

CLASSIC DRIVER

Zenith and Land Rover just showed us why cars and watches go hand in hand

Lead

Cars and luxury watches have gone hand in hand for decades, but why? On the occasion of the reveal of Range Rover and Zenith's first project collaboration, we spoke to three experts from both the automotive and horological fields to find out...

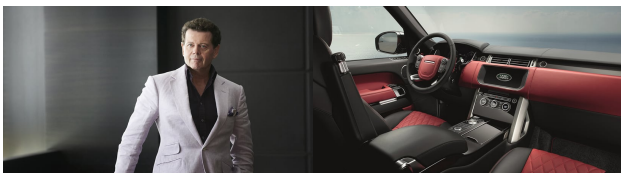
We're in Paris to see the first fruit of Zenith and Land Rover's newly kindled partnership, a tasteful Range Rover-inspired edition of the traditional El Primero chronograph. We've also been given the chance to quiz Jean-Claude Biver, president of the LVMH Group's watch division under which Zenith resides (who curiously spends his spare time as a hobbyist cheese-maker) as well as Aldo Magada, the current CEO of Zenith, and Gerry McGovern, Land Rover's design director, about what we're told will be an enduring alliance.

Opposites attract



So how does a forward-thinking brand such as Land Rover spot synergies with one of the most traditional of Swiss watch manufacturers, and vice versa? "If you own a luxury Range Rover, you probably own a luxury watch," comments McGovern. "Zenith appealed because it's very well respected in its industry, in the same way the Range Rover is." Magada concurs, labelling the SUV a milestone much like El Primero, the world's first automatic chronograph. Incidentally, the Range Rover and the El Primero were both born in 1969, though this was, Biver admits, a useful coincidence only realised *after* the deal was struck.

An inextricable link



The inextricable relationship between watches and cars; that intriguing juxtaposition between something very small and jewel-like and a comparatively huge vehicle – is one on which more and more brands are capitalising – Breitling and Bentley, for example. "Let's be honest, people don't *need* luxury premium vehicles or watches," says McGovern. "Your phone will tell the time better than any mechanical movement can. The difference is, people desire them, and it's all about having an emotional connection, and owning something that you cherish." All three experts agreed that the connection to a watch is, arguably, even stronger than a car because of its direct connection to the skin.

The Zenith and Range Rover tie-up came about after a chance meeting between Biver and McGovern at the beginning of this year, after which months of consultation between the two teams ensued. "We didn't want to fundamentally change the El Primero, rather think of ways to give it that Range Rover twist – take the ceramised aluminium case, for example," comments McGovern. "We tried to make it less complex, the same principle we abide by when designing our cars, particularly the interiors."

A pragmatic approach



Magada is, understandably, pragmatic about the current fragile state of the Swiss watch industry. "Zenith has a specific issue. It is a niche brand, and in a lot of countries it's too confidential. An association with Land Rover, a brand with great influence in regions such as the Middle East and America, will no doubt help us to introduce ourselves to these markets." Is the El Primero a worthy counterpart to the Range Rover? As Magada concludes, "Just like you can use the car to go off-roading and to arrive at the opera in the same day, the Zenith is as at home on the sports field as it is at a fashion show in Paris." Cars and watches – who'd have thought it?

Photos: Zenith, Range Rover, Corinna Fromm Communications

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