
FROM UTILITARIAN TOOL WATCH TO CULTURAL ICON

The Big Pilot's Watch embodies all the expertise IWC Schaffhausen has amassed over the years through developing and manufacturing professional instruments for the cockpit. But thanks to its utilitarian, purely functional design and a long series of special editions, the Big Pilot's Watch has also established itself as a cultural icon, with an appeal extending far beyond the watch industry.

A striking conical crown, a strap with four rivets, and an uncluttered, easy-to-read dial: No other model by IWC Schaffhausen is as well-known or instantly recognisable as the Big Pilot's Watch.

The story of this now iconic model began around the turn of the millennium. Under the aegis of then-director Günter Blümlein, the "Big Pilot's Watch - Mark XXI" project team worked non-stop to develop a groundbreaking new timepiece for pilots. It was not only to reflect the company's heritage in the production of robust, reliable instruments for the cockpit but also to point a new way forward to the future of the pilot's watch. And, by April 2002 the time had come. IWC unveiled the "Big Pilot's Watch Ref. 5002": 46.2 millimetres in diameter, 15.2 millimetres high, and weighing 150 grams.

Starting with the 5001 calibre, with its central seconds and pocket watch movement dimensions, everything about the watch was larger than life. For its 5000-calibre family, IWC reintroduced Albert Pellaton's ingenious self-winding system. The sophisticated mechanism uses even minimal movements of the rotor in either direction to wind the mainspring and is exceptionally efficient. This was the first time an IWC automatic movement also came with a seven-day power reserve.

The inspiration for the uncompromisingly functional design in the style of an easy-to-read cockpit instrument came from the Big Pilot's Watch Calibre 52 T.S.C. With its 55-millimetre diameter, this military observation watch was unveiled in 1940 and is still the largest wristwatch ever made by IWC. The oversized crown was another detail the modern Big Pilot's Watch shared with its historic ancestor: It enabled pilots to adjust their watches even when wearing their padded flight gloves.

From the outside, the Big Pilot's Watch has only undergone small changes since 2002. In the meantime, the 9 has disappeared from the dial, and the numerals have been slightly modified. Its appearance has always remained true to its pure, utilitarian DNA. However, over the years the mechanism inside the case has seen continuous improvement. In 2006, the "Slow Beat" 5011 calibre gave way to the 3.Hertz, 5111-calibre version, and from 2016 movements from the 52000-calibre family were also used for the Big Pilot's Watch. They feature Pellaton winding reinforced with ceramic components and use two barrels to store energy.

In just a few years, the Big Pilot's Watch has evolved from a utilitarian "tool watch" into a cultural icon whose appeal now extends far beyond the watch industry. Around 80 special editions of this model, produced in small series, have also

played a significant role in its success. They were developed for retail partners or available exclusively at selected boutiques. Many of them feature bold, eye-catching colours and have long been highly coveted collector's items. Unforgettable examples include the "Platinum Blue" Jordan Big Pilot's Watch, the Big Pilot's Watch Edition "Muhammad Ali" or the "DFB" Big Pilot's Watch Edition produced for the German Football Association.

Although the Big Pilot's Watch has a long-standing heritage as a "tool watch", it has also been no stranger to complications. The spectrum ranges from the big date and annual calendar through to the perpetual calendar and constant-force tourbillon.

In the almost 20 years that have passed since then, the design has also been released in every material imaginable. In addition to stainless steel, titanium, 18-carat 5N gold, white gold and platinum, it is also available in ceramic and carbon.

The Big Pilot's Watch is the choice of many entrepreneurs, artists, actors and athletes. It has a particularly notable following in Hollywood, the heart of the American film industry, and has also been spotted on the wrists of many personalities from the world of sport.

Now, fittingly, IWC continues to write the success story of "Project XXI" in 2021. In the Big Pilot's Watch 43, stripped of its date window and power reserve display, the Schaffhausen watch manufacturer presents an even purer interpretation of the iconic design in an ergonomic 43-millimetre case. The proportions of the case, horns and cone-shaped crown have been retained. For this reason, the somewhat more compact Big Pilot's Watch 43 feels just as big on the wrist as its famous name implies.

IWC SCHAFFHAUSEN

In 1868, the American watchmaker and entrepreneur Florentine Ariosto Jones travelled from Boston to Switzerland and founded the 'International Watch Company' in Schaffhausen. His visionary dream was to combine advanced American manufacturing methods with the craftsmanship of Swiss watchmakers to make the best pocket watches of his time. In doing so, he not only laid the foundation for IWC's unique engineering approach but also established the centralised production of mechanical watches in Switzerland.

Over its 150 year history, IWC Schaffhausen has developed a reputation for creating functional complications, especially chronographs and calendars, which are ingenious, robust, and easy for customers to use. A pioneer in the use of titanium and ceramics, IWC today specialises in highly engineered technical watch cases manufactured from advanced materials, such as titanium-aluminide and Ceratanium®. Preferring the principle of "form follows function" over decoration, the Swiss watch manufacturer's timeless creations embody their owners' dreams and ambitions as they journey through life.

IWC sources materials responsibly and takes action to minimise its impact on the environment, creating intrinsically sustainable timepieces that are built to last for generations. The company prides itself in training its own future watchmakers and engineers, as well as offering an excellent working environment for all employees. IWC also partners with organisations that work globally to support children and young people.

DOWNLOADS

Images of the new Big Pilot's Watch 43 can be downloaded free of charge at press.iwc.com

FURTHER INFORMATION

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