



Triple Simplicity

Complications are nifty, but sometimes you just want the time, plain and simple. We tested three models under \$1,500 that fit the bill.



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irst and foremost, a watch shows the time of day. Many models can do more, and “more” generally means the addition of a date display. Any other complication that follows will fill very specific requirements, such as a chronograph or alarm function, and will certainly come in handy now and then. But not everyone needs a moon-phase indication or a second time zone, and the actual, real-life usefulness of features that indicate tides or the equation of time is often a matter of debate.

So it's high time that we turn our attention again to simpler watches. Our test examines three different three-hand watches with only the most basic complication, the date display. Two are from Swiss brands: Frédérique Constant's Index Clear Vision

SPECS

FRÉDÉRIQUE CONSTANT INDEX
CLEAR VISION

Manufacturer: Frédérique Constant S.A.,
Chemin du Champs-des-Filles 32, CH-
1228 Plan-les-Ouates, Switzerland

Reference number: FC-303B6B6

Functions: Hour, minute, seconds, date,
hack mechanism

Movement: ETA 2824 "Elaboré," auto-
matic; 28,800 vph; 25 jewels; Etachoc
shock absorption; Etachron fine regulator
with eccentric; 38-hour power reserve;
diameter = 25.6 mm; height = 4.6 mm

Case: Stainless steel with curved, non-
reflective sapphire crystal, six screws on
caseback with sapphire crystal window,
water-resistant to 10 ATM

Strap and clasp: Hand-sewn calfskin
strap with crocodile pattern; stainless-
steel pronged buckle

Rate results:

(deviation in seconds per day)

Dial up	+3
Dial down	+3
Crown up	0
Crown down	-1
Crown left	0
Crown right	-2
Greatest rate deviation:	5
Average deviation:	+0.5
Average amplitude:	
Horizontal positions	276°
Vertical positions	269°

Dimensions: Diameter = 43 mm,
height = 10.5 mm, weight = 82 g

Variations: Silver-tone dial, stainless-steel
bracelet (\$1,325), rose-gold-plated case
and leather strap (\$795)

Price: \$1,150



*The decorated movement of the
Frédérique Constant looks some-
what small inside the large case.*

Pros

- + Good rate results
- + Very comfortable to wear
- + Attractive price

Cons

- Legibility is not ideal
- Simple clasp

and Hamilton's Jazzmaster Viewmatic. The third is the Limes Pharo from Germany.

All three watches are powered by the sturdy automatic caliber ETA 2824, which has a power reserve of 38 hours and an oscillating frequency of 28,800 vph (4 Hertz). Each of these watches is housed in a stainless-steel case with curved sapphire crystal. Each also has a sapphire window in the caseback for viewing the movement. With so many common features, our test nonetheless revealed a number of significant differences in these models, all of which are priced at under \$1,500.

FRÉDÉRIQUE CONSTANT INDEX CLEAR VISION

The Index Clear Vision's simple, black dial, with faceted markers and dauphine hands, creates a well-rounded 1960s retro look that recalls other icons such as the Patek Philippe Calatrava. Frédérique Constant combines these design elements with an individualistic case whose round, sloping form is a treat for the eye as well as the wrist. The caseback is decorated with filled cursive engraving.

Frédérique Constant was unable to avoid the flaw that plagues many large watches with small movements: the 43-mm case makes the solid portion of the caseback appear quite large and the movement (which measures only 25.6 millimeters) look rather lost in its center. The sapphire caseback itself is well designed, with six screws to protect the watch from water leakage up to 10 ATM.

The watch's movement, in ETA's "Elaboré" quality category, impressed us with its gold-plated engraved rotor, two blued screws and various line finishes, as well as its accurate rate. The electronic timing machine showed values between -2 and +3 seconds per day, averaging out to a minuscule +1/2-second per day.

The average jumped to two seconds while the watch was being worn, but the testing period included some overnight time. Fortunately, the watch is comfortable enough to leave on overnight. There are no disturbing corners or edges on the case, and the elegantly sloping lugs lie perfectly on the wrist. The comfort is enhanced further by the flat calfskin strap and its delicate pronged buckle. (The embossed strap is hand-sewn and nicely finished but might have been padded more thickly and given a sturdier clasp with true buckle bars instead of spring bars.)

Another reason to wear the watch to bed is the incredible brightness of the hands, which might make you forget about the digital clock on your nightstand. Thanks to a special luminous

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FRÉDÉRIQUE CONSTANT INDEX CLEAR VISION

Strap and clasp (max. 10 points): The calfskin strap with crocodile pattern is hand-sewn but very thinly padded and has a very simple clasp. 7

Operation (5): The large, fluted crown is easy to pull and turn but does not cleanly lock in the different positions. 4

Case (10): The case is too large for the movement but is nicely shaped and with a sapphire crystal in front and back, screw-down crown, and six screws on the caseback, is water-resistant to 10 ATM. The completely polished surfaces easily show fingerprints. 8

Design (15): A simple, elegant watch with no big surprises. The luminous tubes on the hands are distracting. 12

Legibility (5): The crystal is highly reflective over the black dial. The hands are too short and provide little contrast, though they are highly visible at night. 3

Wearing comfort (10): Perfectly comfortable thanks to a well-fitting case and supple strap. 10

Movement (20): The ETA "Elaboré" movement has several line finishes, two blued screws and an engraved gold-plated rotor. 11

Rate results (10): The daily deviation is negligible and the different positional errors are also quite low. The amplitude remains quite constant. 9

Overall value (15): A low price for an elegant and accurate Swiss watch. 13

TOTAL: 77 POINTS

Individual profiles: Hamilton's curves and lines, Limes's ridged flanks and Frédérique Constant's organic shapeliness



technology that Frédérique Constant has dubbed “Clear Vision,” the contours of the glowing hour and minute hands stay visible throughout the night. This technology is based on the slightly radioactive decay of tritium gas, which the watch industry began using in the 1960s. While most manufacturers have switched to the non-radioactive product Super-LumiNova, a select few continue to utilize the somewhat weaker but longer-lasting glow of tritium luminous material.

The tritium gas is contained within tiny tubes whose walls are coated with luminous material. The electrons that bombard the walls do not have enough energy to leave the tubes, which is why the light source does not fade. The blue glow of the hands in the dark is so bright, you’d think it comes from a tiny electric

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LIMES PHARO

Manufacturer: Limes Uhren – Ickler GmbH, Hirsauer Str. 214, D-75180 Pforzheim, Germany

Reference number: U6282C-LA1.1

Functions: Hour, minute, seconds, date, hack mechanism

Movement: ETA 2824 “Top,” automatic; 28,800 vph; 25 jewels; Incabloc shock absorption; Etachron fine regulator with eccentric; 38-hour power reserve; diameter = 25.6 mm; height = 4.6 mm

Case: Stainless steel with curved, double nonreflective sapphire crystal; fully threaded caseback with sapphire crystal window; water-resistant to 5 ATM

Strap and clasp: Calfskin strap with crocodile pattern with stainless-steel pronged buckle

Rate results:

(deviation in seconds per day)

Dial up	+5
Dial down	+8
Crown up	+16
Crown down	+1
Crown left	+14
Crown right	0
Greatest rate deviation:	16
Average deviation:	+7.3
Average amplitude:	
Horizontal positions	274°
Vertical positions	258°

Dimensions: Diameter = 40.5 mm, height = 10.5 mm, weight = 65 g

Variations: Rose-gold colored hands and markers, diamond bezel (\$4,600)

Price: \$1,400

The sturdy Hamilton clasp surpasses the standard clasps on the other two watches.

Pros

- + Classic, elegant design
- + High-quality case
- + Finely decorated “Top” movement

Cons

- Irregular rate results
- Clasp sometimes pinches

Limes decorates its ETA 2824 with fine finishes, engraving and blued screws, making for the most attractive movement of the trio.

light source. The faceted hands point to conventional green luminous hour markers. The only drawback: the prominence of the hands' illuminating tubes detracts from their clean lines.

The watch is not perfectly legible during daylight hours, as the stainless-steel hands and markers provide little contrast to the black dial. In addition, the hands are a bit too short and don't quite reach the markers. The sapphire crystal reflects the smooth black of the dial, which unfortunately calls attention to any fingerprints or other smudges on the crystal.

Thanks to its large, fluted crown, the watch is easy to operate, even though the crown does not lock cleanly into place at its different positions. Apart from its limited legibility, this watch has few flaws, and these are mostly outweighed by its accurate rate results, superior wearing comfort and attractively designed, water-resistant case. At a price of only \$1,150, this watch is an attractive buy for the price-conscious.

LIMES PHARO

An equally attractive case houses the Pharo from the German watchmaking company Limes in Pforzheim. Of course, one wouldn't expect any less: the head of the company, Thomas Ickler, manufactures the cases for his own watches.

The main feature of the Pharo case is the fluted midsection that recalls Greek columns and gives the watch a classic, architectural look. This design element is complemented by beautifully accented lugs, and the case has sapphire crystals in the front and back. Its water-resistance of only 5 ATM could have been increased, however, by the addition of a screwed rather than a threaded caseback.

Because its overall diameter is smaller than that of the Frédérique Constant (40.5 mm), the solid border is narrower



SCORES

LIMES PHARO

Strap and clasp (max. 10 points): The calfskin strap, with its even crocodile pattern and standard pronged buckle, is well-constructed but shows wear rather quickly. **7**

Operation (5): The crown can only be pulled using a fingernail and is difficult to turn because of its narrow surface. **3**

Case (10): Limes builds an attractive, high-quality case with sapphire crystal in front and back. Screws on the caseback would increase its water resistance. **9**

Design (15): The classically designed and carefully executed dial is a good match with the fluted case. **13**

Legibility (5): The length of the hands is perfect and the nonreflective crystal and structured dial surface reduce glare. The contrast is surprisingly good. **4**

Wearing comfort (10): The flat, light-weight case fits comfortably on the wrist thanks to extended lugs with no sharp edges, but the prong on the buckle pinches when the buckle is snug. **8**

Movement (20): Limes uses a “Top” ETA movement with line finishes, perlage, blued screws and elaborately decorated rotor. **12**

Rate results (10): The watch runs fast and shows a very large deviation at the different positions. The amplitude is stable. **6**

Overall value (15): This is a good-looking watch at a fair price. The rate results are its only drawback. **12**

TOTAL: 74 POINTS

No frills: the rotor is the only decorated element of Hamilton's movement.

SPECS

HAMILTON JAZZMASTER VIEWMATIC

Manufacturer: Hamilton International Ltd., Chemin du Long-Champ 119, CH-2504, Bienne, Switzerland

Reference number: H32515535

Functions: Hour, minute, seconds, date, hack mechanism

Movement: ETA 2824 "Elaboré," automatic; 28,800 vph; 25 jewels; Etachoc shock absorption; Etachron fine regulator with eccentric; 38-hour power reserve; diameter = 25.6 mm; height = 4.6 mm

Case: Stainless steel with curved sapphire crystal; five screws on caseback; water-resistant to 5 ATM

Strap and clasp: Calfskin strap with crocodile pattern and stainless-steel pronged buckle

Rate results:

(deviation in seconds per day)

Dial up	+5
Dial down	+7
Crown up	+6
Crown down	+7
Crown left	+8
Crown right	+5
Greatest rate deviation:	3
Average deviation:	+6.3
Average amplitude:	
Horizontal positions	283°
Vertical positions	278°

Dimensions: Diameter = 40 mm, height = 10.6 mm, weight = 74 g

Variations: Silver-tone dial; stainless-steel bracelet (\$675), rose-gold-plated case and silver-tone dial (\$745)

Price: \$625



Pros

- + Highly detailed design
- + High-quality strap
- + Good value for the price

Cons

- Low contrast
- Undecorated movement

and detracts little from the highly decorated movement, which boasts a line finish, perlage and blued screws with polished slots, a rotor with côtes de Genève, a sunburst finish and gold-decorated engraving. (Later this year the Pharo and other Limes models with a crystal caseback will include an in-house rotor.)

Limes is the only manufacturer in this comparison to use a movement in the "Top" category, which has a temperature-resistant Glucydur balance rather than a nickel balance and is regulated in five positions rather than just three. "Top" is the second-best of four quality levels offered for the ETA 2824, and the movements in this category meet the technical specifications required for chronometers. Considering this, we were surprised to

SCORES

HAMILTON JAZZMASTER VIEWMATIC

Strap and clasp (max. 10 points): The well-finished calfskin strap with crocodile pattern has a thick lining, turned edges and a sturdy buckle. **9**

Operation (5): The crown can be pulled out only with a fingernail, but then is easy to use. **4**

Case (10): The exciting design and nicely finished case has a sapphire crystal in the front and back, and five screws on the caseback, but is water-resistant only to 5 ATM. **9**

Design (15): The interesting embossed dial center finds its match in an especially detailed case. **13**

Legibility (5): The hands and markers are harmonious and glow with average intensity at night. The hands offer little contrast to the dial and the crystal is highly reflective. **3**

Wearing comfort (10): The padded strap makes wearing the watch very comfortable. **9**

Movement (20): In contrast to the dial, the Elaboré movement is mostly free of decoration. **10**

Rate results (10): The watch runs noticeably fast but only shows a small deviation between the different positions. Its amplitude remains in the ideal range. **8**

Overall value (15): An excellent value, especially for those who don't mind a minimally decorated movement. **15**

TOTAL: 80 POINTS

find that on the timing machine our test watch showed a maximum rate difference of 16 seconds between the various positions and gained an average of 7.3 seconds per day.

The daily rate easily falls within the range of values that mechanical-watch fans should reasonably expect, but the large discrepancy between the positions indicates a fault in the movement of the test piece, such as a poise error of the balance wheel. The “wrist test” generally confirmed the electronic measurements. When the watch was removed at night it showed a daily rate of +6.5 seconds. The prominent prong of the clasp, which pressed uncomfortably when the strap was worn snugly, discouraged us from wearing the watch 24 hours a day.

Otherwise, the Pharo's comfort level leaves nothing to be desired. The case has no sharp edges and the lugs slope gently (though not as gently as do the Frédérique Constant's). The strap is simple but nicely finished and is also comfortable against the wrist. It is not hand-sewn like the Index Clear Vision's, but has thicker padding and is more evenly embossed. Still, the leather quickly showed signs of wear. Despite its unsuitable prong, the clasp seems sturdier than that of the Frédérique Constant.

Operating the watch, however, is not as comfortable. The crown does not screw down and you must use a fingernail to pull it out. Because of its limited contact-surface area it must be turned with a certain amount of care and skill.

This watch has it all over the Frédérique Constant in the area of legibility. Each hand has precisely the proper length and offers, like the faceted applied markers, a distinct contrast to the silver dial. The nonreflective treatment on both sides of the sapphire crystal above the light-colored clous-de-Paris-embossed dial reduces glare, and fingerprints on the crystal are scarcely noticeable.

Thanks to these advantages, we didn't mind the lack of luminous material on this watch, which may have detracted from the elegance of the classically shaped hands. The seconds hand is unusually shaped, with a skeletonized tip. The slight misalignment of the date in its window at 6 o'clock was the only complaint we had with the dial.

Apart from these minor problems, the Limes, at \$1,400, is an attractive watch at a fair price. The only real faults are its rate results in the different positions, which cost the watch valuable points in its final score.

HAMILTON JAZZMASTER VIEWMATIC

Our third tested watch, the Hamilton Jazzmaster Viewmatic, showed a consistent rate. According to the electronic timing machine, the maximum deviation between the different positions was only three seconds. The machine also measured a daily rate of +6.3 seconds per day, which was lowered to five seconds per day when the watch was worn.

Because its heavy strap makes this watch not quite as comfortable to wear as the perfectly fitting Frédérique Constant, many people will prefer to take it off at night. However, they can still read the time on it thanks to the luminous material on the hands and hour markers. The dauphine hands — like those



Different design elements: Frédérique Constant exudes elegance, Limes highlights its classic lines and Hamilton flaunts its sportiness.

of the Limes, and in contrast to the hands on the Frédérique Constant — have the proper length, and a nice shape that matches that of the applied markers. But the delicate numerals at 6, 9 and 12 o'clock don't integrate very well with the more substantial display elements.

Otherwise, the attractive dial is set apart by a unique embossed pattern (rows of the Hamilton "H") as well as by a large, trapezoidal date window. The small five-minute numerals and second markers, plus the luminous display elements, give the dial a sportier character than those of the other two watches. The thick, wide calfskin strap, with turned edges, contrasting white seam and detailed, solid-pronged buckle, completes the look.

The case exhibits an equally high quality thanks to its curved sapphire crystal and five screws on the case back, underscoring its solid construction. Plus, both the crown side and the left flank show line finishes and polished surfaces, and its various edges and curves give it a dynamic look. A crown guard and beveled lugs extend from the sides of the case. Like the Limes watch, the Hamilton has a relatively low water-resistance of 5 ATM.

One of the watch's most attractive features is also one that makes it a bit more difficult to use. Because of the crown guard, the crown can only be pulled out using a fingernail. Once it is extracted, however, setting the time and date is easier than it is in the other watches.

The Hamilton has the same legibility problem as the Frédérique Constant: the steel-colored hands and markers often blend in with the black dial. However, the embossed dial, like the detailed case, has the advantage of hiding fingerprints. The precise length of the hands and the large date opening help the Hamilton keep pace with the Frédérique Constant in legibility, though it still doesn't match that of the Limes.

The phenomenal value of the Jazzmaster Viewmatic (it costs only \$625) makes it easy to forgive Hamilton for using an "Elaboré" movement with no decorations except for the finish and engraving on the rotor. In the end, our comparison of these three watches clearly shows that the quality of the movements and their finishes corresponds directly to the watches' prices. ○