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Family affair – A watch and a passion for racing that binds father and son

15 January 2021 | Alexandra Felts

The new Tissot Heritage Navigator Chrono Auto 1973 isn't just reminiscent of its motorsport-themed predecessor. It also embodies the legacy of Swiss racing driver Loris Kessel – and his connection to his son Ronnie



Sometimes, sparkling ideas need the exact opposite of calm and quiet to arise: In September 2019, Swiss Ferrari specialist Ronnie Kessel won the challenging Bernina GT event in a 1977 Ensign F1 car – hailing from a period when the British team was supported by Tissot.

When the Swiss watch brand first got involved in F1 as a sponsor, it looked for a Swiss driver as an ambassador and found Loris Kessel, Ronnie's father and at the time Jacky Ickx's team-mate at Brabham. Back then, Loris wore the Tissot Navigator Chronographe sports watch, which had been launched in 1973. And in the crisp mountain air of the Bernina race, the idea arose of writing a new chapter with this watch, which is so closely linked to the Kessel family.



This Tissot Heritage Chrono Auto 1973 belongs to that exclusive circle of chronographs that are not only inspired by the golden era of motorsport, but actually fulfilled a function on racing drivers' wrists. With a diameter of 43mm and a height of 46.6mm, the watch is not only striking, it's also easy to read at any time. The slightly suggested barrel shape of the stainless-steel case – typical of the '70s style – hides a Valjoux automatic movement caliber A05.H31 with a great power reserve of 60 hours.

The mushroom-shaped pushers on the side are typical of '70s watch design, too. Also based on the predecessor is the look of the dial, which can be selected from three variants, featuring matt black hands with Superluminova coating. The displays in the heart of the dial also include 30-minute and 12-hour counters. Elsewhere, the motorsport DNA is accentuated by the tachymeter scale (whose markings reach up to 500km/h) on the edge of the dial, and through the openwork leather strap – an innovation by Tissot from 1965, designed to be more comfortable in a hot racing-car cockpit.



Since 2018, Tissot has been a partner of Kessel Classics as well as the Kessel Racing team: the two passions of Ronnie Kessel, who inherited not only the important Ferrari dealership in Lugano from his father, but also his racing genes. As well as taking him to Bernina GT victory, Ronnie's very special blue-and-yellow Ensign also won the Monaco Historic Grand Prix 2016 with former F1 driver Alex Caffi at the wheel.

The connection with the traditional Swiss watch brand has another aspect. "In the area of historic motorsport, we start with every car that has had a watch from the Tissot Heritage Collection dedicated to it," says Ronnie. "This includes the Lancia Stratos, the Porsche 911 RS and the Renault A110 Alpine in which I competed in the Monte Carlo Classic."





As it happened, the 20th anniversary of Kessel Classics fell in the difficult year of 2020, when all the major concours events and historic motorsport meetings had to be cancelled – including The ICE in St. Moritz. “Nevertheless, many people came along. It has become a movement,” says Ronnie happily – adding that he has already made many plans for the postponed birthday party.



So what was it like to master a hillclimb on an Alpine pass in a thoroughbred Formula 1 car? “A challenging road in a challenging car,” he says with dry understatement. And of course, he wore his father's Tissot, which served him well. Like Loris, Ronnie now acts as a brand ambassador for the company. “The Tissot Heritage awakens a longing for the '70s,” he says. “This era took motorsport to a new level, as well as giving us the most beautiful cars, great music and great design that still has an impact today. I wish I'd been alive then!”

It's by no means just watches and motorsport that are a Kessel family affair. “The Bernina race starts in the small town of La Rösä in the Grisons in Puschlav and then climbs up,” explains Ronnie. “You have to know that our home was in La Rösä. My father drove this route every day. I accompanied him as a toddler, sometimes in a Ferrari, sometimes in a classic car.” The Bernina GT was held for the first time in 2015 – too late for Loris, who passed away in 2010, to experience for himself. “But he always dreamed of this hillclimb,” says Ronnie. “In the Tissot Ensign that he bought for our collection in the '90s, he wanted to face the challenge of these serpentine corners!”



Tissot is more than a watch for the Kessels. The brand was a milestone in Loris' career and is a piece of family history for his son, that lives on today even after 50 years. "Measurable time is everything in racing," says Ronnie. "That sharpens your sense of how quickly it passes. This year, it stopped for all of us, and we had to come to the harsh realisation that time lost can't be regained."

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