

# Rolex History Part 3



## The ROLEX Watch Company – Part Three

Last time, we discussed the Rolex contribution to making watches water resistant and hinted at the “self-winding” watch that was to come.

With the job of keeping water out well in hand (*or well in oyster*), Hans Wilsdorf turned his attention to finding a practical self-winding watch mechanism. This idea was nothing new, Abraham-Louis Perrelet of Le Locle Switzerland had invented the fundamental form in the mid 1700s and the mechanism was perfected in many details by Abraham-Louis Breguet, the famous French watchmaker. Wilsdorf’s contribution was the rotor mechanism. This metal mass of unstable equilibrium had the ability to rotate on a central

axis from the ordinary movement of a person wearing a watch on their wrist. This central axis was connected to the watch mechanism and provided the action that kept the mainspring wound.

Rolex was also the first manufacturer to include a “Date” and/or “Day” display by means of a window cut in the dial.

That’s at least three important elements of the modern watch brought to us by Rolex: water resistance, self-winding mechanical movements and “Day” and “Date” displays through windows in the dial. How many modern watches make use of these features? Perhaps it would be simpler to ask how many *don’t*.

Another Rolex first was in accuracy. In 1914, Rolex produced the first “wristlet” watch to receive a Class ‘A’ Timing Certificate from a testing observatory for a watch of 25mm in circumference. To this day, the vast majority of Rolex men’s watches are considered “Chronometers” and bear the marking “Superlative Chronometer Officially Certified.”

This means that the watch has been qualified as a chronometer by the exacting and rigorous standards of the C.O.S.C. (*Controle Officiel Suisse des Chronometres*).

Hans Wilsdorf's drive to produce a world-leading brand was a resounding success. The high quality of the design, components, and manufacture of Rolex watches resulted in a rugged and reliable timepiece. Wilsdorf's marketing genius also helped to propel Rolex to the forefront of the luxury watch world. From King George V's Silver Jubilee in 1936 to Sir Edmund Hillary's climb of Mount Everest to the wrist of Ian Fleming's James Bond, Rolex watches have been in the limelight. Hans Wilsdorf died in 1960, but the watch empire he started continues to be a major element of the world of horology today.

Thanks for letting me rant a bit. I think that about covers it for Rolex, unless you have specific issues you'd like me to cover. What other elements of the world of watches would you like to see in these emails? Or should I just give it a rest and get back to watches on our websites? Please let me know, I read all my email and try to respond as quickly as possible. Thanks again for your ongoing support.

*David Harrington*