

INDEPENDENT THINKING THE CERTINA WAY

The 128-year-old brand Certina has an established record of being at the forefront of many horological advances.

BY ALAN SEYMOUR



Muhammad Ali being presented with a Certina DS DiaMaster in 1976.

Founded as an anonymous movement and components factory in 1888 by brothers Alfred and Adolf Kurth, Certina first started producing complete watches 18 years later under the name Grana. With an uninterrupted production since its initial founding in the 19th century, Certina (the new name was registered in 1939) can boast of being one of the first companies to ever produce wristwatches, one of the first to produce a digital display watch and of making real headway with shock and water-resistant watches.

Renowned watchmaker Peter Roberts, a keen collector of vintage Certinas, says: “I spent some time at the Certina factory in the early 1970s and have been an admirer of the watches ever since. I was impressed by the autonomy of the manufacturing and

the independent thinking of the design team. Although one hesitates to use the term ‘in house’, this factory truly was – not only did it manufacture all the parts, it had its own tool-making department, metal laboratory and heat treatment furnace. Few other factories were this independent.”

THE TOUGH ONE

In the mid-1950s, with co-founder Alfred Kurth’s sons Erwin and Hans now running Certina, the company set about designing and building what they hoped would become the world’s most resilient and rugged timepiece, under the direction of head engineer Philip Kurth – Erwin’s son. Subsequently launched in 1959, the DS (or Double Security) was, at the time, easily one of the toughest watches around. Available with either an automatic or

manual-wind movement, it was able to withstand the shock from a 6m drop and up to 200m of water pressure.

The DS’s previously unheard-of level of resistance was made possible thanks to several design features and patents. Its main innovation was that case, movement and dial never came into contact – all were separated by either a gap or rubber gasket, helping to dissipate any trauma the watch sustained. The movement (the element most susceptible to shocks) was suspended within a synthetic-rubber ring, allowing the calibre to “float” and absorb the maximum amount of shock. A more conventional Incabloc was also included, as well as extra seals, thicker plexiglass crystal and a reinforced screw-on caseback.

Roberts says of the DS: “In conjunction with case-makers

Huguenin Frères, Certina produced the first super shockproof wristwatch using an elastically mounted movement. These types of super-strong waterproof watches have always appealed to me and I have in my collection other later models using the same principle – the IWC Yacht Club, Zenith Defy, Tissot PR 516 – in fact, I liked this system so much that I incorporated it in to my design for the Martin-Baker watch when I was the Technical Director at Bremont.”



THE SPORTY ONE

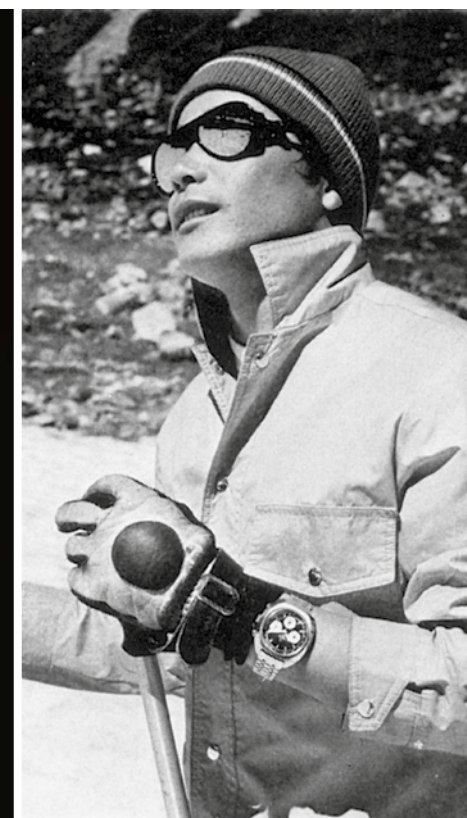
No manufacturer’s collection of watches is truly complete without a chronograph. First introduced in the late 1960s, Certina’s Chronolympic line was by far the brand’s most popular range of chronographs. The initial model – ref. 8501 503 – was followed by the Chronolympic DS-2 (refs. 8501 300 and 8501 800), a version incorporating Certina’s Double Security technology.

The more basic ref. 8501 503 has a gently curved, 38mm tonneau-shaped steel case, featuring either a blue or white dial with contrasting sub-dials and a manual-winding Valjoux 726 movement. The DS-2s had 42.5mm cushion-shaped cases, with both compax and bi-compax layouts in a variety of colour combinations. These, too, were powered by a manual-winding Valjoux movement (subsequent models used automatic Valjoux, electronic tuning forks and latterly quartz movements) and a range of calibres including the 726, 232 and 234 could be found at the heart of the DS-2.



In 1970, members of a Japanese expedition to scale Mount Everest were equipped with DS-2 Chronolympics as their timekeepers. According to reports, the Certinas resisted the arduous conditions well and met with all the expedition’s demands. One of the participants, Yuichiro Miura, also became the first person to ski down the 8,848m peak. His daring exploit would go on to become the topic of the Academy Award-winning documentary *The Man Who Skied Down Everest* (1975). Using a parachute as a windbreak, Miura travelled approximately 2,000m in two minutes and 20 seconds.

Clockwise from bottom image: The original DS; the 1971 Chronolympic Regatta model; the Chronolympic DS-2; Yuichiro Miura wearing his Chronolympic DS-2 during his expedition to Mount Everest in 1970.



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Another Chronolympic milestone model was the Regatta from 1971. As the name suggests it was designed as a yacht timer and was the only Chronolympic to feature a rectangular curved-edge case with hooded lugs, measuring 40 x 44mm. But its true appeal lies in the extraordinary, almost psychedelically coloured dial, which includes hues of red, cream and blue offset by the four central hands in orange, white and duck egg blue. It serves as a great example of flamboyant 1970s horological design.



THE QUIRKY ONE

During the 1970s, the 19th-century concept of biorhythms became increasingly popular, particularly in the United States. The belief that an individual's life is affected by several biological cycles (intellectual, emotional and physical), resulted in an effort to calculate them in order to predict aspects of one's life with them. Largely discredited by the scientific community as hokum, it did, however, prompt the production of an interesting watch.



In the mid-1960s, Certina introduced the Biostar, the first watch to display the wearer's daily biorhythms. Initially launched in a 35mm round case with a manually wound movement, the second iteration was launched in 1971 and had a 39mm cushion-shaped case and electronic movement. Both versions featured a semi-circular window at 12 o'clock, displaying biorhythmic information from three multi-coloured revolving discs. The red and white disc represented intellectual biorhythms, a cycle of 33 days; the blue and white disc emotional, 28 days; and the green and white disc physical, with a 23-day cycle. The watch would be adjusted to the wearer's date of birth and in theory would, at a glance, display his or her biorhythm – as well as the time and date, of course.

THE MOTORING ONE

Now fairly commonplace, a car and watch manufacturer collaborating on a limited-edition timepiece was pretty novel in the early-1980s. But, coinciding with the founding of Audi's Quattro GmbH subsidiary in 1983, the German automobile company collaborated with Certina to create a special timepiece.

A self-winding Valjoux 7750-powered chronograph with 100m of water resistance, the Quattro by Certina was designed with motorsport in mind. Only available in Audi's native Germany and in a limited production run, four versions of the watch were brought to market – two in steel with either a black or white dial, and two with a black titanium-carbide coated case also with either black or white dial. The watch featured a tachymeter scale, three chronograph sub-dials at 6, 9 and 12 o'clock plus day and date windows sandwiched by the legends "quattro" and "by Certina" at 3 o'clock.

When new, the timepiece was delivered in a branded leather box containing what the promotional material described as "five different wear adapters" – basically five alternative straps including a bracelet matching the watchcase, a standard-length black leather strap, an extended black-leather strap for wearing over a racing suit, a black leather fob strap and a long looped cord, designed so the watch can worn around the neck, like a stopwatch.

Clockwise from top: The strange and wonderful Certina Biostar; created in collaboration with Audi, the Quattro by Certina was a practical and versatile chronograph.



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THE JAZZY ONE

Another of Certina's collaborations saw the brand team up with fellow watch manufacture Rado for the creation of the DS DiaMaster. First presented in 1975, the DiaMaster's USP lay in the fact it was virtually scratch-proof thanks to its tungsten carbide case and sapphire crystal.

The case was supplied by master of materials Rado, which actually used the same case for its Diastar watches. Construction of the case involved mixing tungsten and carbon and then compressing the powder through sintering, resulting in a super scratch-resistant material and a case with a hardness of 8.5 on the Mohs scale – almost double that of steel – and 220m of water resistance.

The DiaMaster featured myriad dial options, ranging from white to autumnal orange, aqua blue, tropical green and even tiger's eye. Along with the expected "CERTINA", "DS" and "Automatic" text, the dials of the first Diamaster were also discreetly co-signed "RADO" at 6 o'clock. A heavyweight of the watch industry at the time, it seems only fitting that Certina presented Muhammad Ali with a DiaMaster in 1976.

Speaking about his company's past, Certina's President, Adrian Bossard, says: "Not a lot of brands can look back at such heritage and also such a long history of uninterrupted production. This is something that is really important to us and also makes us very proud."

"We have a lot of traditional pieces through which we are inspired to create novelties and new pieces with this vintage feeling." And, whether new milestones are reached, or old ones revisited, the 21st-century Certina intends to keep hitting the horological high notes. ★



The co-branded, scratch-resistant DiaMaster.

THE CONTEMPORARY ONE

True to Bossard's word, the DS-1 Powermatic 80 "Himalayan Special Edition" is available as a part of the company's current Heritage Collection. Celebrating the original Certina DS as well as a 1960 expedition to the mountain range, where participants were equipped with DSs.

Utilising a self-winding ETA Powermatic 80 movement, the watch features appropriate 1960s vintage styling. An engraving, honouring the expedition, can be found on the sapphire-crystal exhibition back of the 40mm stainless-steel case. The updated version – of course – also features Certina's groundbreaking Double Security concept.

Available at £530, the DS-1 Powermatic represents a great entry point for a young, first-time mechanical watch buyer. ★

