

BACK ON TRACK

• BY JAN TEGLER



BREITLING & BENTLEY
CONTINUE A DECADE
OF SUCCESS BORN IN
RACING

IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE THAT BREITLING'S MOST SUCCESSFUL DEPARTURE FROM ITS TRADITIONAL IDENTITY AS "OFFICIAL SUPPLIER TO WORLD AVIATION" IS NOW MORE THAN A DECADE OLD. THE BREITLING-FOR-BENTLEY PARTNERSHIP BEGAN IN 2002, COINCIDENT WITH BENTLEY'S ONGOING CAMPAIGN TO RECAPTURE THE 24 HOURS OF LE MANS.

The British icon did just that, winning the 2003 edition of the world's most famous endurance race with its two Speed 8 prototypes. Breitling paid tribute to the "Bentley Boys" first win at Le Mans since 1930 with a chronograph known as the Bentley Le Mans. The limited edition timepiece sold out, kicking off the Breitling-for-Bentley line in fine fashion.

Over the following ten years, the collection gained great popularity, burnishing the image of the La Chaux-de-Fonds-based watchmaker and the automaker at Crewe. Wind the hands around the dial to 2014 and we find Bentley on-track again - this time in the hotly-contested GT ranks of world sports car racing - with the Bentley Continental GT3 racer.

Now in its first season of competition, the racing version

LEFT: The new Breitling Bentley GMT Light Body B04

RIGHT: Since 2002 Breitling dashboard instruments have been part of every Bentley Continental.

of Bentley's acclaimed Continental Coupe is already a winner in the Blancpain Endurance Series, having scored victory at Silverstone Circuit in the U.K. in just the second round of the series for 2014. Festooned with Breitling logos, it's also a perfect echo of the partnership's beginnings.

THE CONTINENTAL

THAT'S BECAUSE 2002 WAS ALSO the year Bentley launched the Continental (the car credited with reviving the historic brand) and Breitling played a role in its success, participating in the design of its dashboard instruments and creating the onboard clock that has been a part of every Continental produced since then.

What's more, driver Guy Smith, part of the 2003 Le Mans winning trio in the no. 7 Speed 8, was also at the wheel of the winning no. 7 M-Sport Bentley Continental GT3 at Silverstone last May. That's the kind of continuity that gives one pause.

Now that Bentley is back on-track, can a Breitling-for-Bentley chronograph inspired by the new GT racing program be far behind?

The answer so far it seems is a definite maybe. In the meantime, the collection's latest release, the Bentley GMT Light Body B04, demonstrates the passion and creativity Breitling continues to invest in the partnership.

Powered by the in-house B04 calibre automatic mechanical movement, this light body travel chronograph features a featherweight titanium case with asymmetrical lugs and ergonomic curves, measuring 49 mm in diameter. Bentley-inspired cues include a broad bezel with a knurled motif echoing the Continental's grille and gear selector.

What really distinguishes the GMT is its trick timezone-changing system. The wearer simply pulls out the crown and turns it forward or backward in one-hour increments to set a new local time without loss of precision in terms of minutes - a function already found on Breitling's analog/digital chronographs.

The date also automatically adjusts to the new time zone while the GMT's rotating inner pinion bezel boasts a 24-city world time scale enabling at-a-glance reading of the local time in any global time zone.

That 24-hour scale recalls the classic 24-hour race Bentley won in 2003. Now that the automaker is back on track in endurance racing we're guessing Breitling's collection will reflect the effort. ●

