It's often the case at Rolex that small changes have big consequences. This holds true for one of the firm's most prestigious models, the Day-Date, which was fitted with a smooth bezel in the spring of 2000. The new bezel gives the watch a sleeker look, especially in the white gold version.







mericans have always had a direct (some would say blunt) way of saying what we mean, and meaning what we say. If we respect or revere someone or something, we're unambiguous in our bestowal of royal or important titles: Elvis is the King, Clapton is God, and so forth. (John Wayne was only a duke, but at least he wasn't a queen). Rolex's top model, the Day-Date, is nicknamed the "President" in the U.S., and the Chinese have also paid tribute to it by calling it the "Rolex King." But back in Europe, where actual royalty abounds, this beautiful watch is known simply by its official name, the Day-Date, which only (rather prosaically) describes its primary functions. The date appears in a little window beneath the famous "Cyclops" magnifying lens at three o'clock and the day of the week is fully written out inside a long, arcing window on the upper part of the dial, directly below 12 o'clock.

Why do we call it the "President"? It could be that the watch's cognomen derives from the fact that Rolex introduced a gold-linked bracelet, known as the "President" wristband, especially for this watch. Or perhaps the several American presidents who have worn this model are collectively responsible for its executive-branch nickname. In their compendious standard work The Best of Time: Rolex Wristwatches, James M. Dowling and Jeffrey P. Hess report that Franklin Delano Roosevelt was an enthusiastic Rolex wearer years before the debut of the Day-Date. Dwight D. Eisenhower was given a Rolex watch. Lyndon B. Johnson also wore a "President" watch on his wrist, as did John F. Kennedy, Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford. The book doesn't record Harry Truman's

Clean as a whistle: The Day-Date in white gold with a smooth bezel.

#### TEST: ROLEX OYSTER PERPETUAL DAY-DATE

wristwatch of choice; perhaps his tastes were too plain for a Rolex.

With the debut of the Day-Date in 1956, Rolex further solidified its position as a luxury watch brand. Unlike other important Rolex watches (the Datejust, Submariner and Cosmograph Daytona) that were offered in steel versions, the Day-Date has always been crafted in either in gold or platinum, with different versions featuring diamonds on the dial, case,

and day of the week displays, however, didn't make their first appearances at Rolex with the Day-Date watch. Rolex had already manufactured watches with these displays and others well before 1956, including full calendar models with moon-phase display and hand-type date display and with windows for the day of the week and the month cut into the upper middle of the dial. These watches, incidentally, are now avidly sought by collectors.

Former Presidents
Roosevelt, Eisenhower, Kennedy,
Johnson, Nixon and
Ford all wore a
Rolex wristwatch.

President Lyndon Baines Johnson was known as the master of the backroom deal. As much as anyone, he's responsible for the Day-Date's sobriquet: the "President."

and/or wristband. In these luxurious versions, the "presidential" watch found its way onto many other celebrities' wrists and was seen at all sorts of four-star events, for example, in Hollywood on the wrists of Tom Cruise, Sean Penn, Ray Liotta and Danny DeVito, among others.

In horology as in Hollywood, fame isn't purely a matter of luck. The Day-Date ultimately owes its many decades of success to first-rate technology and extreme longevity. The date

As the Rolex philosophy evolved, relatively complex watches of this sort no longer matched the firm's concept. Rolex's future wasn't in grandes complications. (Although it's interesting to note that Franck Muller passed his final watchmaking school exam by rebuilding a Rolex Day-Date into a perpetual calendar.) Instead, Rolex set its sights on values that the firm had steadfastly articulated throughout its history: the water-resistant Oyster case with

the screwed-down crown and fully threaded screw-in back; the automatic rotor and, of course, the magnified date window beside the "3." All of these elements were either invented by Rolex or else came about as a result of their having been featured by Rolex. As a result, the elegant Day-Date has always been a robust, sporty timepiece that needn't languish in a safe waiting for you to take it out only on special occasions, but a watch more than able to cope with the hard knocks of everyday life.

Not only does the Day-Date symbolize essential Rolex virtues, it also underscores another company characteristic: the perpetual striving to improve details. Rolex has patented more than 1,000 innovations and improvements during the course of its 94-year history. Decade after decade, quietly and without a lot of fanfare, many individual components of the movements, cases and wristbands have been repeatedly tested, modified, and optimized. This be-

gins with the production, where each and every component is subjected to rigorous quality-control procedures before it advances to the next step in the production process. In the course of its nearly 50-year history, the Day-Date model has benefited from many

small improvements in its design. In 1957, just one year after its launch, the Day-Date was equipped with the new Caliber 1055, which included a balance (still in use today) studded with Microstella regulator screws that make it relatively easy for a watchmaker to precisely adjust the pace of its oscillation. At the same time, this became the first Rolex wristwatch to bear the phrase "Superlative Chronometer Officially Certified" on its dial. The original calendar mechanism needed so much energy to complete the daily shift of the date and day-of-theweek displays that the watch's accuracy suffered during the hour between 11 p.m. and midnight. This shortcoming was rectified within a very few years' time, followed a few years later by the insertion of three intervening holders to reduce the amount of friction between the date ring and the day-of-the-week disk. The Day-Date model was given its first scratchresistant sapphire crystal in the 1970s. Towards the end of that decade it received the so-called "Quick Set" rapid adjuster for the date display.



Only a few wristwatches on the market offer the unabbreviated name of the day of the week.

The "Quick Set" has been standard equipment on all Rolex wristwatches since 1983.

The policy of continual optimization continues to the present day, and its fruits are plain to see in the watch that WatchTime was given for this test. This timepiece embodies a new understatement that was lacking in Day-Date classics like the Reference 18238 in yellow gold with ridged bezel. Compared to that more ostentatious model, this new Day-Date makes a far sleeker impression. The smooth bezel, which had formerly been reserved solely for the very rare platinum version of the Day-Date wristwatch, was introduced on gold models in the spring of 2000. Although the white gold of which the case and wristband are made gives this watch a healthy dose of understatement, and despite the fact that it takes a trained eye to distinguish white gold from stainless steel, the former metal is, in fact, both more costly and more difficult to work with than yellow gold. Rolex laboriously mills these cases from solid ingots of white gold. This alloy is particularly difficult to process because it contains small percentages of rhodium and palladium, both of which are very hard metals associated with platinum ore. The greater labor involved in manufacturing the white gold case and wristband also explains why this version is more expensive than the comparable version in yellow gold.

For aesthetic reasons, Rolex prefers not to drill all the way through the lugs of its gold watches. The wristband is no less securely at-



The eye of the Cyclops: the built-in magnifying lens above the date display is one of the hall-marks of Rolex's watches.

#### **DATA PAGE**

Manufacturer: Montres Rolex SA, rue

François-Dussaud 7, CH-1211 Genève 24.

**Model:** Oyster Perpetual Day-Date.

**Serial number:** 118209 with Oyster wristband no. 73859.

**Functions:** Hours, minutes, central seconds, day of the week, date; stop-seconds function.

Movement: Self-winding Rolex Caliber 3155 (based on a Rolex 3135); diameter = 28.5 mm; height = 6.45 mm; 28,800 beats per hour; 31 jewels; Kif shock absorption; fine adjustment via Microstella screws; ca. 50-hour power reserve; Glucydur balance; Breguet balancespring; rapid adjustment of the day-of-theweek and date displays; official chronometer with C.O.S.C. certification.

Case: 18-karat white gold; tripartite; bezel is polished and domed; polished lugs; screw-down crown; fully threaded screw-in back; slightly domed sapphire crystal with built-in magnifying lens above the date display; rhodium dial with applied white gold Roman numerals; water-resistant to 100 meters.

**Wristband and clasp:** Oyster wristband in 18-karat white gold, concealed folding clasp in 18-karat white gold.

## Results of running test: (deviation in seconds per 24 hours)

Dial up:	-1
Dial down:	-1
Crown up:	-2
Crown down:	-2
Crown left:	-2
Crown right:	-2
Greatest deviation of rate:	1
Average deviation:	-2

Average amplitude: 282° in flat

positions; 243° in hanging positions.

**Dimensions and weight:** Diameter = 36 mm; height = 11.9 mm; weight = 178 grams.

**Price:** \$19,550.

#### TEST: ROLEX OYSTER PERPETUAL DAY-DATE

tached, however, because the fittings are so precisely crafted that the cross-pieces cannot possibly come loose when the watch is worn.

Another detail has been the subject of endless criticism time is the fact that the crystal protrudes quite a bit. Too far? Even though the crystal is comparatively thick, as the years go by it's apt to show scars caused by inadvertent knocks.

thickness of the movement demands its tribute. It seems as though Rolex is caught between a rock and a hard place, but we'd nonetheless recommend that the inventive people at Rolex devote some thought to this problem. We're confident that they'll come up with a clever and practical way of providing the edge of the crystal with the protection it needs.

lex wristwatch without the built-in magnifier. Many of these customers ultimately decide in favor of a model without a date display, or else they opt for the SeaDweller, the only Rolex that combines the presence of a date display with the absence of a Cyclops magnifying lens. Will Rolex eventually market a sans Cyclops Day-Date? No one can predict with certainty.

Another detail has also been changed in the new Day-Date. The President can now be had with the improved version of the Oyster wristband, rendering the formerly sharp edges of the

## Rolex has patented more than 1,000 innovations and improvements during the course of its 94-year history.

That's a vexing shortcoming on a robust watch that has otherwise been so perfectly designed to maximize its longevity. Rolex hasn't yet reworked this detail, perhaps because raising the bezel high enough to cover the edge of the crystal would make the watch too bulky. Lowering the glass towards the movement isn't a viable option either because there isn't enough empty space beneath it. This is one detail where the

#### **ROLEX DAY-DATE IN WHITE GOLD**

Wristband and clasp (max. 10 points): Sturdy clasp clicks closed neatly; no sharp edges.

Operation (5):

Simple and convenient to operate thanks to double rapid adjustment for date and day displays; screw-down crown can be readily turned.

Design (15):

Classical Oyster case; the white gold model with the smooth bezel is significantly more under stated and less ostentatious than the yellow gold model.

#### Legibility (5)

Clear and unambiguous; the day of the week is fully legible; no luminous material on the dial or hands. 9

#### Wearing comfort (10):

A heavy watch, but not uncomfortable on the wrist; no sharp edges.

#### Movement (20):

Practicality determines the construction; the self-winding mechanism remains distinctive; components are polished and beveled wherever necessary, but the focus obviously isn't on the attempt to produce visual effects.

#### Results of running test (10):

Very good results, scarcely any deviations in the several positions; a slight readjustment would allow the watch to run minimally ahead rather than to lag minimally behind.

#### Overall value (15):

13 An appropriate price to pay for a product that is truly mature in all of its many details; very high resale value.

TOTAL: 88 points



17



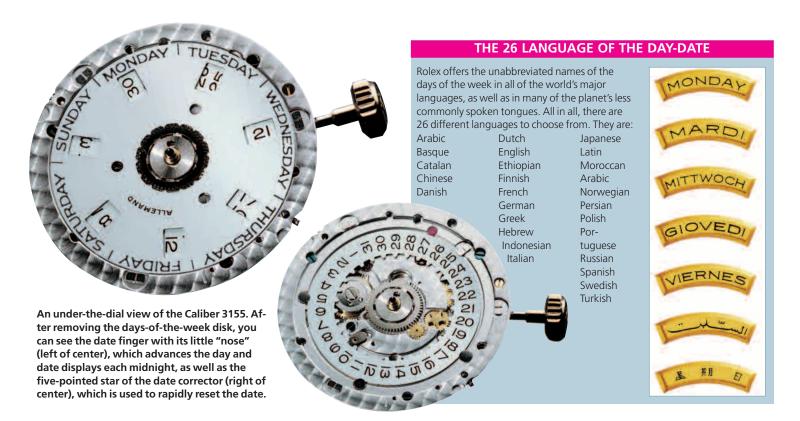
The Rolex Caliber 3155. The two red Teflon-covered reversing wheels and the balance with its Microstella regulator screw are easy to spot.

Although the design of our tested watch with the white gold case and smooth bezel is obviously more understated than that of its predecessors, one particularly notable detail has been left unchanged: the magnifying lens above the date display. This unmistakable feature, which Rolex describes as the "eye of the Cyclops," instantly identifies the watch as a Rolex, but it's also a detail that's not quite as popular today as it was in the past. Master watchmaker Peter Hoffmann, a German Rolex dealer and jewelry storeowner, says that his customers frequently express interest in a Ro-

traditional President bracelet a thing of the past. The watch is now very pleasant to wear, and the user-friendly but inconspicuously concealed folding clasp makes it child's play to slip the watch on and off. The formerly hollow middle parts of the bracelet are now solid, and several half links near the clasp ensure that the wristband can be adjusted to fit any wearer perfectly.

When the movement is removed from its case, the extremely high standards of craftsmanship become obvious. The interior of the case is very precisely milled. This is also where the twin bridles are attached so that they can optimally perform their important job of holding the movement securely in its place. A typical Rolex feature is the water-resistant, solid gold, screw-down crown with the "Twinlock"

#### TEST: ROLEX OYSTER PERPETUAL DAY-DATE



system. This system relies on a pair of rubber insulators, one at the crown end and one inside the tube, to protect the movement against penetration by water.

Beneath the rotor lie the components that combine to wind the mainspring. These include the two red reversing wheels. Coated with Teflon, they're virtually friction-free, as well as smooth and noise reductive. The Day-Date's balance bridge has been in use for roughly a decade. A pair of threaded nuts makes it possible to adjust its height. The protective stirrup is a newer innovation: it protects the balance against sharp blows. The more interesting parts of the movement are located beneath the dial. Here's where a curious connoisseur will find the disks that bear the displays for the date and day of the week. A second disk above the date disk is printed with the names of the seven days of week. One of these seven names appears inside the arcing window below the "12." The day-of-the-week disk itself is pierced with seven small apertures so that this disk doesn't eclipse the date display, which is located beside the "3." A trio of holders firmly clasps the date disk while simultaneously serving as space maintainers for the day-of-the-week disk and thus preventing unwanted friction.

The switch from yesterday's date to today's

date on our tested watch occurred promptly at midnight, even though Rolex's instructions to its watchmakers allow them a tolerance of one minute in each direction before and after the witching hour. Starting around 8 p.m., a little helix begins storing up tension that it releases all at once when midnight arrives. This abrupt release is triggered by the "date finger," located immediately above the helical spring. The crown can be drawn into three positions to perform three distinct tasks: In position number one – unscrewed – the crown is ready to manually wind the mainspring, while in position number three (pulled all the way out), it resets the watch's hands. Between those two positions, in position number two, the crown can be used for rapid adjustment of the date and day displays: twisting the crown in one direction adjusts the date; twisting it in the other direction adjusts the day. This adjustment is accomplished by means of a five-pointed star mounted atop a brass rocker. The date corrector meshes with both the inner teeth cut into the date disk and the centrally axial wheel that bears the day-of-the-week disk.

## Running Results

Our running test showed how much the decades of optimization have paid off for Ro-

lex. With a maximum deviation of just one second in each position, the Day-Date achieved some of the best results ever posted by any watch since *WatchTime* first began performing these tests. Unfortunately the tested watch lagged very slightly behind, but this isn't a serious problem because a minor adjustment of the Microstella regulator screws would suffice to give the timepiece a slight "plus" rate of one second per day. (It's always better to run a little fast than to run a little slow.)

All in all, the white gold version of the Day-Date is an absolutely practical and robust watch. It's ideal for daily use, but is also elegant enough to wear on special occasions. A genuinely valuable watch like the Day-Date really can't be praised highly enough. It's a pleasure to see such a renowned and internationally active manufacturer like Rolex holding such high standards of quality and even continuing to hone each and every detail to the highest degree of perfection. The name "Rolex" is such a luxury juggernaut that they could very easily rest on their laurels and spin-off inferior products at a pretty little profit. Both the strength and the weakness of the brand is the fact that they make extremely traditional and sturdy timepieces. Too traditional? Well that, as you know, is a matter of long debate.

# Success in Five Easy Chapters

### BY GISBERT L. BRUNNER

he first chapter begins with Rolex's founder Hans Wilsdorf, who wanted to prove that a wristwatch could be just as accurate and reliable as a pocket watch. In 1910 Wilsdorf built an 11-ligne movement with a Swiss lever escapement and had a business associate named Aegler send it to the official timepiece-testing site in Biel, Switzerland. The rate certificate with the grade of "first class" that Wilsdorf was hoping to receive arrived on March 22, 1910 – and cast Rolex into the unchallenged role of a pioneer in the field of wristwatch chronometers, a role, it has continued to play ever since.

The longstanding perception that the case of a wristwatch will inevitably succumb to the effects of dirt and moisture leads us to our second chapter. Wilsdorf devoted long and careful thought to the task of solving this problem. The weak links in the chain were the edge of the crystal, the case back and the crown. He solved the problem by designing a new kind of watchcase whose individual components would be tightly screwed together to create a hermetic seal. The crystal above the dial would seal the interior 100% and would have to be crafted from a synthetic material that could be shaped to perfectly fit into the case. And the crown would need to be constructed to reliably protect the interior from moisture, not once in a while but day in and day out. On October 18, 1926, Wilsdorf applied for a Swiss patent on his innovative case, which featured a screwdown crown. It didn't take long for Wilsdorf to come up with an appropriate name. After all, is there any underwater creature that closes itself more tightly than an oyster?

The quest for a truly water-resistant case leads us to our third chapter. A water-resistant case needs a caliber inside it whose mainspring doesn't need to be wound daily via the crown because over the long term, the daily opening and closing of Wilsdorf's screw-down crown

The familiar version of the Day-Date as it has looked for decades: yellow gold and with the famous ridged bezel. would gradually compromise the integrity of the water-resistant seal. The objective was clear, so shortly after the debut of the Oyster case, Hans Wilsdorf and talented technician Emil Borer Ende set to work on inventing "an automatic winding mechanism that would move back and forth in complete and utter silence, without bumps or jerks, and without the need for a buffer." By 1931 Ende and Wilsdorf had reached their goal. The rotor Caliber NA 620 proved itself to be worthy of a patent, and for the next 15 years this patent protection meant that Rolex's competitors were obliged to do without this optimal winding system.

The fourth chapter results from the fact that the ability to display the date ranks head and shoulders above other additional functions as the most important accessory function that a wristwatch is expected to perform. In view of this fact, it's really rather astonishing to consider just how long the industry neglected it. As late as the mid 1940s, the goal of creating an everyday wristwatch that would also indicate the date had still not been achieved. When Wilsdorf celebrated Rolex's 40th anniversary in 1945, he wanted to emphasize the happy event by launching a truly special wristwatch, the Datejust. When it debuted at the 40th birthday bash, no one could possibly have guessed its immediate success or how it would influence the appearance and technology of generations of later wristwatches. The



Datejust was the world's first completely water-resistant men's wristwatch with automatic rotor winding, a central seconds, and a date display in a window beside the "3." An official chronometer certificate testified to the accuracy of the rate of the Caliber 740.

The reign of the 740 lasted ten years. Afterwards, the old adage that insists "better beats good" once again proved true, this time in the form of chapter five in the Rolex success story. The year was 1956. The place was Basel, Switzerland. And the occasion was the annual watch and jewelry trade fair. Under reference number 6511, Rolex debuted a brand-new model that the firm had patented in July 1955. In addition to a date window and a built-in magnifying lens, this model also had an arcshaped window cut into the top of its dial between the "11" and the "1." Within that long, arcing window, the unabbreviated names of the days of the week appeared. The "Day-Date" further reinforced Rolex's reputation as a pioneer on the luxury-watch market. As it had done in the past with the Dateiust. Rolex offered its newcomer with a "President" linked bracelet that was available only in 18karat gold or in platinum. This opulent timekeeper catapulted Rolex into an unprecedented price level. The company was now offering products that sold for prices comparable to those formerly charged only by the likes of Audemars Piguet, Patek Philippe, or Vacheron Constantin.

Beneath the dial of the 28.5 mm diameter and 7.00 mm thick automatic Caliber 1055, which was derived from the 5.85 mm thick automatic Caliber 1030, Rolex's watchmakers installed a special technological innovation: a day-of-the-week disk that rotated above the date ring. One of the seven apertures in the day disk always came to rest precisely beneath the window cut in the dial beside the "3," where it served as an attractive frame for the date numeral beneath it. As the years have gone by, the Day-Date (unlike most of the people who wear them) has gradually become slimmer. But only slightly.