

# COLLECTING IWC WATCHES

How to Recognize Vintage from Fakes

by: **Adrian van der Meijden** and **Hans Goertel**

## INTRODUCTION

IWC belongs to the RICHEMONT GROUP, and represents one of the high-end class Swiss products of HAUTE HORLOGERIE. This brand has a long history, going back to 1868. Always successful, IWC has been especially so the past decade. Collectors worldwide search for IWC pocket watches, military watches and of course wrist watches. Some of the collector's pieces have become very expensive, with prices up to 30.000 U.S. being paid for the rare models.

With the increasing interest in IWC, the current prices for new watches and the influence of internet auctions, the brand has been discovered by fraudulent people, who falsify expensive watches. This has led to the production of fake watches. Many times these fakes are easily recognizable; sometimes they resemble the original in such superb way that only IWC specialists in SCHAFFHAUSEN can identify them as false.

For this, microscopic investigation is sometimes necessary. In this article we describe our knowledge and experience with IWC fakes as fellow collectors. Our goal is to warn innocent starting collectors but also to educate experienced collectors about facts and tricks that they might not know. To avoid problems with copyright of images we show in this article, we explicitly state that the photos have been taken from watches that we have examined and photographed ourselves or taken over with permission of the owner. To prevent problems we do not accuse any particular person from fraud. We simply highlight the general problem. If you'd like to see more IWC fakes, just browse the internet.

## DEFINITION of ORIGINALITY.

When a collector is a purist, a real IWC is a watch complete with strap and buckle, produced by IWC. But, what can be modified in and on a watch before reaching the point of not being original anymore? In the opinion of the authors changing the buckle or the strap using non IWC products does not really affect the originality. Maybe this is also true if one takes one step further by replacing a part of the movement or the crown. Recently, there was a discussion on the IWC forum about the symbol present on the crown of vintage wrist watches. Should it be the "fish" or "PROBUS SCAFUSIA"?



**Fig. 1:** Old FISH-crown



**Fig. 2:** New PROBUS crown

When early models of the INGENIEUR line were serviced in Schaffhausen the movements were sometimes updated with parts that had proven to be better in the later produced INGENIEURS. The freedom to do this is probably one of the reasons why there are numerous variations in dials and hands. But in those days Ingenieurs were not specifically collector's items. It is clear that there is a gliding scale of which the interpretation is very subjective.

## **T**he EXTRACT of the ARCHIVES.

An excellent tool for identifying IWC watches is to consult the IWC archives. The archives are not reliable for watches produced during the first, 15-20 years after the company has been founded. Thereafter more than 2,2 million watches have received a "passport" by recording CALIBER, material, case number, movement number, date and place of delivery in large archive books. Even the first owner (often a watch dealer) has been written down by hand



**Fig.3:** Books of the Archives

On request, IWC offers an excerpt of the archives for a moderate fee. For a long time these archives were a unique and excellent place to explore the antecedents of each individual IWC watch.

However, even this source is used by falsifiers. They use an authentic excerpt of the archives to compose a fake watch around it. How this is done is described in the article: [IWC MARK IX PILOT WATCH TRUE OR FALSE "A STORY BETWEEN HOPE AND FEAR"](http://www.zeitwerke.com/pdf/1125174644-2.pdf) (<http://www.zeitwerke.com/pdf/1125174644-2.pdf>).

Here is a summary of the fraud.

The Mark IX is an extremely rare wrist watch produced between 1936 and 1944. Mark IX was not the original name, nor was it a military watch. It was a watch made for pilots: "SPEZIALUHR FUR FLIEGER". It contains the cal.83 movement of which 68,400 have been produced. Of these, only 430 watches have been identified by IWC as Mark IX. While an "ordinary" wrist watch containing a cal.83 movement would cost currently less than 1,000 U.S., a Mark IX would probably fetch 20,000 U.S. or more. This enormous difference makes a Mark IX a perfect example, prone for forgery. In East Europe the watch case, the steel dust cap, the case back, the rotating bezel and the dial can be produced in such superb way that an experienced collector can not distinguish it from original. But what about the movement and the excerpt from the archives? The Falsifiers first buy a cal 83 wrist watch from the same era for less than 1,000 U.S. than they order the excerpt of the archives at IWC. Now they have the following things in their hands: an authentic IWC cal.83 with unique movement number and unique case number. Moreover they have the "passport" from the watch.

Subsequently, the movement is removed from the case and the case is thrown away!

A "new Mark IX" described previously. of the wasted case is inscriptions like "SCAFUSIA" and the new Mark IX is born. explicitly state that that name was not used much later for



**Fig.4:** perfect example of fake Mark IX

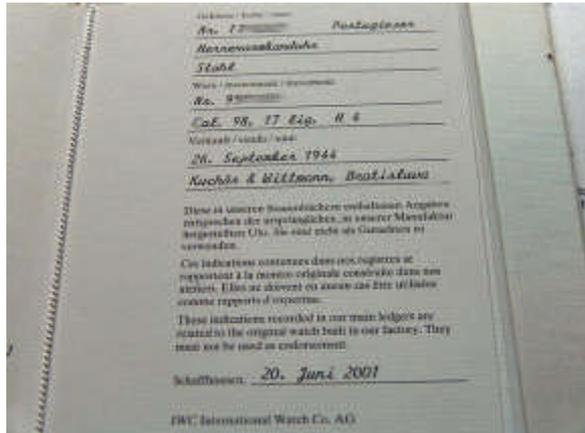
case is produced as In this case the number stamped. Also "STAYBRITE", "PROBUS PERLAGE" are applied. A The extract does not this is a Mark IX. After all, given by IWC and it was the first time.

So the description in the ledger such as "HERRENUHR IN STAHL" or "SPEZIALUHR FUR FLIEGER" can make the huge difference of 20,000 U.S.

The same method is used for vintage PORTUGIESEs. Fortunately, there is a list of movement and case numbers which is only known by a few authorized IWC people. IWC experts explain, that the most frequently requested checks concern fake PORTUGIESEs.



**Fig.5:** Original PORTUGIESEr



**Fig.6:** Excerpt from the Archives

IWC has decided not to deliver excerpts of the ledger anymore without examination of the watch in SCHAFFHAUSEN because the model is falsified frequently. How this is done will be illustrated by the following.

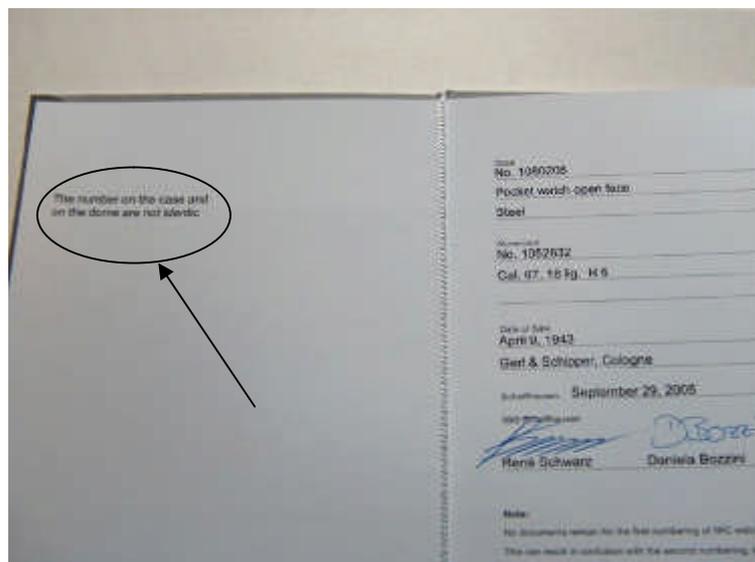
This cal.67 "KRIEGS MARINE" military submarine pocket watch is a collector's item.



**Fig.7:** KM pocket watch (B-UHR) with extract of the archives

It belongs to a series of 1500 pieces sold to GERL AND SCHIPPER, Cologne in 1943. The watch has a snap case back and an extra inner steel lid to protect the movement against dust.

These watches are identified by the case number and not by the usually movement number. The number stamped on the inside of the case should be the same as stamped on the protection lid, but here they are different. IWC has examined the watch and has serviced it. Although authentic, it is not completely original. The inner lid belongs to another cal.67.K.M. watch. This has been noted in the excerpt



**Fig.8:** Excerpt of the archives with comment (see arrow)

The case back of these watches should contain the stamp of an eagle with swastika. Many had been removed after WW II for understandable reasons. As a consequence it makes the watch less original but not less authentic.

## FAKE POCKET WATCHES.

The problem of false pocket watches is less extensive. Probably this is due to less popularity and by that lower prices. As a consequence they are less interesting objects for forgery. Apart from collectors items such as the original B-Uhr, cal.52SC, the marvelous "FISHTAIL" cal.71/72, the rare "SCHAUFENSTERUHR" and a few others, pocket watches have been made in such quantities that it is still possible to find fine, original pieces in excellent condition. Falsifying a cal 52 pocket watch is therefore useless



**Fig.9:** The legendary S.C.52



**Fig.10:** the rare "fishtail" cal. 71/72"

However, there is an increasing problem with the so called "marriages". Simply defined are marriages the unification of old movements, removed from pocket watches and a new made watch case with lugs. After putting a strap the marriage can be worn on the wrist. While despised by purist collectors and pocket watch experts, others consider it fancy to have a large wristwatch with a glass case back. The current fashion of large wrist watches and the low price for an IWC movement make these East European produced fakes popular.



**Fig.11:** Back of „marriage“ with cal 52



**Fig. 12:** Front of "marriage" with small second at 9 o'clock (wrong)

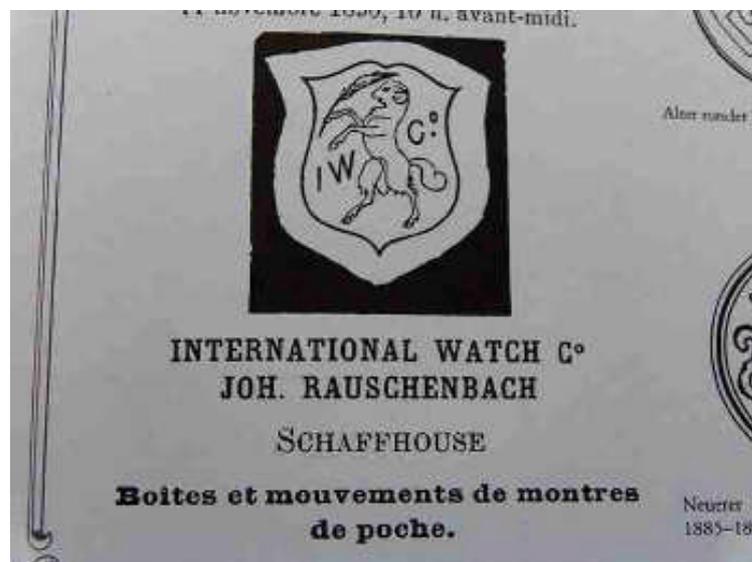
They are offered frequently on watch fairs and internet auctions.

Experienced IWC collectors know better, but starting IWC fans buy these marriages, assuming that these are real IWC products. Sometimes the sellers of these "wedding watches" indicate the origin, too often they don't.

A bit of resemblance might be encountered during the first 50 years that the company existed. IWC has produced many movements to be sold to other manufacturers. They assembled the case dial hands and crown outside the IWC factory. In fact the founder of IWC, F.A.JONES, used this principle first. He wanted to produce cheap movements in Switzerland (because of low labour cost) and then subsequently export these to the USA. Here the cases were fitted.

A few decades later IWC made many movements for STAUFFER, SON & CO in London. These movements are marked "PEERLESS" and stamped with S & Co.

The true DNA of IWC is not immediately visible, but under the dial or the balance cock, the Schaffhausen "bock" stamp has been applied. On the dial and on the case are no marks referring to IWC SCHAFFHAUSEN. It is clear that a "Stauffer-IWC" is considered as a real IWC,



**Fig. 13:** The SCHAFFHAUSER bock (ram), one of IWC movement stamps

This is also true rare pocket watches used by the American Corps of Engineers, which entered France at the end of WWI.

Among the extensive supplies the army ordered, were over 10,000 pocket watches

of predominately Swiss manufacture.

ULYSSE NARDIN, one of the contractors, could not produce the large amount of watches fast enough. Sub-contractors were hired, among them IWC. The company delivered 2,200 watches to ULYSSE NARDIN. On the dial was depicted: ULYSSE NARDIN, LOCLE & GENEVE. The movement cases were produced by IWC (Koenig and Wagener, [www.zeitwerke.com](http://www.zeitwerke.com))

Also, THE CORPS OF ENGINEERS pocket watch is considered by collectors as a genuine IWC product.



**Fig.14:** CoE pocket watch

Finally, one can find on internet auctions silver and gold pocket watches that belonged to kings, presidents and Tsars of the Balkan countries, Russia etc., who are deceased many years.

These watches, probably genuine IWC's, are offered with decorations and certificates to proof the original ownership. Too much money is asked for the watch and the fun articles.

## **F**AKE WRIST WATCHES.

The highest amount of money can be earned by falsifying holy grails such as MARK IX and vintage PORTUGIESER. We refer to the paragraph on "The extract of the archives". Sought after models such as MARK XI, INGENIEUR and AQUATIMER are also worthwhile to copy. We have not seen fake watches from the "PORSCHE DESIGN" line.

This is probably due to the very original design, material, straps and coating used on the Compass models, the Ocean and Bund divers.



**Fig.15:** THE IWC KOMPASS UHR



**Fig.16:** Inside look famous Ocean 2000

How about the current models? If one takes a vacation at the Spanish costa's, the Turkish Riviera or in Asia, beautiful "IWC" watches are offered, starting from 10.00 U.S.

If you examine such a piece, you are surprised by the weight, the sturdiness, the fine looking strap and the finish. How can such an automatic mechanical watch be made for so little money? Of course there are many "poor" falsifications.

They have nothing to do with an original, but the three capital letters: IWC.

Although one might be wondered by how the watch looks like, it is pathetic to read how inscriptions and logo's such as "SCHAFFHAUSEN", "PROBUS SCAFUSIA" and "Power Reserve" are molested.



**Fig.17:** „PROBUS SOAFUIA“ and “POWER RESERVE”



**Fig.18:** fake of GRANDE COMPLICATION



**Fig.19:** a blue fakers dream



**Fig.20:** An intended Portugieser Chrono



**Fig.:21:** Imitation engravings, nearly professional



**Fig.22:** S.C.52 fake



**Fig.23:** Faked Portugieser, small second at 9 O'clock (wrong)



**Fig.24:** A FIEGERUHR, all made from phantasy



**Fig.25:** Portugieser fake (front)



**Fig.26:** Portugieser fake (Back, cal.74 and glass case back)



**Fig.27:** Mark XV fake phantasy



**Fig.28:** no comment

## C ONCLUSIONS.

If you spend \$ 10.00 to \$50.00 for a fun fake IWC, fun is you'll have.

However fun will quickly disappear if you have spent thousands of dollars for a vintage IWC that turns out to be a fraud. What can you do to prevent a deception? If you are seriously considering to collect the brand a research in the literature is recommended. The books IWC by TOELKE AND KING and IWC -UHREN by REINHARD MEIS present an excellent overview of IWC's production from the first 100 years. Than there are the white hard cover books, containing the current collection and edited by IWC every year. Finally there is IWC itself ([info@iwc.ch](mailto:info@iwc.ch)), IWC forums ([www.iwc.ch](http://www.iwc.ch)) and IWC dedicated websites such as [www.zeitwerke.com](http://www.zeitwerke.com) and [www.gregsteer.net](http://www.gregsteer.net).

Last but not least, fellow collectors are often prepared to help you. Several of them can be approached by email. In the case of very expensive IWC collector's pieces, we recommend to send the watch to SCHAFFHAUSEN for verification. IWC has a unique service to meet the needs of their collectors.

## Ten Golden Rules

1. If you are offered an original PORTUGIESER or Mark IX for less than 10,000 U.S., something is wrong.
2. An original PORTUGIESER normally had a steel case back, with the diameter 42 mm, always. One IWC expert states that he has seen 2 Original PORTUGIESERS with a glass case back but it's not clear what role IWC had played in assembling these.
3. An original PORTUGIESER never had the small second at nine o'clock but at 6.
4. Extracts of the archives do not guarantee authenticity. They prove a certain watch with given case-and movement numbers existed.
5. All expensive IWC collector items (Mark IX, MARKXI, original PORTUGIESER, Deck watches etc) should be verified by IWC/SCHAFFHAUSEN, for authenticity.
6. If you buy a used IWC, ask for papers and original box
7. If you intend to spend considerable money, first consult literature.
8. The best insurance to buy a genuine IWC is at an authorized IWC dealer.
9. If you have been deceived, approach the seller and warn about legal action.
10. Always beware of fakes!

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