



# SWISS PRECISION IN FLIGHT

BY JAN TEGLER

BREITLING HONORS THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY  
OF THE PATROUILLE SUISSE





Captions



**S**INCE 1964 THE PATROUILLE SUISSE FLIGHT demonstration team has served as an ambassador for Switzerland's armed forces— and for the country itself. Performing precision aerobatic displays throughout Europe and just above the snow-capped peaks of the Swiss Alps for half a century, the team is familiar to aviation enthusiasts globally and remains a symbol of national pride.

Breitling has a longstanding relationship with the team, having produced numerous special edition timepieces over the years honoring the pilots and aircraft of the Patrouille Suisse. None is more special or poignant, however, than the newly released, limited edition Patrouille Suisse 50th Anniversary Chronomat 44 GMT.

That's because 2014 will likely be the team's penultimate season of flight demonstrations. In February of 2013, then-Swiss president Ueli Maurer announced that 2016 would be the Patrouille Suisse's last season.

The roots of the unit date back to 1959 when an aerobatic team was launched inside the Swiss Air Force's Reconnaissance Wing, flying four Hawker Hunter Mk. 58 fighters. But it wasn't until 1964 and the celebrations surrounding Expo64, the Swiss national exhibition in Lausanne, that the Patrouille Suisse was formally founded.

The team expanded to six Hawker Hunters in 1978 and flew the popular fighter until 1994. In 1995 the Patrouille Suisse converted to the supersonic Northrop F-5E Tiger II. The unit's distinctive Tiger IIs are multi-role aircraft, used as aggressor aircraft and target tugs for air-to-air combat training as well as for the eighteen-minute precision aerobatic demos the unit flies throughout its air show season.

#### THE WATCH

**BREITLING'S DUAL-TIME VERSION OF ITS** Chronomat pays tribute to that precision and to the pilots chosen from throughout the Swiss Air Force's tactical fighter squadrons to serve one-year-tours with the Patrouille Suisse.

Powered by Breitling's automatic Caliber B04, the 44 mm satin-brushed, steel cased chronograph features a unique dial and caseback. The team's logo adorns the black dial at nine o'clock while a second hour hand, tipped by the outline of a red Tiger II indicates the second time zone in 24-hour mode. A rotating bezel inlaid with rubber numerals also enables a third time zone

reading. The caseback is engraved with the official 50th anniversary logo and limited edition number.

Switzerland is planning to retire its aged fleet of 54 F-5Es including the eleven colorfully painted Patrouille Suisse Tiger IIs by 2016, leaving the team with no aircraft. Twenty-two Saab Gripen Es are to replace the F-5Es pending a public referendum late this spring, but the new fighters would be dedicated to defense only.

The announcement caused a backlash among the Swiss population which, despite decreasing support for the Swiss Air Force, views the team as a national asset. Maurer contends that the cost of maintaining a formal flight demonstration team is unsustainable.

Sadly, it appears the proud five-decade tradition of the Patriouille Suisse will soon be grounded. Viewed from a horological perspective however, that should make previous models Breitling has dedicated to the team more collectible. And if the 1,000-piece Patrouille Suisse 50th Anniversary" Chronomat 44 GMT proves to be the last chronograph the renowned Swiss brand fashions in honor of the famed Swiss aerobatic team — it may just be the most collectible of all.

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