

A Brief History of the Wristwatch

By Katrin Hundorf and Eduard Saluz

Published 2005 by the Deutsches Uhrenmuseum, Furtwangen (Germany); saddlestapled, 39 pages, many color illustrations, ISBN 3-922673-16-3 (concurrent editions in German 3-922673-14-7, and in French 3-922673-15-5), available from the DUM giftshop (<http://www.deutsches-uhrenmuseum.de/>), approx. \$5 plus postage, 35 or borrow from the Library & Research Center at the National Watch & Clock Museum.

Most horological museums treat the wristwatch as a stepchild, an everyday object, without a long history. The few wristwatches on display more often than not are extraordinary items, of great rarity, with rare complications, or fancy pieces of jewelry. Under its new director, Eduard Saluz, the German Clock and Watch Museum in Furtwangen has broken out of the mold: Over the last few years they have systematically collected the necessary pieces to tell the history of the wristwatch, which after all is the most significant history in horology for the 20th century. They have created an exhibit, which traces and illustrates all significant steps –both technically and sociologically- of wristwatch history in a hand-full of display cases. It is well worth visiting.

But few people will travel to the Black Forest just for that. So the museum has published a modest booklet summarizing this new addition to its exhibits. In keeping with the tradition started last year with its overall museum guide, the Deutsches Uhrenmuseum took the admirable step of publishing “A Brief History of the Wristwatch” concurrently in three different language editions (German, French and English).

In the opinion of this reviewer the resulting booklet is the best currently available concise overview on this subject. The authors identified 16 different technical or social developments that shaped the history of the wristwatch. Some of them are technical (like shock-absorbent pivot jewelery, waterproofing, self-winding, or quartz technology), while others are sociological (the watch brand as a status symbol, the sports watch, or the watch as a nearly-disposable fashion accessory). Each of these themes is explored on one page of text, faced with a page of illustrative examples, featuring both watches from the museum exhibit, and other illustrations, such as period advertisements.

This is not a scholarly essay on the subject, but an affordable popular introduction into a subject which most horological collectors have not given much thought. Given that not much else is available in this area, one can only hope that the publisher can find a US distributor for this innovative little text.

Review by Fortunat Mueller-Maerki, Sussex NJ
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