



Eric Ong working on a watch movement at his workbench

# Ignorance is NOT Bliss

This is especially true when you have made a purchase of a wristwatch that cost a few thousand dollars only to discover that it does not function as well as expected. Is it the manufacturer's fault or is it improper handling on your part?

By Irene Ang

Imagine a solid gold watch with its top case missing or a watch that looks like a 'miniature aquarium' because the owner forgot to secure the crown before taking a swim; yes, these are just some of the timepieces brought to Eric Ong, proprietor of Bonfield specialising in the restoration of timepieces and even

customised jewellery setting services, among other things.

After more than 20 years servicing and repairing watches from his office tucked away in Tanglin Halt Road in Singapore, Ong has many amusing tales to share, including the one about a Rolex watch that had its hour and minute hands, and even the hour indexes





**Eric Ong**  
Watch restorer and Jeweller  
Bonfield

painted over by a marker pen. Strangely, that watch was previously ‘serviced by a so-called watch repairer’ before being brought to Ong.

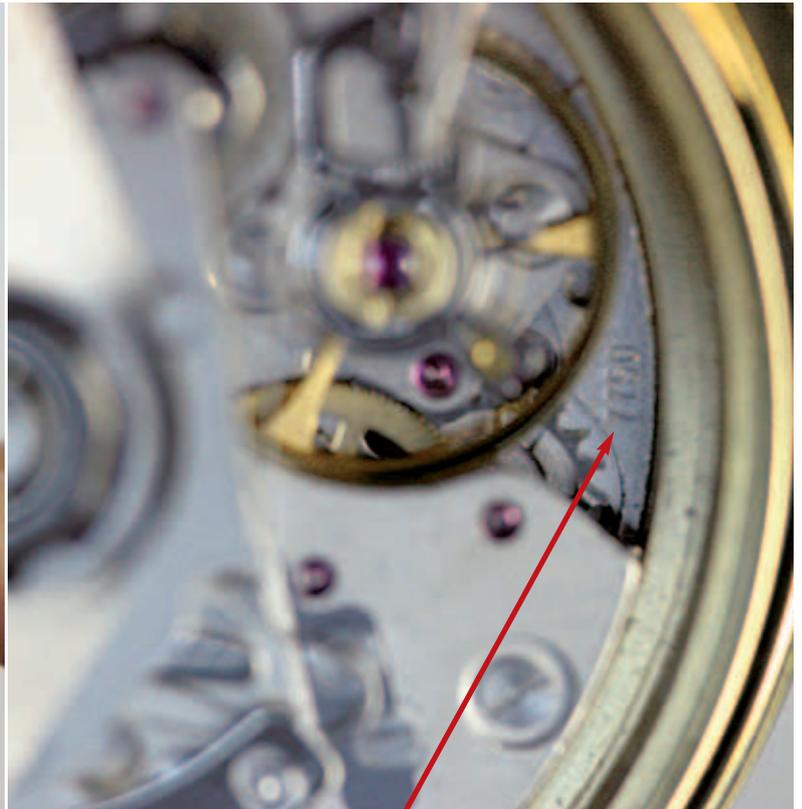
“One of the worst ‘sins’ a watch owner can ever make is to send his or her watch to an untrained or unqualified technician,” says Ong matter-of-factly. “The other mistake many make is not to send their watches in for the required servicing when it is due,” he adds. Generally, owners of quartz watches should have their batteries changed once every two years while mechanical wristwatches should be serviced at least once between seven months to five years.

“The solution to prolong the lifespan of your watch is simple; seek only trained and qualified technicians to handle your prized possessions,” says Ong, who services mostly Rolex timepieces. “This is because of the large numbers that exist in the market. I do service all the major brand names too, and some are just more fun than others,” he explains.

But are there instances when manufacturer’s fault is to blame for timepieces which fail to function properly? “Most watchmaking companies have well-developed quality control systems and it ensures that mistakes seldom leave the factory. Do not forget that mistakes cost a manufacturer much more than the repair or replacement of the timepiece; it is because their reputation is at stake. In this industry, there is nothing more important than the trust and reputation that your customers and peers have in you,” says Ong.

According to Ong, some of the common mistakes made by mechanical wristwatch owners are:

- i. Buying cheap watches. “Know the difference between a good deal and a cheap deal; it can save you a great deal of money and headaches in the long run.”
- ii. Not understanding what a watch is and how it functions. “A watch is a machine just like an automobile. It needs to be serviced to be kept in good working condition. Do not wait till it stops before sending it in for servicing.”
- iii. Failing to understand the difference between water-resistance and water-proof.
- iv. Not taking proper care of their watches. “Because of our tropical climate, watches tend to experience wear and tear quicker than in a cooler climate. One recommendation is to rinse your watch under cool clean water and towel it dry at least once a week. But before that, do know and understand what is water resistance and what is water-proof.”
- v. Improper handling and storage of watches. “Do learn how to handle your watch. If you treat it like an egg once it is off your wrist, you should not have many problems. I do see many cases of damaged watches because the owners mishandled and dropped their timepieces. Do not place or store your watch near any source of magnetic interference such as TVs, stereos, etc. If so, your watch may become magnetized thereby affecting its timekeeping precision.”



Question: How can you confirm if the watch houses a Valjoux 7750 calibre?

Answer: One way is to look for the 7750 marking which is engraved on the movement.

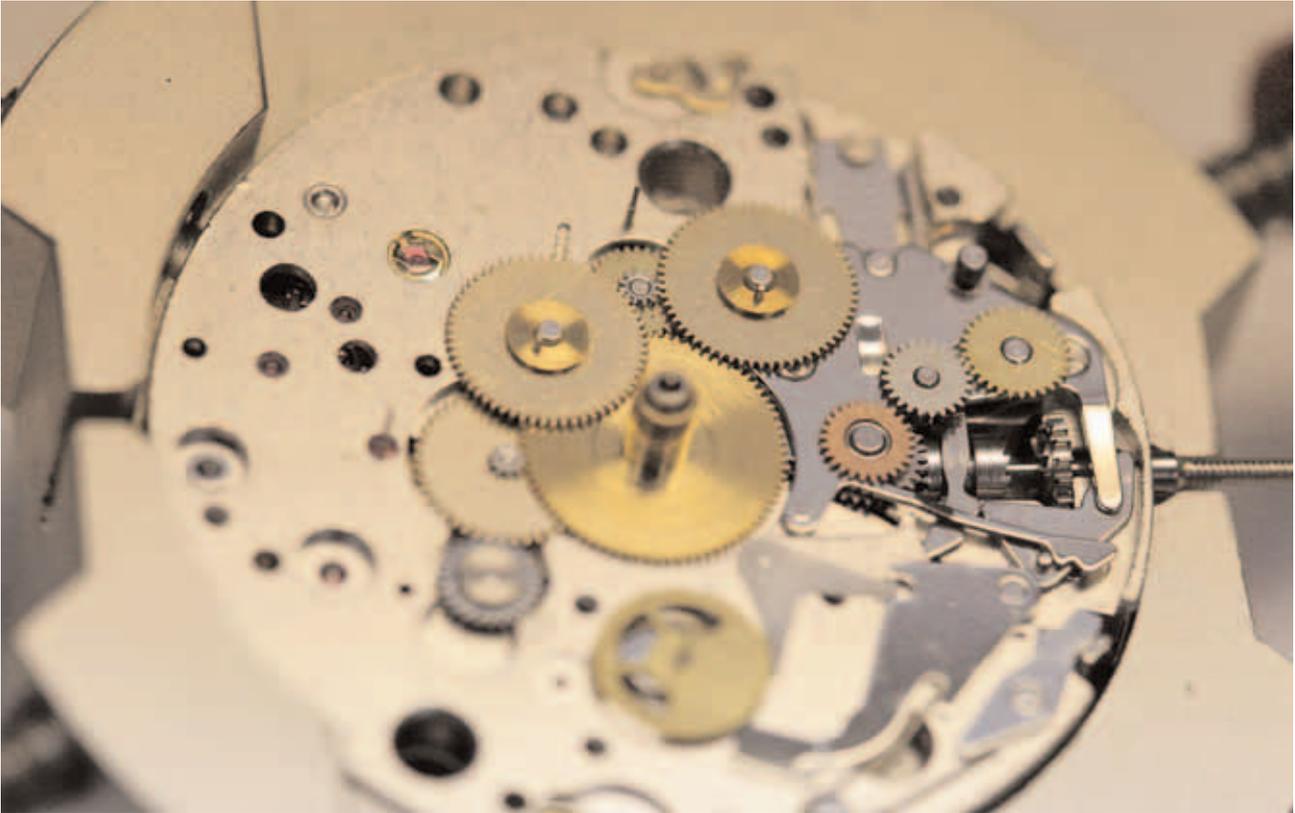
In addition, Ong figures the common mistakes made by quartz watch owners are:

- i. Failing to change the batteries in the watch. “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.”
- ii. Failing to use recommended batteries. “Why take chances with unbranded batteries which may discharge low voltage and have a higher chance of leakage which will eventually cause corrosion?”
- iii. Mishandling of the battery. “Do not handle the battery with your bare hands and do not touch the IC as well because the oil and dirt on your hands can lead to corrosion.”

When it comes to watch movements or calibres, Ong figures that most, if not all, of the Swiss-made movements are reliable. One of

the more common and reliable chronograph movements around is none other than the Valjoux 7750 chronograph calibre.

“The Valjoux 7750 is now used in the vast majority of mechanical chronographs produced in Switzerland. A calibre like the Valjoux 7750 is obviously engineered from the ground up and now enjoys economies of scale in production, hence its modest cost for a mechanical chronograph. The 7750 has indeed proven itself to be a reliable and durable workhorse,” Ong continues. “Before the advent of the 7750, mechanical chronographs were expensive because such movements were limited to manufacturers capable of producing such in-house movements. I have nothing but praise for this relatively inexpensive workhorse. One characteristic of the 7750 is the ‘shake’ or rather, the noticeable vibrations one feels on the wrist with a watch using this movement simply because of the spinning rotor. Actually, some owners find the vibrations from the



Part of the Valjoux 7750 movement

7750 reassuring because it is easy to differentiate it from fakes which do not have such a 'syndrome'."

On average, customers who send their watches in to Ong for repair works can expect to wait between two and six weeks, depending on his workload and the availability of spare parts. "There is actually no average repair downtime as each watch is assessed and repaired on a case-by-case basis. I will only replace or repair what is required. I do receive many enquiries from customers who want to know how much it will cost and that is a fair question. However, the problem is that I will not know exactly what is wrong till I actually see the watch," says Ong who derives great pleasure watching the smiling face of customers once they have collected their 'serviced or repaired' timepieces.

While there are not many people with budgets to purchase the best of the watchmakers' art (prized and expensive timepieces), it

does not mean that they cannot enjoy the hobby at their current levels (whatever that may be), says Ong. "Who knows? At some point in time, you may be able to purchase that limited edition timepiece which costs a bomb. In the meantime, purchase the timepiece you like, and not what someone else tells you to buy, enjoy your hobby and learn as much as you can. And don't forget to take good care of your timepiece," says Ong.

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