

# CLASSIC DRIVER

## Million Dollar Rolex



**With its light-faded numerals and less than immaculate dial, the 1942 Rolex chronograph that appeared as lot 129 in the Christie's flagship Geneva watch sale on Monday hardly looked a million dollars - but that's what it fetched, establishing a new record price for any Rolex at auction.**

As is often the case with highly collectable watches, the price was not governed by the material from which the piece was made - the case was a simple, stainless steel one - but by rarity: just 12 examples of the reference 4113 are thought to have been made and only eight survive. As a result, several leading collectors from around the world were vying to own it, with the eventual winner being an anonymous bidder who had to stump up a premium-inclusive \$1,163,340 to beat off the opposition.

Back in May 2004, Christie's set a Rolex record when it sold a reference 6062 triple calendar model for SFr 465,000, a price that was almost matched last November when Sotheby's achieved SFr 464,500 for a 1969 Cosmograph Daytona 'Paul Newman' - but, until now, no vintage Rolex has managed to break through the magic seven-figure barrier.

As well as being exceptionally rare, the ref 4113 model is also ultra-desirable because of its large case size - 44mm - and the fact that it is the only split seconds chronograph model ever produced by Rolex. Extensive research by Christie's watch department head Aurel Bacs revealed that it had the split seconds feature for a very good reason: every known example of the model has had a link with the world of car racing.

Even more specifically, the majority of those that have been offered for sale during the past 30 years have connections with Sicily which, as many Classic Driver readers will know, was the home of the 'Giro Automobilistico di Sicilia', once the biggest closed circuit race in Europe and later known as the Targa Florio. Although the event was postponed from 1940 to 1948, it seems possible that the reference 4113s, which were all completed in 1942, were in some way connected with it – one notable ref 4113 owner was Stefano La Motta, Barone di Salinella, who died in the 1951 race after his Alfa 1900 hit a house at high speed.

The Christie's watch was last seen at auction in London in October 1991 – when it fetched less than £60,000.

Despite the large sum achieved, the Rolex was merely the fourth most expensive watch sold at Christie's on Monday. The top price of – wait for it – \$3.6 million was paid for a 1928 Patek Philippe single button chronograph; and two other Pateks each made more than \$1.2 million apiece.

*Text: [Simon de Burton](#)*

*Photos: Christie's*

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