



Gem Talk

by Michael S. George

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Watches

In this issue I would like to explore watches. Many have been intrigued by watches these days as is evident in the diversity of designs and sheer numbers sold. For example in the month of December in 1998 more watches were sold than the combined total for the previous 11 months in our store.

I believe that fashion has set the pace for the explosion of watch designs as well as sales. If you think about it you probably have more than one watch and if you are like most of us you have four or more watches. There was a day when having one watch was all you needed and then two were needed; one for daily wear and one for Sundays and good wear. Today we need a watch to match our outfit or to tell us when our next appointment is or give our pulse rate while running just to mention a few. So now that we have become so sophisticated we find it necessary to have our watch become a sophisticated tool also, thus the entrance of the quartz accurate movement in our modern watches today. Many of these are guaranteed to be accurate to a minute per year, and generally they are, but did you know that there are only two types of quartz chips? (The brains behind the movement.) The best can cost a whopping \$.25, that's right twenty-five CENTS. So why the high cost of some watches?

The answer is simple, 1) plastic versus metal, 2) gold versus stainless steel and 3) jewels or not. Allow me to explain:

The movement may be made of plastic or metal parts and it is obvious that metal will hold up to wear and tear much longer and better than plastic. This is a factor in the value of a watch as is the place of origin of the movement. A movement from China, Hong Kong or Japan may be functional, but are not as recognized as the

Swiss movements for quality and endurance. When buying a watch ask where the movement was made. ETA movements are the most recognized and typically the finest brand of watch movements in the industry.

Another major factor affecting the price of a watch is the material the case is made of. Plastic, pot metal, stainless steel, silver and gold are the most widely used, with gold plating over stainless steel being the most common today. When gold is employed, the karat of gold used is relevant of course. The typical fine watch today is one with a mineral crystal, which makes it scratch resistant, water resistant so if immersed in water will not rust and gold plated over stainless steel with 5 to 20 microns of gold. 10 to 20 microns of plated gold will keep your watch looking good for a period of 5 years or more, depending on your body chemistry and wear habits.

Many of the finer watches today have jeweled movements and the purpose of this is to reduce friction where metal might be touching metal in a moving part of the mechanism. The jewels that are used the most are genuine and synthetic rubies known as corundum. This is due to the fact that corundum is so hard.

When purchasing a watch be aware of these above-mentioned factors and remember that "you get what you pay for". Try not to overpay for a watch because of its style, but place more value on the quality of the mechanism remembering that this is brains behind the beauty and isn't that why we wear a watch in the first place?

Mechanical movement watches are making a comeback, due to the Swiss and their love of quality craftsmanship in watch making. The last 20 years have been depressing for them with regards to watches, because there is so little that can be done when a quartz watch needs repair except to replace the movement, but with a mechanical watch adjustments can be made and parts can be replaced allowing the craftsman the opportunity to maintain a fine watch for many years. Soon you will be seeing more on the self-winding, automatic style watch. This watch employs a mini generator inside the watch-case that stores energy in a cell and is capable of being quartz accurate (from what they tell us. The proof is in the pudding.) Time will tell. Ha ha!

