breitling continued to rely on its partnerships with watch and jewelry stores.

**BREITLING'S 125TH ANNIVERSARY** year in 2009 coincided with the launch of Breitling's first *manufacture* movement, Caliber B01. The movement pow-

ers a new version of the Chronomat, the 43.5-millimeter Chronomat B01, which is available in stainless steel, bicolor and rose gold with various dials. Its bezel rotates in only one direction and is engraved with wide minute digits to measure flight and dive times. Thanks to its screwed crown, screwed push-pieces, domed sapphire crystal and massive steel back, the stainless-steel case can resist up to 500 meters of pressure, meaning that it can be worn for diving. Price-conscious watch fans will be pleased to know that the Chronomat B01 is not prohibitively expensive despite having a *manufacture* movement. The price range begins at \$7,075 for the stainless-steel version with calfskin strap.

Connoisseurs will appreciate this high-quality automatic chronograph, with its column-wheel control and friction coupling, both of which are manufactured according to ultramodern standards. And of course, each and every movement is officially COSC-certified as a chronometer. ○