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A SHORT HISTORY OF MARTEL WATCH CO and ZENITH CHRONOGRAPHS



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**March 10th, 2012**

#1

**sempervivens** 

Member



Join Date: Sep 2006

Posts: 3,079

**A SHORT HISTORY OF MARTEL WATCH CO and ZENITH CHRONOGRAPHS****Martel watch co** was founded in **1911** in **Les Ponts-de-Martel** by **Georges Pellaton-Staudler**.(see [http://www.antiquewatchworld.com/watch/html/watch\\_co.html](http://www.antiquewatchworld.com/watch/html/watch_co.html))**1911** was also the year that **Georges Favre** retired and changed his company name from "**Georges Favre-Jacot**" to "**Zenith**" (see Roessler, p.11-12).Note that Zenith and **Universal** were both in **le Locle**, at

approx. 10 km from Martel.

Around **1918** Martel is seen supplying Universal with chronograph movements (see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal\\_Genève#1930s-1949:\\_The\\_Chronograph\\_and\\_22Watch\\_Couturier.22\\_er\\_a](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_Genève#1930s-1949:_The_Chronograph_and_22Watch_Couturier.22_er_a)).

Universal Geneve claims on their website that in **1917** they launched **the world's first wristwatch chronograph** (see <http://www.universal.ch/newsletter/en/details/didyouknow.htm>).

Combining this information we can conclude that "the world's first wristwatch chronograph, launched by Universal", probably used a movement made by Martel.

From this advertisement (ca. 1927?) we can see what those early Martel wristwatch chronographs looked like :



Next thing we know around **1932** Universal launched **the world's first wristwatch chronograph with two pushers**.

The wristwatch chronograph with two pushers as we still know it today, was born!

And it will become clear from the watches produced during the 1930's that the movement had been created by Martel.

The next year in **1933** Universal launched **the world's first two pusher chronograph with three counters**. (other sources say it was **1934**).

The chronograph with three subdials, another important and exciting improvement which remains a classic until today!

Thus the two chronograph movements were born which Martel was going to make for 37 years (1932-1969).

These two could easily be made in different sizes : of 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16 lignes.

Zenith named them according to their size **cal. 122, 136, 146, 156, 166**. They are all basically the same, different in size only. Each can be made with two or three counters: cal.



136 **D** and cal. 136 **H**, and so on.

Universal used the same movements and of course their own caliber codes, caliber 281 and so on.

It should remain clear that Universal had the initiative. Zenith perhaps got in the project thanks to its investment power in those days. Exactly at which date Zenith got in the project, we don't know, but it was probably quite early.

In **1933 Raoul Perret**, the son of Georges Perret (the co-founder of Universal Watches in 1894), came in charge of Universal. The same Raoul Perret can be found in **1935** on the board of administration of Zenith :

F É D

N° 23. — 5 Juin 1935

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**Registre du Commerce**

---

**Raisons sociales:**

**Enregistrement:**

22/5/35. — **Montres Luxor S. A.**, soc. an., Le Locle, achat et vente d'horlogerie, soc. soc. fr. 12,000 nom. Cons. adm.: Hermann Brunner, d'Iseltwald, sign. indiv. Edouard Düber, de Paris, est nommé directeur, avec sign. individ. Siège: Rue Alexis-Marie Piaget 18, Le Locle.

27/5/35. — **Heinrich Bühler** (de Zurich), construction de petits appareils, horlogerie électrique, Rue Lavater 67 a, Zurich 2.

**Registre spécial (II):**

**Enregistrement:**

21/5/35. — **Vve Andrea-Mariette Heyraud**, régleuse, Rue A.-M. Piaget 45, La Chaux-de-Fonds.

**Modifications:**

18/5/35. — **Fabriques des Montres Zénith, Successeur de Fabriques des montres Zénith, Georges Favre-Jacot & Cie.**, Le Locle. Le cap. soc. est réduit de fr. 3,150,000 à fr. 126,000, puis porté à fr. 2,500,000 au porteur. Cons. adm.: Auguste Jeanneret, Werner Staub, Jacques Nardin, Raoul Perret, (déjà inscrits), Louis-Paul Monnet, de Vevey; ils n'ont pas la sign. soc.; Louis Huguenin et Armand Berg ne font plus partie du Conseil. La sign. collect. de Jean Chopard, fondé de pouvoirs, est radiée.

24/5/35. — La soc. n. coll. « **Rochat-Chapallaz et Cie** », et dissoute, la raison radiée. Actif et passif sont repris par **Alfred Rochat-Pilloud, successeur de Rochat-Chapallaz et Cie**, fabr. de fournitures et pièces détachées pour l'horlogerie et la pendulerie, Rue du Buron 6, Yverdon.

Through Raoul Perret the Universal and Zenith Watch companies could easily cooperate in the field of the new wristwatch chronographs with two pushers.

Thanks to this cooperation Zenith from the beginning



around 1932 had the same first wristwatch chronographs with two pushers available, as Universal had.

Take a look at this 1930's advertisement for Zenith chronographs:

*Nouveau calibre chronographe à deux poussoirs*

# ZENITH

Un chef-d'œuvre de technique et de beauté classique

*Arguments:*

- Un seul calibre: 12-13", donc
- Assortiment de fournitures réduit
- Ø d'ouverture de lunette: 28 mm.
- Cadrons interchangeables
- Boîtiers aux lignes modernes
- Mouvement de qualité extraordinaire
- Prix raisonnable




N° 313 - Acier      N° 314 - Or

This probably dates to around 1932-35. It could be the first known advertisement for a two pusher chronograph. The title is : "*A new chronograph caliber with two pushers*".

The text mentions that it is one and the same caliber for different sizes, with as a result the ease of interchangeable parts : a characteristic of Martel calibers.

Zenith praised the extraordinary quality of the movement and the reasonable price.

The advertisement also mentions that the chronograph dials could easily be exchanged. This is interesting, because it is possible that changing the dial was about the only thing that Zenith had to do in the making of these chronographs. There is a plausible theory that in this period not only the movements were made by Martel, but the chronographs were then also cased by Universal, before they were delivered as complete chronographs to Zenith.

In any case since Martel was making the movements, all there was left for either Universal or Zenith was adding the dials, hands, and cases to the movements, with the company names and numbers.

An example of the gold watch in the advertisement, an early 1930's Zenith chronograph with two pushers and Martel movement (Zenith caliber 136), can be seen in this thread :

<http://forums.watchuseek.com/f27/my-grandfathers-zenith-596561.html>

In Roessler's book about Zenith, we can also see several examples of early Zenith chronographs with two pushers,





made in the 1930's (p. 216-218).

Around **1936** Universal then introduced the "*Compur*" and "*Compax*" names for chronographs with two or three subdials. Zenith used these names as well.

Roessler shows some Zenith chronographs from this period with 'Compur' on the dials (p. 219-220).

From advertisements we also know that there was a direct and open collaboration between Universal and Zenith, both using the Compur and Compax name. This advertisement for the Compur must date to ca. 1936 :



Here is another one :





And here is an advertisement from the same period (ca. 1936), where we find Zenith (and Universal is mentioned as well) advertising the Zenith Compax :



Next we should mention the renaming of Universal as **Universal Genève** in 1937. (Again I found some uncertainty about the exact date: some sources cite 1934, but 1937 is more likely to be the correct date).

Due to the success of the chronographs in 1941 Universal Genève had to build a new, ultramodern production line for chronographs (see for instance : <http://www.montreshorlogerie.com/histoire-montres-universa-geneve.html> ).

From this follows an example of a mistake which originates from one site, and is then copied by others. The opening of a new production line for chronographs in 1941 was misinterpreted by somebody as the founding date of Martel. This mistake has since spread to more sites, who copied the wrong information. As a result, some people have started believing that Martel was only founded in 1941. Please note that Martel was *not* founded in 1941 by Universal, as it had already been founded in 1911 by Georges Pellaton-Studler.

Around 1942 the **Martel/Universal Genève/Zenith** collaboration then led to **the first wristwatch chronograph with date**. (see for instance [Page Mod](#)les)



A Zenith example of the first chronograph with date can be seen in Roessler on p. 217.

It is estimated by Roessler as "1930"(s), this should probably be "1940"(s). Interestingly the movement is signed with two caliber codes : "287" and "146" (a Universal Geneve and a Zenith caliber code for the same movement).

But this chronograph with date was only the last step before Martel came to make the star product, the **first wristwatch chronograph with full calendar and moonphase in 1944**.

And Zenith also got it: an example of the Zenith "Tricompax" can be seen in Roessler p. 221.

Then towards the 1950s it seems that Universal Geneve shifted its attention more and more to that other novelty of those years : the automatic wristwatches. This eventually led to the Universal Geneve **Polerouter**, which (starting in **1954**) became another success for Universal Geneve.

Zenith in the meantime started using the Excelsior Park chronograph movements as well. During the 1940's, starting ca. 1942, a movement was made by Excelsior Park which was then used by Gallet, Girard-Perregaux and Zenith for their chronographs (see [Page Modles](#)).

Still at the same time Zenith remained faithful to the Martel chronographs as well.

Thus for a period of ca. 10 years (1946-1956) Zenith used both Excelsior Park and Martel chronographs.

We then find Martel ca. **1956** happily, independently and optimistically doing business.

Martel all the time had continued to supply Zenith and Universal Geneve with chronograph movements during the 1940's and '50's.

But now they also had watches under their own brand name.





An interesting non-chronograph with full calendar and moonphase.

Around 1956 they can be seen advertising for their own new automatic watch with date.

**Get ahead of your competitors!**

*Victorious*

**MARTEL**

The self-sliding CALENDAR made in the watch of the future? The solution of people who wear it, although constantly growing, is still relatively small.

**A profitable new market is yours for the asking...**  
Don't miss this opportunity!  
Sell to everyone's watch to-day!

The MARTEL VICTORIOUS is a valuable watch for your efforts to increase sales — that's precisely the advantage.

Every one of its features is a selling point:

- regular performance, extreme reliability due to the unique continuous motion of the hand and to superior precision.
- easy-to-read date, changing automatically.
- fully guaranteed against theft.
- waterproof construction of superior quality, indestructible.
- self-compensating, non-magnetic, balancing, that you cannot steal.
- shock-resistant precision, at all temperatures, also fully guaranteed against all magnetic interference.
- absolutely waterproof case, suitable especially for sports, travel, high pressure.
- lightweight design, a new combining modern and classic design with a beauty of line that is equally as distinctive as the watch's technical features.

**Be the center of attraction...**

The highlight of Martel's VICTORIOUS. The watch that is the outstanding example of modern watchmaking, and a special new feature that is particularly desirable in the field of the watch.

MARTEL WATCH CO. S.A. — Les Prévôtés (Neuchâtel)

*Une réalisation d'avenir!*  
*Un succès certain!*

**MARTEL**  
*Victorious*



Ses nombreux avantages sont autant d'**arguments de vente** dont il vous appartient de tirer profit auprès de vos clients.

La montre MARTEL-VICTORIOUS est la synthèse des réalisations les plus judicieuses de l'industrie horlogère suisse. Elle possède tout ce qui peut contribuer à l'amélioration du rendement et de la qualité, mettant ainsi à la disposition de l'homme moderne le maximum d'avantages pouvant être demandés à une montre d'aujourd'hui, soit, entre autres:

- Remontage automatique (système rotor)
- Calendrier à guichet (sans poussoir)
- Dispositif antichocs (incalable)
- Ressort incassable
- Spiral auto-compensateur et amagnétique
- Boîte super-étanche

Le tout exécuté dans la traditionnelle qualité Martel de grande précision, bénéficiant d'une expérience de plus de 40 ans dans la fabrication de montres extra-soignées.

La présentation longuement étudiée et très harmonieuse de la MARTEL-VICTORIOUS est, vous en conviendrez en la voyant.

**UNE PARFAITE RÉUSSITE**

Elle ajoutera donc encore à la valeur de ce modèle qui contribuera ainsi largement à

**faciliter vos ventes**

Profitez-en!

**Avis aux grossistes:** Un vaste programme publicitaire pour le lancement de la MARTEL-VICTORIOUS auprès du public est établi. Si son action sur votre marché et la vente de ce brillant modèle vous intéressent, écrivez-nous sans tarder.

**MARTEL WATCH Co S.A. Les Ponts-de-Martel (Suisse)**







*An outstanding achievement!*  
*A recognized success!*

**MARTEL**  
*Victorious*

Every feature a **selling point**  
which will help you convince your customers!

Martel's VICTORIOUS combines the latest achievements of Swiss watchmaking science to offer higher quality and better performance. The Martel VICTORIOUS is the watch for the modern customer. It has all the features your most demanding clients insist upon...

- ▶ Self-winding (Rotor system)
- ▶ Calendar with date window (no pusher)
- ▶ Shockproof (Incabloc)
- ▶ Unbreakable mainspring
- ▶ Self-compensating, non-magnetic hairspring
- ▶ Super waterproof case

plus precision workmanship and impeccable quality guaranteed by Martel's 40 year reputation for dependability and outstanding service to the watch trade.

Beautiful styling has helped to make the VICTORIOUS

**A REAL SUCCESS**  
...see for yourself! Feature the VICTORIOUS and see it **bring in customers** and increase your sales...

Don't miss this opportunity!

**Notice to wholesalers:** A vast advertising programme has been planned to launch the Martel Victorious and help you on your own market. If you are interested in increasing your profits with this brilliant new watch, write today to

**MARTEL WATCH Co. Ltd. Les Ponts-de-Martel (Switzerland)**

Note how this ad mentions that the watch was made in the best Martel tradition of precision and that Martel already had more than **40 years** experience at that time :

**"...precision workmanship and impeccable quality guaranteed by Martel's 40 year reputation for dependability and outstanding service to the watch trade."**

This funny ad dates to ca. 1957 :



Shortly afterwards, around **1958**, Zenith bought the entire Martel Watch co.

Usually **1960** is cited as the date of the acquisition (for instance by Roessler). Elsewhere I read **1959**. But in Roessler's movements and calibers' list (p. 32) 1958 is indicated as the date when they effectively started with the Martel 25x2 movements.

Not only was Martel the supplier of excellent chronograph movements for Zenith since (at least) the early 1930's, by 1956 they also had developed a modern automatic watch (with rotor), with date, and the same Martel precision. Zenith could use a modern automatic movement. Until then Zenith only had bumper automatics.

The Zenith Martel cal. 25x2 could also be used for handwound watches. It became the main Zenith movement line during the 1960's and '70s (until 1975). It was further developed and updated by Zenith almost every year during the 1960's, until ca. 1975.

At the same time the Zenith Martel chronographs could be continued and developed further, now also by bringing all the new technologies together : wristwatch - chronograph ; automatic - with date; with the addition of a very high frequency (a novelty from the 1960's).

As a result, in **1969** the **Zenith El Primero** was born.

Martel had made **the worlds' first automatic wristwatch chronograph movement**.



And not only that : they made it straight away with chronometer precision; with three counters; with date (and quickset); they made it ultra-thin; with a very high frequency (36000 bph); and yet very solid and stable, durable and reliable.

In **1971** followed **the worlds' first automatic wristwatch chronograph with full calendar and moonphase (Zenith Espada)**.

Unfortunately for Zenith and the mechanical watch industry in general, at the same time during the '60s other people had been experimenting with electronic and quartz watches.


As a result **Bulova**, owner of an electronic watch movement, was able to buy Universal Geneve in **1967**.

And in **1972** a **Zenith radio (and television) company** was able to buy Zenith watches.

In **1975** the Zenith radio company ordered Zenith watches in Switzerland to stop the production of mechanical movements altogether, including the chronograph production in Martel and selling the Martel building and destroying all their tools.

*Will you still need me, will you still feed me,  
When I'm sixty-four?*

Martel was 64 years old, when it was not needed any more.

Fortunately Charles Vermot (who for 40 years was chef of bauches production at Zenith), at that time went against the foreign orders and saved many tools, machines as well as know-how from the Martel building, which all proved to be very valuable for Zenith ten years later in 1985 when the El Primero was revived. Charles Vermot was a visionary and saved the finest tools and machines from the Martel plant in Ponts-de Martel.

You can see a moving interview with Charles Vermot on the Zenith site :

<http://www.zenith-watches.com/en/#/manufacture/saga/el-primero/saving-el-primero/movie>

A golden age came to an end, however soon to be revived.

In the early 1980's a few business men bought up the old stocks of Zenith's Martel chronograph movements (both





automatic as well as handwound chronograph movements), cased them, and sold them with a profit.

Soon orders for new movements followed and around **1985** the El Primero was resurrected.

The rest is history.

Through the El Primero, which is now more alive than ever, the legacy of the small Martel Watch Company from Les Ponts-de-Martel also lives on.

But it also lives on in the many fine watches from the past, such as most Zenith chronographs starting from around 1932 and many Zenith watches from the 1960's (until 1975).

**In memory of the Martel watch company, founded a hundred and one years ago (in 1911) in Les Ponts-de-Martel by Georges Pellaton-Steudler. Among its accomplishments are the world's first wristwatch chronograph with two pushers (1932), with three registers (1934) with date (1942) and with full calendar and moonphase (1944); and the world's first automatic wristwatch chronograph (with three registers, date, high frequency and ultra-thin) (1969) and with full calendar and moonphase (1971).**

*Last edited by sempervivens; March 17th, 2012 at 19:44.*

pyiyha, eatDV, dicioccio and 2 others like this.

Vanitas vanitatum et omnia vanitas, praeter ...

**Reply With Quote**

**March 10th, 2012**

#2

**nicola1960** ◉

Member

Join Date: Mar 2011

Location: Italia

Posts: 153

## **Re: A SHORT HISTORY OF MARTEL WATCH CO and ZENITH CHRONOGRAPHS**

Bravissimo ! 😊

Originally Posted by **sempervivens** ➡

*...Around 1936 Universal then introduced the **Compur** and **Compax** names for chronographs with two or three subdials. Zenith used them as well....*

*... But this chronograph with date was only the last step before Martel came to make the star product,*

*the first wristwatch chronograph with full calendar and moonphase in 1944....*

*And Zenith also got it: an example of the Zenith "Tricompax" can be seen in Roessler p. 221....*

Rassegna di

*Nicola Hidden Content*

**Reply With Quote**

**March 10th, 2012**

#3

**sempervivens** 

Member



Join Date: Sep 2006

Posts: 3,079

### **Re: A SHORT HISTORY OF MARTEL WATCH CO and ZENITH CHRONOGRAPHS**

Thank you Nicola ! And credits should go to you for providing some of the most essential information and illustrations which I could find (for instance concerning the role of Raoul Perret and the Universal Geneve/Zenith joint advertisements).



edit : I've added three more old advertisements, found on the page for which you gave the link (Rassegna di) and I should mention that it also contains many interesting pictures of actual watches, early Zenith chronographs, Compur's and Compax and so on.

Thank you !

*Last edited by sempervivens; March 10th, 2012 at 18:17.*

Vanitas vanitatum et omnia vanitas, praeter ...

**Reply With Quote**

**March 10th, 2012**

#4

**v76** 

Member



Join Date: Dec 2009

Location: MO, USA

Posts: 7,581

### **Re: A SHORT HISTORY OF MARTEL WATCH CO and ZENITH CHRONOGRAPHS**

Great job summarizing the intertwined histories of Martel, UG and Zenith. Thank you for putting this together, it should definitely be a sticky!



**Collection:**

A few of this and some of the other ...

*"I worked my way up from nothing to a state of extreme poverty" - Groucho Marx*

**Reply With Quote****March 10th, 2012**

#5

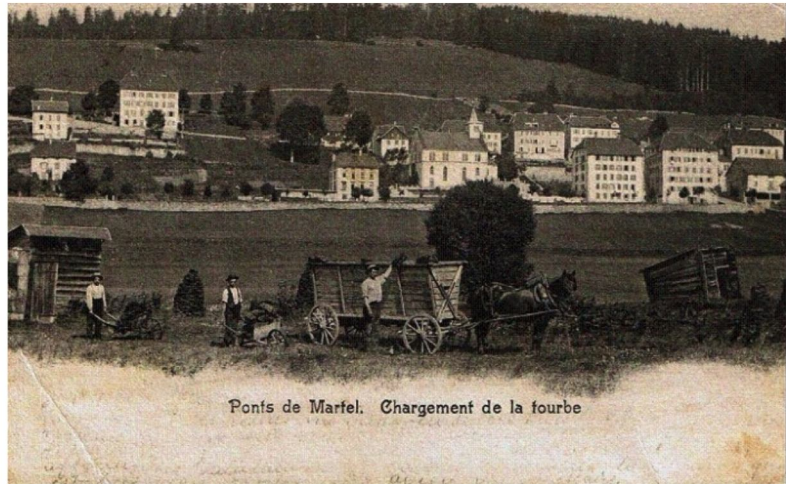
**nicola1960** ◊

Member

Join Date: Mar 2011

Location: Italia

Posts: 153

**Re: A SHORT HISTORY OF MARTEL WATCH CO and ZENITH CHRONOGRAPHS**

*Last edited by nicola1960; March 10th, 2012 at 20:15.*

sempervivens likes this.

**Reply With Quote****March 10th, 2012**

#6

**LouS** ◊

Member



Join Date: Oct 2009

Posts: 2,736

**Re: A SHORT HISTORY OF MARTEL WATCH CO and ZENITH CHRONOGRAPHS**

Wow, what an impressive compendium! Your radically revisionist recitation certainly raises several interesting points, and if it turns out to be accurate, is revolutionary. Many a chronograph collector will be surprised to learn that all of the mechanical achievements of the vaunted UG brand are actually those of Martel, a company that until about the 1950s did not produce a wristwatch with its name on it. It raises several questions as well, and leaves me somewhat confused. For the sake of clarification and a little critical evaluation, let me present a few points and express some reservations

Originally Posted by **sempervivens**

*Around 1918 Martel is seen supplying Universal with chronograph movements (see Universal Geneve -*





Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia a).

On further examination, this statement appears to be unsupported. Your source is wikipedia, and their source is no less an horological authority than a reporter for the Singapore Business Times, whose article states only that Martel bought Zenith in 1960 - nothing about Martel supplying UG. Check it yourself:

<http://www.businesstimes.com.sg>

[/sub/...53681,00.html?You](#) have pointed out elsewhere that statements can become fact by simple repetition on the internet - we see here an example of how. On the italian site, Nicola extracts an apparently supporting statement from [inevneitetfecit.com](http://inevneitetfecit.com) ([Rassegna di](#)).

However, again tracking back to the source, we see that this is in reference to the Datocompax, known to be manufactured at the UG facility at Ponts-de Martel after 1941. Unfortunately, this unsupported assumption about Martel being the source of UG movements proves rather key in all that follows, as here

Originally Posted by **sempervivens**

*we can conclude that the world's first wristwatch chronograph, launched by Universal around 1917-18, probably used a movement made by Martel.*

In *Universal Watch Geneve*, Pietro Giuliano Sala has written an horological history that more lavishly documented from primary sources than all but a few others. He has stated that in 1933, upon his accession to the management of UG with the death of his father, Raoul Perret concentrated all manufacturing operations in Geneva, which would seem to preclude Martel being a source of movements.

Originally Posted by **sempervivens**

*"A new chronograph caliber with two pushers". The text mentions that it is one and the same caliber for different sizes, with as a result the ease of interchangeable parts : this is a characteristic of Martel calibers.*

...and of UG calibers, which the advertisement is in fact talking about.

Originally Posted by **sempervivens**

*In any case since Martel was making the movements, all there was left for either Universal or Zenith was adding the dials, hands, and cases to the movements, with the company names and numbers.*

Wouldn't it be odd for UG to have bought ebauches from Martel, and the sold them - as ebauches - to Eberhard, Jaeger LeCoultre and Vacheron & Constantin, all well documented in Sala, as if those firms did not know Martel's telephone number themselves? Now, there is no doubt the Swiss watchmaking industry works in mysterious ways,



with all sorts of collective agreements that do not jibe with expectations of competitive corporate culture, but that seems curiously complicated and improbable to me.

Originally Posted by **sempervivens**

*Then it is reported by some that due to the succes of the chronographs by **1941** Universal Geneve had to open a new, ultramodern production line for chronographs*

This piece of information is not "reported by some." It is documented. I will quote Sala at length "This latest chain of events (*Zenith's demand for UG ebauches - my note*) convinced the partners to build a new plant in Pont-de-Martel in record time, where they began manufacturing chronographs and timekeepers for military and industrial purposes...the new factory was opened on 31 January 1941....It was in this facility that, among others, the new chronograph presented on 6 November 1940 was built: the Aerocompax...in the following year, production of a new totalizing chronograph fro aviation commenced, along with other watches and chronographs for purely military purposes which dominated the period." Along with this, Sala offers two pictures of the plant itself with "UNIVERSAL" across the front of the building. This last suggests strongly that you are right that the establishment of this plant is different from the establishment of Martel, the point of confusion being the place name. It also raises the possibility that the identity of Martel watch and UG's Pont de Martel facility have been conflated in other ways, namely that many of the achievements of the UG works have been ascribed to Martel Watch company when in fact the two are different. Here is a good example of that:

Originally Posted by **sempervivens**

*Around **1942** the **Martel/Universal Geneve/Zenith** collaboration then led to **the first wristwatch chronograph with date**. (see for instance [Page Modèles](#))*

The DatoCompax is plainly a UG product, made at the Pont-de-Martel works. That, as you have showed, is not the same as a Martel product. The author of invenitetfecit (your source) regards the two as synonymous, it now seems to me erroneously. Very confusing...

Originally Posted by **sempervivens**

*only the last step before Martel came to make the star product, the **first wristwatch chronograph with full calendar and moonphase** in 1944.*

That will surprise many people! Again Sala, shortly after



discussing the Tri-Compax introduction for UG's 50th anniversary, "All chronographs produced (Unicompax, Compax, Medico-Compax, Dato-Compax, Aero-Compax, and Tri-Compax) along with more simple pieces, were equipped with movements designed and manufactured entirely in-house."

So, I'm skeptical - to say the least - of your casting Martel as the "little man behind the curtain" to Universal Geneve's Wizard of Oz, and assigning all of UG's accomplishments to little Martel. Nevertheless, there remain many ambiguities. Left to explain is the Martel-UG shared, near-identical triple-calendar moonphase with the cal 291, the cal 146 which entered into Zenith's possession as well as the 'Victorious' product line, similarly in Zenith's portfolio. From where did each originate?

It seems to me that four elements clearly existed and must be accounted for

1. Martel watch company established in 1911
2. a wholly-owned UG facility at Pont de Martel
3. an independent Martel watch company functioning in the 1950's with self-branded products, some of which are shared with UG
4. an entity named 'Martel' which Zenith bought 1958-1960, and which brought a new time-only watch movement (never used by UG), and UG-derived chronograph movement, and the 'Victorious' product line into the Zenith portfolio

To me, the 1911 Martel seems unrelated to anything else. The only statement that relates it to UG is an unsupported Wikipedia item. As a footnote, I should mention that "Martel" does not enter Sala's history until the plant is built there in 1941. The UG facility and the independent 1950s Martel are linked by the cal 291 triple-calendar moonphase watch. The independent Martel and Zenith are linked by the 25x2 series calibers and the 'Victorious.' The UG facility and Zenith may be linked by the cal 146 - I know of no Martel-branded chronograph at all.

From this, my hypothesis: 1911 Martel died or was absorbed at some undetermined point in the past. UG built a chronograph works at Pont de Martel in 1941, and spun it off as a separate brand, perhaps wholly independent, perhaps not, in the 1950s, using a name from the past that had fallen into disuse, as many companies have done recently. That company developed the 25x2 series of calibers to support a time-only watch line as a main product. That brand and the physical facility in Pont de Martel was acquired by Zenith, looking for a rotor automatic and an in-house chronograph. UG's accomplishments belong to UG





and no one else, and UG was the parent of 1950s Martel, sold to Zenith.

*Last edited by LouS; March 10th, 2012 at 21:15.*

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**March 10th, 2012**

#7

**sempervivens** 

Member



Join Date: Sep 2006  
Posts: 3,079

### **Re: A SHORT HISTORY OF MARTEL WATCH CO and ZENITH CHRONOGRAPHS**

but dear Lou, Whatever the fans of Universal Geneve or Zenith may think or say about the UG or Zenith chronographs being made wholly "in-house", you should see through all that.

Tell me, what movements did Universal Geneve use when it started, in the 1930's? Everybody knows that these were identical to the Zenith calibers, they were Martel made movements.

The Zenith advertisement from ca. 1932-1935 for the two new chronograph caliber with two pushers is not about Universal Geneve calibers, it is about Zenith chronographs with Zenith cal. 122 and 136.

But whether called Universal cal. 281 or Zenith cal. 122, the movement was the same, and it was designed and made by Martel.

Take a look also at the advertisement for the Martel single pusher wristwatch chronograph from ca. 1927, another addition thanks to Nicola.

Nicola has studied the thing more and we seem to agree on this short history being correct!

Take your time to study the movements.

Thanks

*Last edited by sempervivens; March 11th, 2012 at 03:35.*

Vanitas vanitatum et omnia vanitas, praeter ...

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#8



March 10th, 2012

**sempervivens** 

Member



Join Date: Sep 2006

Posts: 3,079

## Re: A SHORT HISTORY OF MARTEL WATCH CO and ZENITH CHRONOGRAPHS

 Originally Posted by **v76** 

*Great job summarizing the intertwined histories of Martel, UG and Zenith. Thank you for putting this together, it should definitely be a sticky!*

Thanks V!

Vanitas vanitatum et omnia vanitas, praeter ...

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March 10th, 2012

#9

**Hartmut Richter** 

Zenith Forum Co-moderator

Join Date: Feb 2006

Posts: 11,976

## Re: A SHORT HISTORY OF MARTEL WATCH CO and ZENITH CHRONOGRAPHS

Thanks you, sempervivens, for the write up and LouS for the additional comments. My only contribution at this stage is two corrections:

1. The Zenith Cal. 126 was not a chronograph movement, not was it made by Martel. It is the in house cousin of the Cal. 106 (HW, sub second but 12''' instead of 10'''). You are thinking of the (Martel chronograph) Cal. 122.

2. Prior to using the 25xx P(C) series, Zenith had only one automatic movement (Cal. 133) and derivatives (Cals.133.8 and 71) but these were in house. Zenith did not obtain external automatic movements at that stage.

Hartmut Richter

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March 10th, 2012

#10

**John Chris** 

Member



Join Date: Jul 2010

Location: Vancouver, B.C.,

## Re: A SHORT HISTORY OF MARTEL WATCH CO and ZENITH CHRONOGRAPHS

SV, thank you so much for your intrepid and valuable research. This issue has long interested me (ever since I read in a JLC book that UG had subcontracted chronograph manufacture to Martel in order to keep up with demand in the late '40s), and it is all so hard to pin down! Fascinating to learn that UG's Raoul Perret was on the board of Zenith!

Canada  
Posts: 649

I have to admit that information I have seen (admittedly not as much as you have seen!) has always indicated that UG developed and manufactured its chronograph movements in-house in the '20s, '30s and '40s, being, with Lemania, one of the only houses to do so outside of the ebauche-makers, Ebauches S.A., Venus and Valjoux. It is so interesting to see the connections in those days between Universal, Zenith and Martel!

Your conclusion "that the world's first wristwatch chronograph, launched by Universal around 1917-18, probably used a movement made by Martel" seems rather thinly supported to me. Lang and Meis, "Chronograph Wristwatches, To Stop Time" (1993) credit the Moeris firm with the first small (13'') chronograph movements marketed as wristwatches around 1910. Frustratingly, they barely mention Martel except to note a 1937 patent concerning the hour register wheel drive.

Incidentally, you have repeated what I have read elsewhere that Zenith ceased mechanical manufacture in 1975 on the orders of its parent Zenith Radio Corporation, deviously undermined by the sainted Charles Vermot. It is clear, however, that Zenith Le Locle continued to produce the El Primero 01.0200.415 "Fernseher" (TV set) (and no other) right up to 1978 when the last 50 were produced in black (see how our purchases guide our research; see also Roessler, p. 241). My assumption has been that this continued production was tolerated by ZRC because it used up existing parts and connected in to the TV set image - they were advertised under ZRC's slogan "The quality goes in before the name goes on." But I have never seen an authoritative explanation for this limited continued mechanical production from 1975-1978. Anyone?

SV, thanks again!

Chris

*Last edited by John Chris; March 11th, 2012 at 03:05.*

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