

A Quick Introduction to Russian Watches

by Elizabeth Doerr

If you are like the average connoisseur of Swiss timepieces, you may not know that much about Russian watches. So here's your chance to find out.

Russian watches can very well be viewed as the not-so-distant cousins of traditional Swiss and American timepieces.

Before 1930, when the First Moscow Watch Factory was founded, Imperial Russia was home to only small watch workshops, usually kept by Swiss watchmakers following Catherine II's call for quality watch- and clockmakers. Some of the more famous of the Swiss nationals to make their fame and fortune there were Paul Buhre and Heinrich Moser. Naturally they used Swiss parts in their creations, and even sold entirely Swiss-made timepieces, which they imported from their Jura-based factories. After the October Revolution of 1917, the whole of this little industry was absorbed into a precision mechanics combine and ceased to exist as individual business entities.

Watch parts and components were, however, in sore demand, as the Soviet Union realized that it still needed portable timekeepers. The country's council for labor and defense passed a resolution regarding watch production in 1927, and a committee was sent to Western Europe to

purchase machinery. Fearful of losing a large export market, the Swiss weren't of much help, so the delegation moved farther west, to the United States. There they were able to purchase Dueber Hampton Watch & Co. and Ansonia Clock Company, both of which were dismantled and rebuilt in Russia. In May 1930, it is reported that thirty American watchmakers and fifty wagons full of equipment reached Moscow, where the First Moscow Watch Factory was put into action and the Russian watch industry founded. The first Russian caliber, Type 1, was actually a rebuilt Dueber. Modified and varied, it continued to be produced for years: Between 1935 and 1941 alone, the First Moscow Watch Factory manufactured about 2.7 million pocket and wristwatches using this caliber.

In 1949, Sturmskie navigational watches came into production. Designed especially for military pilots, one even accompanied Yuri Gagarin on his historic space flight of April 12, 1961.

In 1975, Swiss-made production machines finally made it to the Soviet Union, and Swiss-style calibers were introduced in the factory. The design of chronograph Caliber 3133, first issued in 1983, is based on the Swiss Valjoux Caliber 7734, with a diameter of 31 mm, a height of 7.35 mm, 23 jewels, and 42 hours of power

reserve. This is Russia's premier movement and the particular one that makes the watches manufactured today by Volmax Watch Company competitive in the world market.

By the 1990s, the First Moscow Watch Factory, known as Poljot since 1961, was exporting 80 percent of its watches to seventy different countries, including the U.S.A., Western Europe, Asia, and, of course, Germany, where they have always been immensely popular. In the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Volmax Watch Company was born, taking its name from a brand the First Moscow Watch Factory created in the '60s.

The United States has recently gained a distribution specialist for Russian timepieces, Revolutions in Time. On this page you will find a sampling of the fine, very affordable mechanical watches this company is now bringing to the States. Vostok timepieces range from \$180 to \$350, while Aviator, Buran, and Sturmskie start at \$150 and can range to a couple of thousand for solid gold models, though average prices run between \$300 for simple timekeepers and \$1,200 for chronographs.

Visit www.revolutions-in-time.com where you can view the entire collections of Vostok, Aviator, Buran, and Sturmskie watches.

