
THE 85-YEAR LEGACY OF PILOT'S WATCHES

From the 'Special Pilot's Watch' and pure functionality of its military observation and navigation watches, all the way to its modern pilot's watches: IWC has extensive experience and expertise in manufacturing precise, robust instruments for the cockpit.

The scent of kerosene with a hint of adventure: IWC's pilot's watches bring the magic of flight to all who wear them, in an especially elegant form. Originally designed as dependable and exact instruments for the cockpit, pilot's watches are now treasured sports timepieces that prove their worth in everyday situations.

The history of pilot's watches at IWC stretches back to the early years of aviation. At the time, precise wristwatches were an essential cockpit instrument and vital to a pilot's survival. Used primarily to monitor flight times or engine operating hours, they were also useful tools for navigation during visual flights. Combined with a sextant, a highly accurate wristwatch helped the wearer to determine their current location using astronomical navigation.

IWC was an early pioneer in the production of technical instruments designed to meet aviators' requirements. In 1936, the '**Special Pilot's Watch**' (Ref. IW436) was developed in Schaffhausen. The project was the brainchild of the sons of IWC's then-owner, Ernst Jakob Homberger. They were both passionate pilots and knew what a pilot's watch needed to do. The new design's technical features included an antimagnetic movement and shatterproof front glass. What's more, the timepiece worked perfectly at temperatures between -40 °C and +40 °C, which was an essential advantage in the unheated cockpits of the time.

The **Big Pilot's Watch calibre 52 T.S.C.** (Ref. IW431) was developed in the 1940s to meet the strict requirements set out for military observation watches, and later inspired the design of the Big Pilot's Watch. With a case diameter of 55 millimetres, a height of 16.5 millimetres and a weight of 183 grams, it is the largest wristwatch that IWC has created to date. The minimalist dial, designed to resemble easy-to-read cockpit instruments, and the striking conical crown, which was simple to use even for pilots wearing their quilted flight gloves, continue to influence the design of the modern Big Pilot's Watch to this day.

The most famous pilot's watch created in Schaffhausen was produced in 1948. After an invitation from the British Royal Air Force (RAF), IWC developed the **Navigator's Wristwatch Mark 11**, based on the calibre 89. One key requirement was for the movement to be protected against magnetic fields. The radar equipment in use at the time generated strong electromagnetic fields that were capable of impairing a watch's rate. IWC's response was to develop an inner cage made of soft iron, with the dial forming the cage's top. It dissipated the radiation around the movement like a Faraday cage. Another unique feature was the specially secured front glass, which would not come loose from its position, even in the event of a sudden drop in pressure in the cockpit. The clearly-structured, high-contrast dial with luminescent elements ensured that pilots could always read the time easily, no matter the visibility conditions.

The age of modern pilot's watches began in Schaffhausen in 1992. In record time – just a few weeks – the engineers at IWC used the Valjoux calibre 7750 as the basis for developing a double chronograph, which enabled two short time periods to be measured simultaneously. At the same time, the **Pilot's Watch Double Chronograph** (Ref. IW3711) established IWC as an expert in creating robust, precise chronographs; a reputation that the brand still enjoys today. IWC was also an early adopter of innovative new case materials for Pilot's Watches. Manufactured in 1994, the **Pilot's Watch Chronograph Ceramic** (Ref. IW3705) in a case made of black zirconium oxide ceramic was the first pilot's watch to be made of this tough, scratch-resistant material. Since only 999 models were manufactured, this chronograph is highly sought after by present-day collectors.

The brand reached a milestone in 2002 when it presented the **Big Pilot's Watch** (Ref. IW5002). Inspired by a functional military observation watch, the chronograph's dial, featuring a clear cockpit-instrument look, and the oversized 46.2 millimetres case have since become truly iconic. Not least thanks to numerous – sometimes daring – special editions, the Big Pilot's Watch is now one of the most well-known watch designs on the planet.

In 2007, IWC combined a double chronograph with a case made of black zirconium oxide ceramic. The **Pilot's Watch Double Chronograph Edition TOP GUN** (Ref. IW379901) takes its name from the US Navy's legendary Fighter Weapons School (TOPGUN).

This is where the US Navy hones its best pilots' flying and tactical skills, before they return to their units as 'Strike Fighter Tactics Instructors'. To withstand the extreme stresses of naval aviation, TOP GUN watches are made of exceptionally robust, corrosion-resistant materials such as titanium and ceramic. Black ceramic is completely anti-reflective, so the pilots in the cockpit are not blinded by reflected sunlight. The material is also scratch-resistant, which makes it especially suitable for everyday use in a narrow cockpit.

In 2019, IWC unveiled the **Pilot's Watch Double Chronograph TOP GUN Ceratanium** – the first pilot's watch with a Ceratanium® case. This groundbreaking material, developed by IWC, is as lightweight and unbreakable as titanium and at the same time as hard and scratch-resistant as ceramic. It is also characterised by its good skin compatibility and its eye-catching matte black colour.

IWC is the only Swiss watchmaker to have been awarded a licence to develop pilot's watches for US Navy squadrons. The brand has designed watches for the US Navy Strike Fighter Squadron 102 'Diamondbacks' and the US Navy Strike Fighter Squadron 211 'Fighting Checkmates'. Today, pilot's watches are still developed in close collaboration with top pilots, just as they were in 1936. Feedback from the pilots about how the pilot's watches perform in everyday use continues to help IWC engineers to improve and perfect their designs 85 years later.

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

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