

IT'S ABOUT TIME

Negligence may lead you to discover that your watch does not function as well as expected. So, take the time to take care of your watch – advise top watch technicians, reports POOJA AGARWAL



Nicolas Burrige, customer service technical advisor of Audemars Piguet

"The greatest achievement of the age: everyone has a watch – but nobody has any time," wrote Ernst Ferstl an Austrian poet.

After more than 20 years servicing and repairing watches from his office tucked away in 48 Tanglin Halt Road in Singapore, Eric Ong says: "One of the worst 'sins' a watch owner can ever make is to send his or her watch to an untrained or unqualified technician."

For mechanical watch owners, this suggestion could save you a great deal of time and money. "Clients come to me and tell me 'I keep wearing a few often, but not those that I don't like.' If the watch is seldom used, every quarterly wind it up five to seven times and let it run. A watch is a machine just like an automobile. It needs to be used to be kept in good working condition," explains Ong.

How does one take care of quartz watches, though? "Do not wait till your quartz watch stops running before you change the battery. Old batteries can cause corrosion and ruin the integrated circuit (IC) in your watch." He favours changing the battery once every two years. Another tip he gives is to use the recommended batteries. "Don't take chances with unbranded batteries as they may discharge low voltage and have a higher chance of leakage which will eventually cause corrosion." Also, it's not advisable to handle the battery with bare hands. "Do not touch the IC as well because the oil and dirt on your hands can lead to corrosion," he cautions.

For those that possess both mechanical and quartz watches, he advises: "Please

separate while storing because of the havoc magnetic fields can play. The coils in the quartz watches will magnetise the movement of the mechanical watches in time to come." Recently, he has made available certificates of authentication that attach a value to your timepieces, so that you can insure them against loss or damage.

Ensuring the timepieces keep the precision and appearance they had in their original state, Nicolas Burrige, customer service technical advisor, Audemars Piguet (Singapore) has a life full of wheels, tiny screws and dials. "We analyse and fully dismantle the watches to clean them through ultrasonic and other specially dedicated baths. We then reassemble and check all the watch functions and tolerances. After

lubricating the watch, we check and regulate its timing," he says.

"When handling a watch, one should avoid quick date changing in the evening, until midnight has elapsed as not all watches allow this function at this time and might cause damage to the mechanism. High magnetic fields are to be avoided at all times as it will affect the timing," explains Burrige. "Direct light exposure over long periods of time might discolour the dial. Alcohol, perfumes, solvents and salt water might compromise the gaskets, thus the water resistance of the watch. Owners of Tourbillons, Minute Repeaters and other Highly Complicated watches should avoid playing any impact sport with their watch on, the accelerations involved in these sports might damage the delicate components," he adds.

Does he have to take extra care when jeweled watches are brought for repair? "As the diamonds are mostly set on the case and do not interfere with the mechanical parts, there is no repair difficulty on the technical side. Difficulty lies with the delicate and thin pieces that sometimes come when having to insure their water resistancy, or when manipulating a worn case, the setting may become loose."

"People usually take their watches for repair as they are aware of the ideal service intervals – three to five years. It also happens that they notice any irregular behaviour of their timepiece," comments Burrige. "Some other customers simply wish to re-polish their watch to preserve its original appearance."

Rolex unveils the secrets of keeping those watches working impeccably. "Mechanical and automatic watches should be cleaned and serviced regularly by a qualified technician," says the service manager, Rolex Singapore. He encourages watch owners to only have the timepiece serviced at the respective brands' service centre. "If it's a Rolex, their service centres have proprietary tools and parts that cannot be found elsewhere. Many times, we see people come in with watch cases damaged to the point of compromising the attributes of the watch, such as waterproofness

or pressure-proofness because they've gone to other technicians who did not have the right equipment to open our Oyster case," he expands. All mechanical watches require regular maintenance, just like a car. "Parts need to be kept well-lubricated and cleaned even if the watch is not displaying any signs of damage or inaccuracy. All internal moving parts ought to be kept in good condition. Some need to be replaced from time to time."

To ensure longevity one also needs to take extra care of a watch. "It is also advisable that the watch be washed periodically in warm water, using a soft brush on the metal bracelet and case. Of course, this applies to only waterproof watches," he warns. Storage is always an important factor for any precious belonging. "Watches should be stored in cool, dry, well-ventilated places when not in use. If you prefer to wrap the watch in a cloth during storage, be sure to use a natural, non-synthetic material to minimise the risk of chemical reactions between the material and the metal. Little reactions can be incremental overtime resulting in tarnishing or other damage," he advises.

A watch technician has had years of rigorous training and re-training to update his skills and knowledge of timepieces. Yet, whatever brand a technician represents, all share a common goal – to keep the watches in perfect tick tock shape. **TT**



Above and below: Eric Ong with watches that he has helped to repair

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