

Masters of time

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US tax reforms might be driving customers away from Switzerland's private banks, but at least one component of the alpine nation's economy is still ticking along nicely.



The country's unrivalled brilliance in watch-making will be on full display at Sotheby's in Geneva on May 11, when the auction house hosts an exhibition by IWC Schaffhausen, the the luxury Swiss watchmaker that recently launched a number of models affiliated with motoring brands.

A selection of more than 30 new and vintage timepieces will go on sale in Geneva, particularly relating to the firm's Ingenieur watches, which were originally designed in the 1950s as antimagnetic watches for engineers – hence the name – and have since been redesigned to reflect the latest technological innovations of the prevailing times.

Watches at the auction will include the 1960s sports-influenced Ref 866 timepieces and creations from the 1970s, when designer Gerald Ganta overhauled the brand's look. For those hoping to go even further back for an inspirational watch, a stainless-steel manual-winding Portuguese model from 1944 will be up for grabs.

For those unable to make it to Geneva in time for the auction, the UK is just as good a place to start for those on the hunt for a classic timepiece. One of the country's most respected watchmakers is Roger Smith, apprentice to the late George Daniels, who possessed the exceedingly rare talent of being able to design and complete a watch by hand, and whose workshop was bequeathed to Smith.

With Smith's studio producing only a limited amount of watches a year, only those with deep pockets need apply. Take the Series 2 watch, of which fewer than 10 are created each year. The prototype for the model, after years of development, was unveiled in 2006, and it was to be a further year before the first pieces were released into the market.

If the Series 2 is a modern-day example of the best traditions of English artisan watchmaking, then Smith's bespoke series caters for those who wish to bend the classic watch to their own specifications, choosing between different materials, engravings and metal treatments. Finally, those looking for the ultimate in original watches might opt for a unique commission – handcrafted by the master himself for a truly one-off gift.