

CLASSIC DRIVER

Reinventing the classic sports chronograph with Singer Reimagined

Lead

The explosive popularity of Singer Vehicle Design's exquisitely restored Porsche 911s has led founder Rob Dickinson to team up with watch designer Marco Borraccino to radically reimagine the iconic 1970s sports chronograph. Rémi Dargegen caught up with Borraccino at the brand's Geneva studios...

Singer rocked the watch world earlier this year when it revealed the Track1 Chronograph, a revolutionary take on the classic sports watch directly influenced by the philosophy of the California company's fabulously restored Porsche 911s. Employing the expertise of designer and former head of design at Officine Panerai, Marco Borraccino, and Agenhor's Jean-Marc Wiederrecht, the Track1 Chronograph is aesthetically inspired by the sports chronographs of the 1960s and '70s, yet it incorporates an innovative central-stem chronograph movement that's been in the works for 10 years.



Unlike a regular chronograph, it displays the time at the periphery of the dial, while the chronograph takes centre stage, and you can measure up to 60 hours, rather than the more typical 12. Our house photographer Rémi Dargegen paid Marco Borraccino a visit to Singer Reimagined's Geneva HQ, to find out why and how the brand beloved by so many car enthusiasts made its first obsessive step into the world of watches.

What are your earliest automotive memories?

I have a few of them, because I've always had a deep passion for cars. When I was a child, my father was involved in the management of Peugeot in Italy. I often used to visit dealers and trade shows with him, as well as the presentations of new models. I remember the day he came home from Paris with an official photograph of the new Peugeot 205. Several months later, he brought a Turbo 16 home, and it was incredible. During the same period, my uncle owned a Lancia Fulvia Montecarlo, and to this day, it's still one of my dream cars.





Did this impressionable period of your life influence your later aesthetic tastes?

Absolutely. Furthermore, my grandpa was an artist and a real geek. He used to buy every new gadget and contraption, and I’ve kept all his colourful lamps, telephones, and televisions. It helped me to grow my sensitivity to a certain aesthetic from a certain period of time that I’m still very much attached to. The point is that, during the 1960s and ’70s, a lot of things happened design-wise — new material development, for example, or the feeling that people wanted to cross boundaries in terms of shapes and functionality. Everything was pushed to its limits.

Could you tell us a little bit about your career before you became involved in this Singer Reimagined project?

I started my career in the late 1990s in Italy, working as a product designer in the accessories field. I started working for an Italian watch company in 2000, setting up a design studio with three other guys. That was my step into watchmaking. After that, I joined Panerai in 2004, where I was the first designer hired by the company. There, I had the chance to create the design department with the CEO, and I managed that department for four or five years. At that point, I needed more of a challenge. Don’t get me wrong, I loved working for Panerai, but it was not enough, because I wasn’t able to express all my creativity. So, I decided to move from Milan to Geneva, where I set up my own design studio, immediately working for brands in the watchmaking field.



What prompted the decision for Singer to create a watch?

It was entirely out of the blue. I met Rob briefly and we chatted about everything. We discovered we shared a passion for vintage watches, as well as classic cars. I told him about what I did for a living and that if he was ever interested in making a Singer watch, he should call me. He said he’d had several proposals from watch brands looking to work with him, but he’d refused, because, in his mind, he wanted everything related to Singer to be spectacular and different — not just another gimmicky co-branding exercise. I suggested a watch that would entirely fit the philosophy of Singer Vehicle Design, without compromise, and that was the reason he accepted. There was zero business talk — I just made the right proposal at the right time.

Were you given carte blanche in the design process?

Once we’d held the first discussions, I immediately saw a thousand possibilities in my mind, so I started drawing and conceiving the watch. And actually, the initial sketches are very similar to the piece you see today — there was already the central chronograph dial and a side indication of the time, for example. I really wanted to inject the same 1960s and ’70s spirit of the Porsche 911s reimagined by Singer into the watch. By chance, I love and collect vintage watches, and the Heuer Autavia and the Omega Speedmaster from this era are two of my favourites. Quite quickly, the design was inspired by those iconic pieces.



But actually, the main goal was to reimagine the most important element of those watches — the chronograph movement. As Singer Vehicle Design reimagine something that's important to the automotive community, I wanted to reimagine something important to the watch community. The only way we could imagine a Singer watch was if it completely revolutionised the way the chronograph was displayed.

In what ways were you inspired by the Porsche 911s restored by Singer Vehicle Design?

Aesthetically, the connection is really the style — the shapes that were designed and measured in the same epoch, the 1960s and '70s. The barrel shape of the watch, for example, echoes that of several watches that were produced during that time. We didn't want to make a watch that explicitly fitted the cars, but there are a few subtle details that tilt their hats to Singer Vehicle Design. What's important is that both the car and the watch follow the same philosophy. Of course, they work together, but they're not co-dependent.

Could you elaborate on this shared philosophy?

Well, when you see one of the cars in the street, you might just think it's a beautiful classic Porsche. But when you look closer, you understand the passion, work, and technology behind it. It's the same with the watch — with its shape and face, you have elements that are familiar, but scratch the surface, and you'll see everything is different. You need to forget everything you know about chronographs, because this is an entirely new paradigm. It's this characteristic that Rob and I enjoy so much.



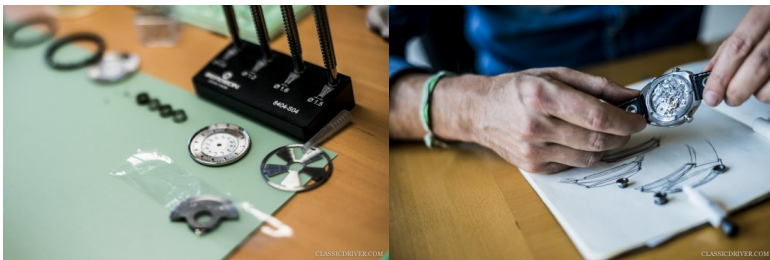


So, what do you find when you scratch the surface?

This watch lets you tell so many stories because there are a lot of things to explain, many of which are hidden. Take the aluminium hat on top of the central seconds hands — it's exactly the same aluminium hat found in the speedometer needles of vintage Porsches. And underneath the dial, which you'll never see, the wheel that drives the aluminium discs is shaped like a Fuchs wheel. Furthermore, the grommets in the rally strap are titanium and screwed down, and are shaped like those on the Singer Vehicle Design seats.

How did you settle on the AgenGraphe movement for the Track1 Chronograph?

It sounds cliché to say it, but I didn't choose it — destiny brought it to me. I designed this watch because the idea was to reimagine the chronograph. Once we agreed that this was the way to do it, I put together a business plan of the administrative stuff to see if the project was feasible, and I start meeting watchmakers to ask them to develop the movement. I invited Jean-Marc Wiederrecht from Agenhor to lunch and started telling him about the project. He told me not to bother...until I put my drawings and renderings on the table. Completely by chance, he told me he'd been working on this exact chronograph concept, one that didn't yet exist, for seven years. We'd had the same idea at different times — it was as simple as that.



How do you balance your passion for watches with your passion for cars?

It's a matter of space — if I could just invest in cars, then I for sure would. But, I don't have the means to be a car geek! If one day I ever have the chance to seriously collect cars, I'd spend all my time doing it. Today, I have a first-production Porsche 993 Carrera 2 and a BMW Z4 M Coupé. I'm sure the latter is going to become collectable. It's a car that, when first presented, it wasn't very well received. But if you look at the lines on the car today, it's still absolutely contemporary.

Regardless of budget, what's your dream car?

The problem is that I change my mind every five minutes. But my ultimate three-car garage is easy: the Ferrari 288 GTO, the Alfa Romeo Tipo 33 Stradale, and the Lancia Stratos.

Photos: Rémi Dargegen for Classic Driver © 2017

Gallery

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