

WatchTime

THE WORLD OF FINE WATCHES

SPOTLIGHT

www.watchtime.com

**THE MILESTONE
WATCHES OF
GIRARD-PERREGAUX,
FROM THE PAGES
OF WATCHTIME
MAGAZINE**

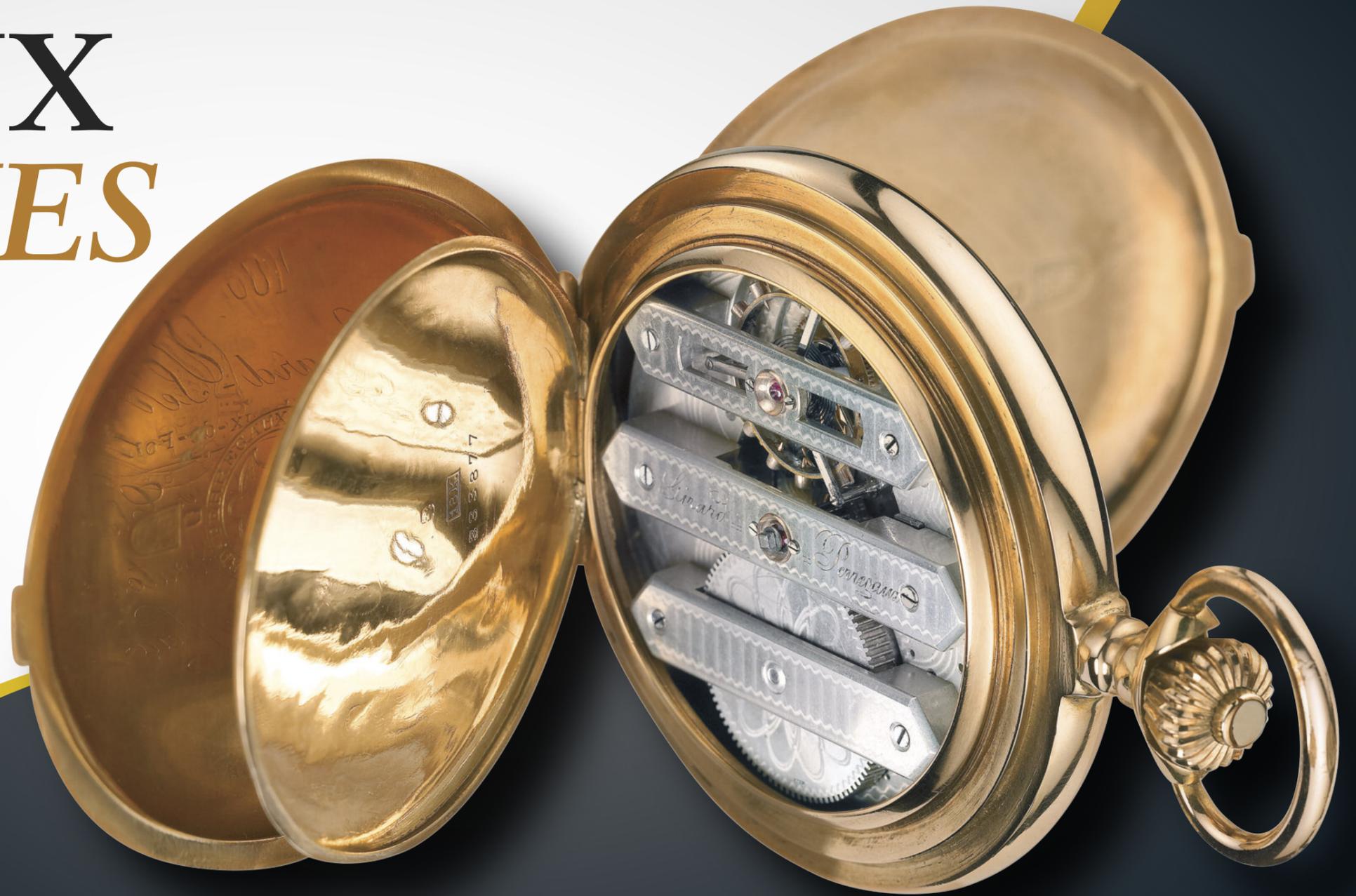


GIRARD-PERREGAUX

GIRARD- PERREGAUX *MILESTONES*

*A look at 14 watches that loom
large in Girard-Perregaux's history*

BY GIBERT BRUNNER



*Girard-Perregaux's most
famous face: the Tourbillon
with Three Bridges*

1860s

Tourbillon with Three Gold Bridges

Girard-Perregaux's most famous watch is the Tourbillon with Three Gold Bridges. Its distinctive design, featuring three parallel, arrow-shaped bridges, survives to this day in the brand's wristwatches. The first Tourbillon with Three Gold Bridges was made in the 1860s. In 1867, Girard-Perregaux founder Constant Girard won a gold medal for a Three Gold Bridges model at the Universal Exhibition in Paris. On March 25, 1884, Girard-Perregaux received a patent for the bridges' arrangement on the plate. One of the most unusual Three Bridges models is La Esmeralda (see below). This savonnette pocketwatch, which has an artistically decorated gold case, won a prize in the Universal Exhibition in Paris in 1889. It has a one-minute tourbillon, a compensating balance with 16 screws, a golden escape wheel and a detent escapement with lever. The watch was named after the luxury-goods store in Mexico that sold the watch. La Esmeralda was later owned by the Mexican president Porfirio Díaz (1830–1915). Girard-Perregaux purchased the watch for its collection in the 1960s.



1880

First Series-Produced Wristwatch

At the Berlin industrial exhibition in 1879, Girard-Perregaux displayed several of its more technically inventive watches. They caught the eye of Kaiser Wilhelm I, who asked Girard-Perregaux to make another innovative watch: one that officers in his navy could strap to their wrists so they would not need to go digging in their pockets to tell the time. Wilhelm liked the prototype, and in 1880 placed an order with Girard-Perregaux for 2,000 of what were probably the world's first series-produced wristwatches. They had 13-ligne, hand-wound movements and metal grilles to protect their crystals. Encouraged by the big order, Girard-Perregaux tried to sell men's wristwatches in the United States, but found that men here were not yet ready to adopt them.



1933

Mimorex

Early wristwatches suffered two Achilles' heels. First, they were ill-equipped to cope with dust and moisture. Second, even a relatively gentle blow was likely to shatter their glass crystals. Around 1930, Girard-Perregaux began selling men's wristwatches designed to address these problems. They had rectangular cases and digital displays for the hours, minutes and seconds in little apertures cut into the metal watch faces. Most of these watches bore the name "MIMO," for "Manufacture Internationale de Montres Or," the company that had recently acquired the then-dormant Girard-Perregaux brand. In 1933, MIMO brought out a women's model called the Mimorex (see above), which had a reversible case. On one side, the watch had an analog face, which the wearer would turn outward for dressy occasions; the other side was digital, like the men's models, and was designed for wear during sports. The watch had a specially designed hand-wound baguette movement, the provenance of which even Girard-Perregaux no longer knows.

1940

Loga

The Loga, launched in 1940, operated like a slide rule, with two logarithmically calibrated scales that could be used to quickly multiply, divide and perform other mathematical operations. Calculations were performed by rotating the knurled bezel. The watch, made of steel, contained the 13-ligne, hand-wound Caliber 200. The Fabrique d'Horlogerie de Fontainemelon (FHF) supplied its ébauche.



1965

Gyromatic HF

In 1965, Girard-Perregaux launched the world's first self-winding caliber with a frequency of 36,000 vph, the Gyromatic HF ("HF" stands for "high frequency"). There were two versions: the 31.7 HF, which had a direct center-mounted seconds hand, and the 32.7 HF (shown here), which had a date window. The next year, the Neuchâtel Observatory awarded its Centenary Prize to Girard-Perregaux for its caliber. In 1967, 73 percent of the observatory's chronometer certificates were issued to these movements. In addition to its fast-beat balance, the watch had another important innovation: a self-winding subassembly that featured two so-called "gyrotrons" that replaced the click wheels used in traditional self-winding systems. (Their purpose is to convert the winding rotor's back-and-forth motions into unidirectional motion that winds the barrel.) The gyrotrons were more compact than click wheels and they made for slimmer watches. The first watch to incorporate the new winding system was called the Gyromatic and it came out in 1956.





1971

GP Quartz

Quartz watches have a frequency of 32,768 hertz: exceptions to this rule are as rare as hen's teeth. The GP Quartz watch, which was unveiled in 1971 and launched officially at the Basel fair the next year, was the first watch to incorporate a quartz crystal with that frequency. The watch had been five years in the making. The Swiss watch industry started developing quartz-controlled calibers for wristwatches in the early 1960s, setting up a collective research laboratory called the Centre Électronique Horlogèr SA (CEH) to do so. Girard-Perregaux did not join that effort, but instead decided to go it alone. In 1966, G-P CEO Charles Virchaux asked the young engineer Georges Vuffray to collaborate with a handful of G-P colleagues to develop Caliber GP350 in one of the brand's own laboratories. That year, the CEH came out with the first prototype of its quartz movement, the Beta 1, which had a frequency of 8,192 hertz. That frequency remained the industry norm for four years, until G-P introduced its movement, whose quartz crystal oscillated four times as fast. The dial of the watch pays homage to the electronics inside: it bears a design resembling an integrated circuit.

1976

Casquette

Luxury analog quartz watches were selling so well for Girard-Perregaux in the mid-1970s that the company decided to try its hand at a luxury digital watch with the Casquette. G-P took its inspiration from Hamilton's Pulsar watch, launched in 1972, a high-priced LED (light-emitting diode) watch that lit up to tell the time when the wearer pushed a button. The Casquette case, made of steel and a type of plastic called Makrolon, was shaped so that the time display – the smallest four-digit LED display then in existence – was vertical (the designers had drivers in mind). The watch contained Caliber 396, which measured 25.9 by 25.6 by 7.3 mm and required two batteries. The first push of the button, on the right-hand side of the case, activated the hours and minutes display, a second push activated the day and date, and a third the seconds. Another button on the left-hand side of the case could be pressed to adjust the displays.



1986

Equation Espace Perpétuelle

After a foray into digital watches in the 1970s, Girard-Perregaux turned back to analog ones, bringing out multi-function quartz models designed to be as simple and user-friendly as possible, with all the functions set via the crown and only the briefest operating instructions necessary. The crowning moment of this phase arrived in 1986, when G-P unveiled the Equation Espace Perpétuelle, which had perpetual calendar, leap-year and moon-phase displays. Equipped with Caliber 738, the watch had a running autonomy of four to five years so that the wearer seldom needed to reset its calendar functions.



1999

Scuderia

1929 – 1999

Girard-Perregaux marked the 70th birthday of Ferrari's Scuderia Ferrari by launching the Scuderia 1929–1999, a split-seconds chronograph produced in a limited series of 750 watches in various cases. (G-P had the license to make Ferrari watches at the time.) The watch could measure elapsed intervals to the eighth of a second and precisely display the result on its dial. This was accomplished via its *seconde foudroyante* ("lightning seconds") display at 9 o'clock. Such subdials had been used in 19th-century pocketwatches but never before in a wristwatch. When the chronograph was switched on, the hand in the subdial began to rotate once per second; when the chronograph was stopped, the hand's tip came to rest pointing to one of eight fractions of a second. Automatic Caliber GP8020 had a second barrel to provide the *seconde foudroyante* with six hours of running autonomy. The ordinary movement had a 40-hour power reserve.



1994

Caliber Family 3000

Under the direction of its new owner and CEO, Luigi "Gino" Macaluso, Girard-Perregaux in 1994 returned to the ranks of manufacturers of self-winding mechanical movements with the launch of the 3000 family of calibers. After approximately two years of developmental work, caliber family 3000 had matured to the point where it was ready for serial manufacturing. The basic caliber (3000) numbered among the slimmest of its kind: it was 23.9 mm in diameter and a mere 2.98 mm thick, yet nevertheless included a jumping-date display with rapid-reset mechanism. The construction could support either a center-mounted sweep seconds hand or small seconds subdial. The movement had a frequency of 28,800 vph, 27 jewels and a unidirectionally winding, ball-borne rotor. Caliber 3100 (see above) was derived from it. The main difference between the two calibers was the larger diameter of the 3100: 26.2 mm. One welcome result of this enlargement was a power reserve of at least 50 hours.



2003

Opera Three

The brand added to its choir of audible watches in 2003 when it introduced the Opera Three, the first wristwatch that plays music. Its musical mechanism is just like that in a music box: a metal cylinder bearing some 150 pins rotates, and as it does so the pins strike tiny tongues of metal and produce the desired notes. The watch can play two melodies, one from Mozart's "A Little Night Music" and the other from Tchaikovsky's "Swan Lake." The wearer chooses which tune he wants to hear via a button on the side of the case and his selection is shown on an indicator at 11 o'clock. The music plays on demand or, if the wearer so desires, automatically every hour. The power reserve for the music mechanism sits at 1 o'clock. The watch contains the hand-wound Caliber GP950, which has 50 hours of running autonomy.



2001

Opera Two

Girard-Perregaux's Opera Two is the epitome of complexity, with a perpetual calendar, tourbillon and Westminster carillon. Pushing the slide on the left side of the case, then releasing it, triggers Westminster chimes to sequentially ring the hours, quarter hours and minutes. Four hammers striking four gongs announce the quarter hours. Three of the four are always visible through an aperture in the dial. The fourth hammer comes into view only when minutes are being chimed.



2007

Vintage 1945 Jackpot Tourbillon

Despite its connection with one-armed bandits, this watch is a work of high horology. It has both a tourbillon and an intricate mechanism that mimics a slot machine. When the wearer pulls a lever on the right side of the case, three rollers are set in motion. Each roller bears five symbols around its circumference: spade, heart, club, horseshoe and bell. Like their larger counterparts in gambling casinos, the rollers sequentially stop in a random series. A little hammer strikes a gong to create a mellifluous sound. The three rollers can create a total of 125 different combinations of symbols. The entire device occupies a surface measuring just 32.6 by 38.6 mm. The watch contains Caliber GPFAY08 Jackpot, which has a power reserve of four days.

2005

Sea Hawk II Pro

As partner of the BMW-Oracle team in the competition for the 32nd America's Cup, Girard-Perregaux brought out a divers' watch more water resistant than any it had made before. The titanium case of the Sea Hawk II Pro could withstand 3,000 meters' worth of water pressure. It had two helium valves. The uncommonly hard and robust housing shielded a hand-wound, flying tourbillon movement with a power reserve of 110 hours. The watch had a carbon-fiber dial, impossible-to-overlook luminous hands and a rotating divers' bezel.

