

Rolex History Part 1



The ROLEX Watch Company – Part One

Yes, it's a Rolex Submariner. Yes, it's the design that INVICTA (*and just about every other watch company*) bases its "dive" watches on. Yes, it's the watch that most people think of when they hear the name "Rolex." So am I trying to say that INVICTA is the equal of Rolex? Not a chance. A Rolex Submariner is an expensive timepiece, and probably worth every penny. This is not meant to be a

pitch for INVICTA, but rather a chance for me to spout off about a great watch company. Still, nice looking design - isn't it.

Those of you unfortunate enough to have had conversations with me about watches know that it takes next to nothing for me to launch into long, dull lectures about the history of timekeeping and watch manufacturers such as Rolex (*or, for the truly insomniac, Hamilton*). "Rolex," what a great word. But what does it *mean*? Would you be surprised to learn – nothing at all?

The company we know as Rolex was founded in London (*not Switzerland, thank you very much*) in 1905 by Hans Wilsdorf as "Wilsdorf & Davies." At this time, the watch industry was vastly different from what we know today. For one thing, pocket watches were still all the rage. Wristwatches, though certainly known to exist, were considered more than just a bit effeminate. Another difference was the marked tendency for retailers to be the "brand" name on a watch. It was very common for a jeweler to have *his* name on a watch made by a company like Wilsdorf & Davies.

Hans Wilsdorf was born in Bavaria in 1881. Orphaned at the age of 12, he learned the lessons of self-reliance early on. Having worked in the watch industry in both Switzerland and England, he started his watch company at the age of 24 in London focusing on the specialty market. In the early 1900s, there were many obstacles to the wristwatch. It was generally thought that a movement small enough to fit on one's wrist would not be sufficiently robust or accurate for daily wear, to say nothing of the problems posed by dust and moisture! Hans Wilsdorf faced these challenges head-on and began making wristwatches (*or "wristlet" watches as they were then known*). Another flight into the face of convention was the whole "brand name" issue. For many generations, the English "retailer" would inscribe his own name on the watch he was going to sell. Wilsdorf wanted to establish his own brand as a manufacturer and so was born "Rolex." The word itself means nothing at all. Wilsdorf wanted a name that would "sound

luxurious”, be easy to remember, and be pronounced the same in any (*European*) language. Say it. Rolex. I think he came up with the “right” word.

It took rather a while for this radical break with tradition to be accepted. In the years prior to 1927 there are Rolex watches that have *both* the dealer’s name and Rolex on them. So what happened in 1927?

Next time – Rolex and the London stenographer.

That should about cover it for this email. Do please let me know your thoughts on the updated website, features such as the above, or just about anything. I read all my emails and try to respond to them as quickly as I can. Thanks again for all of your feedback, comments, and criticisms, I truly appreciate it.

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