

CLASSIC DRIVER



Icons of watchmaking history: Audemars Piguet Royal Oak

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In our new series, 'icons of watchmaking history', expert Gisbert L. Brunner looks at a selection of watches which have achieved cult status. This week, it's the 1972 Audemars Piguet Royal Oak.

Hot or not? A great many new watch models appear on the market every year, some of which only survive for a year, while others hold their own for decades. The Royal Oak by Audemars Piguet is one of the long-term winners.

As the world's first high-end steel sports watch, there were a fair few sniggers from industry pundits when Audemars Piguet unveiled the Royal Oak - with its innovative porthole design - at Baselworld in 1972. Legendary watch designer Gérald Genta was responsible for this '*objet de discorde*'. Not only

did its unusual shape cause surprise, but even more shocking was the fact that it cost more than most of the gold watches Audemars Piguet was making at the time – even though it was created ‘only’ from stainless steel.



The competition can stop laughing now. The Royal Oak was the herald of a new dawn – as the first luxury sports watch, it set a trend that has continued through the four decades since its launch, and as a result has become a true watchmaking legend. Meanwhile, Audemars Piguet – not in good shape in 1972 – has gone from strength to strength, thanks largely to the launch-pad of the Royal Oak.

Next week: The Breitling Navitimer

Text: Gisbert L. Brunner

Photos: Audemars Piguet

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