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THE MK. VIII



on his mark

RACER STEFAN JOHANSSON'S OWN
BRAND WINS THE CHECKERED FLAG FOR
AUTO-SPORTS AUTHENTICITY

BY JAN TEGLER



THE BRAND BEGUN MORE THAN A DECADE AGO BY SWEDISH RACING DRIVER STEFAN JOHANSSON JUST MIGHT BE THE TRUEST LINK BETWEEN HOROLOGY AND AUTO RACING ANYWHERE. THAT'S BECAUSE JOHANSSON, THE EX-FORMULA ONE (FERRARI, MCLAREN), EX-INDYCAR (BETTENHAUSEN RACING) AND CURRENT SPORTS CAR DRIVER (GULF MIDDLE EAST RACING TEAM), DOESN'T SIMPLY LEND HIS NAME TO A LINE OF WATCHES PRODUCED BY A MAJOR BRAND.

JOHANSSON IS THE creative mind behind all of his limited edition timepieces. From dials to cases (and in the future, movements), Stefan Johansson Väjö watches are designed by a man who has stood the podium in F1 and IndyCar and who has won at the famed 24 Hours of Le Mans and 12 Hours of Sebring.

But Johansson's entry into the watch world didn't happen at race-pace.

Collecting on his own, followed by years of study and contact with a wide array of players in the industry, helped Johansson better understand the ins-and-outs of watchmaking, resulting in the eye-catching Mark VIII chronographs he is best known for. Collectors, fellow racing drivers, enthusiasts and celebrities alike have gravitated to the racing-themed chronos over the last several years.

Now there are two completely new Stefan Johansson Väjö timepieces, the Mark IX and Mark X. Johansson gave *International Watch* a sneak peak at BaselWorld 2012, the week before he piloted Gulf Middle East Racing's Nissan-powered LMP2 Lola B12/80 Coupe to a seventh-place finish in the World Endurance Championship standings at the 2012 12 Hours Of Sebring.



▷ THE MK. IX FEATURES A TRADITIONAL ROUND CASE. THE "C" MODEL INCORPORATES A NEW BLACK DIAL DESIGN WITH SUBTLE RACING CUES AND STEFAN JOHANSSON'S UNIQUE NEW INTEGRATED CROWN AND PUSHER ARRANGEMENT.



▷ THE MARK X FEATURES A COMPLETELY NEW INTEGRATED CROWN AND PUSHER ARRANGEMENT. THE DIAL INCORPORATES THE FIA RACING-FLAG INDEXES.

▷ STEFAN JOHANSSON STANDS IN THE MIDDLE OF A LINE-UP OF RACING LEGENDS. L TO R - MARK BLUNDELL, JOHNNY HERBERT, EDDIE CHEEVER AND ARIE LUYENDYK. ALL THE DRIVERS HAVE WORN THE MK. VIII IN COMPETITION.



"My new case designs are finally ready," Johansson reveals. "It's been almost a two-year process getting these designs done, but in some ways I'm glad it took that long because they've gotten better and better with every little tweak and change we made. I'm really pleased with the way they've turned out and I think they'll be spectacular! The dials look great too."

The Mark IX sports a traditional round case while the Mark X features a tonneau shape, rotated to lie on its side. Stefan tells us case materials are being finalized but there will be several options including steel, white gold and more. Inside the new cases is Dubois-Depraz's 2075 automatic chronograph movement. Dials will continue to be colorful and eye-catching. Initially available in basic black or with a steel finish, other color options and finishes will follow.



“The recurring feature on both models is the integrated crown protector and pusher arrangement which nobody’s ever done before,” Johansson explains. “We’ve actually filed patents on it. I hope that people will agree with me that these are done in a tasteful way that ties the concept together in a technically focused-looking watch with subtle references to automotive engineering and racing without being too obvious.”

“I’m trying to produce designs which are somewhat timeless,” he continues. “I’m not really following current trends or fashions. I



▷ THE NEW MK. IX WILL BE AVAILABLE WITH A RANGE OF DIAL COLORS AND DESIGNS INCLUDING THIS MK. IX G WITH SILVERED DIAL AND INTEGRATED TACHOMETER SCALE.

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FAVOR
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favor designs that can stand on their own for a long time. As always, I’m trying to respect the best traditions of watchmaking, retaining classic lines and styles but in distinctive ways.”

The new pieces carry forward several of the cues which have become emblematic of the brand including the signature crest bearing the checkered flag and “Little Leaf” symbol Johansson has displayed on his helmets throughout his career. His nickname is derived from Leaf, his father’s nickname.

Meanwhile, Stefan is still working on the details of a movement he is designing himself. The complex project is taking time but, as the famed driver notes, “it will pay dividends down the road. And we’ve got two new great designs.”

For 2012, however, the Mark IX and Mark X are ready to race. Look for them this fall. Visit www.sjwatch.net. ●