

CLASSIC DRIVER

Time is golden... or maybe platinum? Our favourites from the Geneva watch auctions

Lead

Twice a year, watch dealers and enthusiasts assemble in Geneva to attend the horological auctions held by Christie's, Sotheby's and Antiquorum. Between 11 and 14 May, 1,075 timepieces will find new owners – and here are our favourites...

Watches that are not only beautiful, but also unique, are often given the title 'important'. At least two of the timepieces from the [Christie's auction](#) fall into this category: a [Patek Philippe platinum cushion-shaped minute repeater from the 1920s \(lot 101\)](#), and a [gold 1949 Rolex with a cloisonné enamel dial \(lot 207\)](#).

Two special specimens



In the first half of last century, Henry Graves Jr. was one of Patek Philippe's most valued clients, and he was often given the opportunity to commission special-request models as a result. At the time, the movements of [minute repeaters](#) were usually at least 50mm in diameter. Mr Graves, perhaps as a challenge to the Patek Philippe watchmakers, requested one measuring half that width, with a case that's just 29mm across. Due to the downsized movement and the astounding workmanship required to complete it, the watch was decades ahead of its time. Meanwhile, the cloisonné dial of the Rolex was the work of Geneva-based artist Marguerite Koch who was, at the time, also creating intricate faces for Patek Philippe and Vacheron Constantin watches. For several years, this important Rolex has been kept hidden away, but now its resurfacing will perhaps further its already significant value.

Vintage wristwatches for all budgets



As well as pieces worthy of a museum exhibit, the Geneva auctions also have plenty of vintage wristwatches in easier-to-swallow price brackets. Right from the off at the Christie's sale (lots 2-8), some interesting and affordable chronographs – all proudly exhibiting a style popular during the 1970s – will go under the hammer with affordable estimates attached. Ambitious amateur investors can also find attractive watches with appreciation potential: the Patek Philippe model ref. 2526 features a beautiful automatic movement and is offered in several variants (Christie's lots 51, 93 and 96; Sotheby's lot 267). Also of interest to the Patek collector will be the previous ref. 565/570 Calatrava models (Christie's lots 41, 49 and 50; Sotheby's lots 200 and 248; Antiquorum lot 18), which laid the foundations for Patek's ongoing success since the 1940s.

Sporting Rolexes



Like the Pateks, classic sports Rolexes vary hugely in price. At top end are the 'big crown' James Bond Submariners, Bakelite GMTs and hand-winding Daytonas, the latter produced in many variants. Also special is Lot 269 at the Antiquorum sale: the Submariner ref. 5513, which features a so-called 369 Explorer dial, a highlight in itself. But the appeal of this watch is furthered by the presence of small silver lines on the dial, known as 'underlines'. Rolex printed these onto the watch faces retrospectively, in order to replace the luminous (but also radioactive) tritium markers of the early models. The icing on the cake for this particular watch is the also-retrospectively printed double 'T<25' signature. For high-end enthusiasts with less-stratospheric incomes, the Sea Dweller 2000 ref. 1665 is offered in a variety of styles (Christie's lots 153 and 155-157; Sotheby's lots 178, 290 and 292; Antiquorum lots 102, 205), or there are the second-generation Milgauss models ref. 1019 (Christie's lots 88 and 162; Sotheby's lot 294) – a sound choice with or without the guarantee and box.



Three examples of the Rolex model ref. 6062 give rise to dreams. Perhaps due to the contrasting combination of a large, water- and dust-resistant housing and a rather poetic complication, this Moonphase was not a commercial success. This might also be partly explained by the fact that, because the handle is recessed into the case, it was not quite as waterproof as Rolex claimed. Fewer than 500 were ever produced, but their rarity now equates to high demand. Special examples – such as Lot 342 at the Sotheby's auction, with rare starred indexes – regularly achieve record prices.

Gentlemen, raise your paddles!



The emergence of a Rolex Moonphase with a black dial is an event in itself – and there is usually an interesting story to go with it. That of the Rolex Oyster Perpetual offered by Christie's surely has a fascinating, if not yet discovered, tale to tell. The dial design corresponds to the 1960s style, yet the calibre and casing it has was produced in the first half of the 1950s. This suggests that the dial was added to the older movement and housing in order to shift units. It borders on the incredible that a watch with a similar design, albeit with a white face, will be offered in the same auction (lot 366). Here, the dial is of the same period as the housing and movement, but exhibits unusual precision printing on the dial. The case numbers of both watches are only four digits away from each other.

It's worth remembering that, no matter how much you intend to spend, you should carefully check the condition of the watch(es) you intend to bid on. We strongly recommend attending the previews, which commence on May 10. Gentlemen, raise your paddles!

Gallery

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