

This newest Towson model pays tribute to the Pride of Baltimore II and the famous Baltimore Clippers.



**A**s the final decade of the 18th century dawned, men of means seeking timepieces had two choices. They could opt for a high quality, accurate pocket watch from Britain or choose a more fashionable, more readily available example produced by the Swiss watch industry. By 1790, Geneva was already exporting more than 60,000 watches annually.

At the same time, Maryland led a still nascent America in shipbuilding. The heart of the industry was in Bal-

timore where a class of vessels known as “Baltimore Clippers” were built to meet the need for fast ships capable of eluding the brawny but lumbering British naval vessels which were devastating American shipping on the Chesapeake Bay and beyond as the British sought dominion of maritime commerce in continental Europe and Yankee waters.

The increasingly frequent illegal impressments of American sailors into the Royal Navy as the British

and French vied for control of the sea during the French Revolutionary Wars (1792-1802) and later Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815) of the period fanned the flames of war stateside. Conditions were ripe for the War of 1812, which was a conflict in which Baltimore Clippers were to play a seminal and unforgettable role.

That notoriety and proud heritage is carried on today in Baltimore by a reproduction Baltimore Clipper known as the Pride of Baltimore II.



# PRIDE OF BALTIMORE II

Already renowned as one of the few contemporary American watchmakers, TOWSON WATCH COMPANY'S line of elegant chronographs and automatics pay tribute to the Chesapeake Bay region

BY JAN TEGLER

The successor to the original Pride of Baltimore, launched in 1977, Pride II is a living monument to the feats of the Baltimore Clipper fleet and a powerful sight for all who see her.

"Baltimore Clippers were a surprise to the world at large," Jan Miles, Pride II's Captain, explains. "Fast and capable, they were sailed boldly. American seamanship was not hampered by traditionalism. The ability of the Baltimore Clippers to frustrate the British Navy during the War of



Captain Jan Miles  
(Bill McAllen Photography)



The very first example of the 100-piece limited edition collection is a donation that will be auctioned to benefit the topsail schooner.

1812 was widely respected. Their power as a symbol stems from the very iconic American profile that the *Pride II* presents today.”

#### Distinctive case

While that appearance has never quite been equaled on the water, for the wrist there is now a new timepiece with a profile almost as distinctive. Fittingly, the Towson Watch Company (TWC) makes it in Towson, the Baltimore suburb. This newest model pays tribute to the *Pride of Baltimore II* and the famous Baltimore Clippers she recalls. Featuring a clean and tasteful black or silver dial, the *Pride II* is powered by the reliable ETA 2892 automatic movement and available with a brown or black leather strap.

It's the shape of TWC's latest creation that sets it apart. The unique sail-shaped case steel case is unlike just about any you've ever seen and a

surprisingly appropriate complement to the *Pride II* herself. Ironically, that wasn't the original intention of TWC's directors.

Towson Watch Company founders Hartwig Balke and George Thomas weren't looking to create a new model when they contacted French-Canadian industrial designer, Patrick Ayoub. Co-founder of another American brand, Bozeman Watch, Ayoub's background is diverse, including stints in automotive design at Volkswagen, BMW and Daimler-Chrysler and more broad industrial design as the founder of his own design firm, Graphite 2 LLC.

TWC had turned to Ayoub for a fresh look for the brand's emblem says Hartwig Balke. “George and I often

say that we ‘collect artists.’ We met Patrick three years ago. He had done watch design before and our Towson Watch logo needed to be made more distinctive. I asked him if he would do me the favor of cleaning up the logo and he said, ‘No problem.’ When I saw the logo shape he came up with I thought to myself, ‘That’s a nice shape. That could be a watch case.’ I drew a few lines on the shape and asked Patrick what he thought about it.”

The next day Ayoub called Balke and told him he had something special. “He said, ‘I have a present for you. Go to your computer and see,’” Balke recalls. “It was the first layout of the watch. I said, ‘Wow! We have to make this.’ That was the beginning of the project.”

Now all TWC's leaders needed was a theme in keeping with the rest of their watch line. Inspiration didn't strike immediately. But in fact it could be said that the genesis of Balke's idea for the new watch was more than three decades in the making.

### The Pride of Baltimore

By the mid-1970s, Baltimore, like many other American cities was in decay, struggling to revitalize its infrastructure and its image. The city's harbor had for hundreds of years been the vibrant hub around which business, commerce and gracious living were concentrated. When urban renewal was advanced as the way forward for the metropolis, Baltimoreans focused on their beloved port.

The redevelopment and emergence of the Inner Harbor as a magnet for recreation and tourism put "Charm City" back on the map and inspired similar efforts in cities across the country. But Baltimore officials wanted a symbol that would represent the revitalized city, linking it with its proud maritime past. The idea that eventually emerged was to construct a historic vessel right in the heart of the Inner Harbor. No tall ship could be more identified with the town than the iconic Baltimore Clipper.

And so it was that construction of the first Baltimore Clipper to be built in 150 years began in the Spring of 1976. The name of the vessel would at once suggest the modern rebirth of the city and recall local maritime history. The *Pride of Baltimore* embodied the spirit of Charm City and honored the biggest and brashiest of the Baltimore-built Clippers, the *Chassaeur*—a ship whose contributions to victory in the War of 1812 earned it the nickname, "The *Pride of Baltimore*."

The original *Pride* served as a goodwill ambassador to the world, representing Baltimore for nine years from Newfoundland to the Florida Keys, the Great Lakes, the Caribbe-

The ship's image is on the back and the crown recalls a ship's winch.



an Sea and the Gulf of Mexico, the West Coast of America as far north as British Columbia and in Europe. She racked up over 150,000 miles and would likely have logged another 150,000 were it not for a tragedy.

In mid-May 1986 the Pride of Baltimore was struck by a violent squall off Puerto Rico. Later confirmed as a microburst squall with 80 mph winds, the storm tore the vessel apart.

### **The Pride of Baltimore II**

The shock and sadness felt at the loss of the original was palpable throughout the region, but Baltimoreans and other area residents rallied, sending in contributions in everything from penny jars to \$10,000 checks to build a replacement vessel. Spurred by the outpouring of financial contributions from private citizens, corporations, foundations and the state of Maryland itself, the non-profit company that operated the Pride of Baltimore launched an effort to build a new Baltimore Clipper by the close of 1986.

Known as the Pride of Baltimore II she would serve as a sailing memorial to the Pride and carry on the role of ambassador for the city.

Her mission has broadened to include the promotion of education regarding Baltimore and the War of 1812, American history, Maryland and the Port of Baltimore. She also serves as a unique learning platform—both for students of math, science and social studies, and for professional mariners as a sail training vessel for historic tall ships. Simply put, she preserves history and waves the flag for Baltimore everywhere she goes.

### **A sailing machine**

As a Baltimorean and an avid sailor himself, Hartwig Balke had followed the exploits of the City's prized ambassador. In search of an appropriate local icon upon which to theme TWC's new watch, Balke had a brainwave.

"We have our 'Bay Pilot, 'Chop-tank', 'Skipjack' and 'Potomac' models," he affirms." So we were looking for a Chesapeake Bay theme. I had the Constellation (USS Constellation, the famed 1854 Baltimore Sloop-of-war which would be the last sail-only warship designed for the U.S. Navy) in my mind and Thomas Point (a renowned 1875 Chesapeake Bay Shoal Lighthouse) and other things. Then all of a sudden because I'm sailor and I like ships, I thought of the Pride of Baltimore. It's absolutely beautiful!"

Janet Caslo, director of development for Pride of Baltimore Inc, the non-profit organization that operates Pride II, recalls that Balke told her about the watch.

**The genesis of Balke's idea for the new watch was more than three decades in the making**

"I was floored! He sat down and we talked for quite a while and he said he needed a photo of Pride II so that we can put an image of it on the watch."

Balke was quick to make another creative request. He wanted an image of Pride II to use as the basis for an engraving on the watch's caseback. Caslo suggested the work of commercial photographer and longtime Pride of Baltimore/Pride II chronicler Bill McAllen. In fact, among the images seen here is the photo that was replicated on the caseback.

It's one of the many touches that make TWC's Pride II watch stand out. Another is the timepiece's crown which mimics the look of the winch on a sailboat lending it one more distinctive maritime touch.

### **Pomp & circumstance**

When the Pride of Baltimore II re-

turns from her 2010 sailing season (the ship typically sails from home waters from spring through fall) in November she will be a central part of festivities celebrating the Inner Harbor's 30th anniversary. She will be feted with a week of activities (Pride week) commemorating her contributions to the city of Baltimore and celebrating the history she preserves. Towson Watch will be a part of the merriment and will make an official presentation of the first Pride II watch, #001, to the Pride organization. The very first example of the 100-piece limited edition collection is a donation from TWC that will be auctioned to benefit the topsail schooner.

"It's a very generous gesture," says Caslo enthusiastically. Captain Jan Miles is equally enthusiastic about the connection of sailing machine and time machine.

"If there's one vanity that I have it's that I admire the heck out of watches," he admits. "And I suppose that the same kind of passion that has helped us keep alive the tradition of tall ship sailing and Baltimore Clippers in particular must have played a dominant role in how a lot of the traditional watchmaking processes and concepts have been preserved."

Aye' Aye' Captain. And through Towson Watch Company's efforts there's now an American watch that unites the iconic profile of the Pride of Baltimore II with a distinctive new timepiece, bringing together the traditions of historic sailing and watchmaking. ☺