

Rolex History Part 2



The ROLEX Watch Company – Part Two

Last time, we talked about the beginnings of the Rolex Company and introduced its founder, Hans Wilsdorf. I left you with a year, 1927, and am now going to add a specific date to that year, November 24th.

Had you been reading England's "Daily Mail" on that day, you would have seen that the entire front page was taken up with the advertisement seen at left. Several weeks prior to November 24th, Mercedes Glietze, a young London stenographer, had swum the English Channel in 15 hours and 15 minutes. She was wearing a Rolex Oyster the entire time and the watch emerged from the ordeal not just undamaged, but keeping perfect time!

This might not seem like much of an accomplishment to us today, we pretty much expect even the most inexpensive watch to have at least *some* water resistance today, but in 1927 it was nearly miraculous. Protection of delicate watch movements from dust and moisture had been the "holy grail" of watchmakers for generations and it was Hans Wilsdorf's Rolex that achieved it. Wilsdorf's solution had three main elements. First the crystal was specially adapted to the bezel to keep out condensation. Then there was the "Oyster" case – including a case ring, back, and bezel, all threaded. When the unit was assembled the

components were all clamped together (*like an oyster*) to ensure that dust and water would not get inside the watch through the joints. The last element was the winding crown. This was truly a challenge as one had to be able to wind and set the watch, yet there couldn't be a "hole" through which dust and moisture could enter the inside. The Rolex solution was a winding crown that screwed onto an outer tube. This tube screwed into the case and an inner sleeve was threaded to receive the stem. In order to wind the watch one had to unscrew the crown.

The "Oyster" watch, combined with Hans Wilsdorf's marketing, really put the Rolex name on the map. The same basic system is still used to provide water resistance in today's Rolex watches, to say nothing of the myriad of other manufacturers that make use of these principles.

As you might expect, Hans Wilsdorf didn't stop there. He continued to pursue greater market share through higher quality (*as opposed to lower prices*) on the way to becoming perhaps the best recognized luxury watch brand in the world.

Next time – After all that work to keep water from coming in through the winding crown, do we *have* to wind a watch?

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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