

THE CRICKET RETURNS



The Vulcain Cricket Anniversary Heart watch, specially engraved for the president.



Within a few weeks, President Barack Obama is due to receive a new Vulcain Cricket watch. Vulcain, founded in 1858 and relaunched in 2002, has been known as the watch of presidents, because past US commanders-in-chief were presented with Vulcain watches and were photographed wearing them—specifically Dwight D. Eisenhower, Richard Nixon and Harry Truman.

“The Anniversary Heart, a skeletonized version of our alarm watch, is being sent to President Obama, with his name engraved on the caseback and the movement,” says Bernard R. Fleury, Vulcain CEO. “Ours has been the watch of other US presidents, so we felt it would be a good time to offer it to him. We hope that President Obama will wear it. I think it is a type of watch he would appreciate; it has tradition and craftsmanship, but it’s not too extravagant.”

Fleury heads up the group that purchased Vulcain in

September 2001, Production & Marketing Horloger SA (PMH SA). Vulcain is the real deal, a watchmaking house founded more than 150 years ago and active until the mid-1980s, when the company went dormant. In addition to the name Vulcain, PMH SA purchased the rights to the famous Cricket alarm movement, the drawing packages, production notes and know-how and even the production tools necessary to create the legendary movement. Today, almost 90 percent of Vulcain watches have the alarm movement in them.

The Cricket watches have a specially designed caseback that acts as a resonance chamber, so the alarm is loud. The sound is like the chirping of a cricket, hence the name, and this alarm system is proprietary to Vulcain. “When I relaunched Vulcain, the first priority was to re-engineer the base Cricket movement, which was introduced in 1947,” Fleury says. “We made many improve-

ments to make it an up-to-date, high performance caliber. It sounds easy, but it took us many years.”

“The Vulcain brand has everything—history, tradition, the world’s first alarm watch—and based on this heritage, it was a fantastic platform on which to relaunch and revive this name,” Fleury says. “We have ‘clean’ markets, without any existing stock. We are not overproducing. For me, starting Vulcain was the awakening of a sleeping princess. We make 3,500 watches a year, and we are probably in fifteen countries right now. Since we have relaunched the brand, we have gone step by step. Producing a Vulcain watch is not like producing watches with ETA movements. Our basic movement has 157 parts, and this year we are producing the new automatic version of the Cricket movement.” Previously it was only available in manually wound versions.

Vulcain makes watches the old-fashioned way: doing all the design work in-house then subcontracting the production. “It all needs to be developed by us, technically-speaking, then we

leave the production of the parts to the specialists in the Watch Valley; then all the parts come back here for quality control and assembly,” Fleury details. “Our approach is slightly different, because we have our own historical movements, which we assemble here as well.”

Vulcain watches are reasonably priced for the value they provide. All mechanical, the price range is \$4,000–9,000 for steel models. So far, things are going well for Vulcain. “We sell all the watches we make,” Fleury says. “We take orders for one month, and we can deliver in one month. Many brands introduce a watch in 2009 and deliver it in 2010.”

“Vulcain historically has been producing a wide range of watches, including women’s watches, so we developed a women’s model for the 150th anniversary last year, an automatic with a mother-of-pearl dial, called Vulcainova,” he continues. “We are now studying the concept of creating a women’s collection.”

Although there is no assurance that President Obama will



The Vulcain Cricket has been worn by (left to right) Richard Nixon, ca. 1960; Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower, both ca. 1947. Today’s Vulcain Cricket features a re-engineered mechanical movement with the namesake alarm.



wear the Vulcain watch sent to him, the company can always hope. The Anniversary Heart that was delivered to the Oval Office is a skeletonized version of the Cricket, that retails for \$6,300, available in three different dial colors (black, silver and bronze, each limited to 150 pieces).

With offices located in a beautiful old villa in Le Locle, just down the road from Tissot and Montblanc, Vulcain is a venerable name with real watchmaking tradition. The new owners are respecting that heritage, focusing on limited production and utilizing the company’s famous historical movement. Vulcain has just begun selling in the US. If the president wears his gift, the brand could get a welcome promotional boost and quickly attract the kind of attention that translates into future success. ❖

By Keith W. Strandberg, international editor. To discover more about the brand, visit www.vulcain-watches.com.