

Time flies

Aviation-inspired pieces make a welcome return journey, says Wendy Hu

Horology and aviation have a long history together. Alberto Santos-Dumont, an early Brazilian pilot, is credited with popularizing the modern style of men's timepieces.

Women had worn watches on their wrists since the 1880s, but in the early years of the 20th century, men of character still preferred pocket watches.

However, aviation pioneers needed easy access to their timekeepers without fiddling for fobs, so Louis Cartier created a handy wristwatch for Santos-Dumont in 1904, just a year after the Wright Brothers made their historic first flight at Kitty Hawk.

More than a century later, high-end marques still produce "pilot" ranges of watches, though the link with aviation grows ever more tenuous. Cartier, for example, makes a watch named after the Brazilian pioneer, but the motif of the Santos XL is neither plane nor pilot but bird of prey.

This limited edition of 20 pieces is constructed around a Calibre 430 MC mechanical movement with manual winding. The face features a grey-and-blue falcon hand-engraved in high relief and champlevé enamel. The rhodium-coated 18-karat white gold case is set with 49 baguette-cut diamonds.

IWC, meanwhile, introduced a pilot's chronograph dedicated to French aviator and author Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, who perished while flying a reconnaissance aircraft over the Mediterranean Sea 70 years ago this month.

The Pilot's Watch Mark XVII Edition "Le Petit Prince" features a Calibre 79320 auto-

matic movement. The 43mm stainless-steel case has a midnight blue dial with hands and appliques at 12, 3, 6 and 9 o'clock, coated with Super-LumiNova.

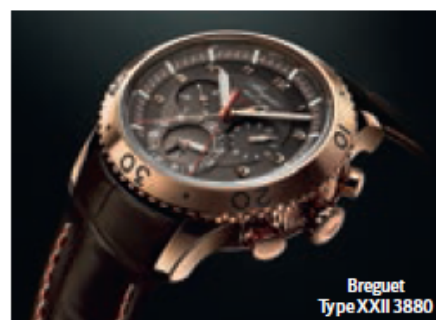
While the traditional horology craftsmen make art out of aviation, a few pioneering manufactories stay close to the genre's practicalities. Cartier's original design led to a few basic requirements for pilots: clear dials, large crowns for turning while wearing gloves and a reliable mechanical movement to ensure precision timekeeping.

Clean lines and neutral stainless steel finishes have long been the hallmark of pilots' watches. Montres Breguet has jazzed up its Type XXII 3880 with an elegant brown dial and a rose gold finish while maintaining the precision-engineered look of an aviator's wristwatch.

The 44mm timepiece includes a fly-back function – which allows the chronograph to be returned to zero and instantly restarted in one operation – and second time zone.

A more traditional distillation of the pilot watch design principles is found in the latest series produced by the Hamilton Watch Company, a storied maker of chronographs since 1892 and – after a series of mergers, demergers and dissolutions – now part of the Swatch Group.

Hamilton reached its zenith producing military-grade timepieces for a range of the world's armed services, including the United States Navy and the Royal Air Force, beginning in World War II, from its manufactory in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Hamilton now offers a contemporary touch on watches it had



created for the RAF in the 1970s through its Khaki Pilot Pioneer Aluminum series.

The 41mm asymmetrical aluminium cases feature a turning flange with a count-down function is set in motion via a crown positioned at 2 o'clock for maximum convenience. The face, with its easily readable Super-LumiNova digits is reminiscent of an aircraft cockpit panel.

Though Hamilton is now based in Switzerland, the U.S. continues to innovate with pilot watches. Corey Butler, a professional pilot, launched the Butler Watch Company in 2006 after finding inspiration as a fan of mechanical things and an aficionado of artistic form.

"We focus our watch models on useful function," Butler tells *A Plus* from the company headquarters in Carmel, California, south of San Francisco. "Each creation is weighted heavily towards styling cues that support the function of the watch, without superfluous visual distractions."

His flagship creation is the Butler Professional Series J80 Chronograph, which features a 30-minute timer sub-dial and centre stop-second hand. This snappy watch, built around a Ronda Calibre 5021.D analog quartz movement, is 40mm in diameter and comes in a stainless steel case with either a brushed metal or matte black finish.

Another modern design house is Swiss-based Torgoen, founded in 1998 by a group of pilots and aviation enthusiasts. The Torgoen T7 even features a classic E6B flight computer, the iconic pilot's circular slide rule developed in World War II to calculate wind correction, fuel burn and other vital flying data. **A**



Butler Professional Series J80 Chronograph