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Raketa

Henry Neuteboom / 1 hour ago

Raketa is **Russian** for “**space rocket**”, and the company adopted the name in 1961 in honour of Yuri Gagarin’s epic flight. But the origins of the brand go back much further, to **1721** when Peter the Great founded the “Imperial Peterhof Factory” in **St. Petersburg**, dedicated to carvings made in semi-precious stones. In fact this year, Raketa is celebrating its 300th anniversary. At the height of its success in the 1950s and ‘60s, Raketa was making almost 5 million watches per year. The brand survived the turbulent collapse of the Soviet Union, and so when Englishman **David Henderson-Stewart** moved to Russia and visited the factory, he was impressed by its expertise and potential. We spoke to David, now **CEO of Raketa**, during Geneva Watch Days in August 2021.



David Henderson-Stewart, CEO of Raketa

“I took over the factory a decade ago and we have had some crazy years. We **modernized the plant**, a task that was simplified by the staff’s remarkable skill. It is a factory that still uses **old-style machines**, and 90% of components are made in-house, including the **balance springs**. Virtually the only thing that we don’t make is the sapphire watchglass. All our watches have a powerful and **immediately recognizable identity**, and a distinctive sound, an acoustic signature that descends from the movement’s original engineering. They have an **interesting price**: our average retail price is €1,400 inclusive of VAT”.

Every watch is delivered in a box that includes the **photo of one of the employees**, and an **invitation** to visit the factory in St. Petersburg. The details of these pieces are deliciously idiosyncratic: **attractive crowns** with a red cabochon, **movement screws** that are red instead of the conventional blue, and the hand-cut “**Onega waves**” instead of the Swiss Côtes de Genève.

Raketa Russian Code 0275, counter-clockwise best seller

Today, Raketa’s best seller is “Russian Code 0275”, a time-only watch in which the hands run counter-clockwise. “This can be justified by the fact that the **planets go around the sun counter-clockwise**”, says David. “and the only reason why clocks and watches go clockwise is because that’s the way the shadow of a sundial moves in the northern hemisphere”. To make the counter-clockwise movement, the **barrel** and **escapement** had to be re-

engineered, and even the **winding system** is reversed, so you turn the crown anti-clockwise to wind the watch. The second hand has a **circular tip**, which revolves around the globe shown on the dial and mirrors the counter-clockwise movement of the **moon around the earth**. Raketa Russian Code 0275 costs **€1,380** inclusive of tax.



Raketa Leopard 24, twenty-four hour display

Another characteristic of many Raketa watches is the 24-hour dial. This was typical of watches made for the USSR armed forces in the post-WW2 period. It is a feature of the **Leopard 24 watch** that incorporates metal from the Russian Akula-class *Leopard* submarine. Logically, the dial has “0” at the top, and this is something that Raketa uses on other watches as well, 0 at the top of the dial instead of 12. “The Russians are very practical”, says David, “our watches are robust and reliable. We have no ambition to make tourbillons”. The Leopard 24 costs **€1,550** inclusive of tax.



Raketa Avant-garde, art in motion

Raketa Avant-Garde is a watch that celebrates Russia's traditions in **modern art**. The distinctive dial has the **zero at 12 o'clock**, a normal seconds hand with a triangular red tip, an hour hand in the shape of a large asymmetric triangle, and a **circular minutes hand** with a small red indicator on its circumference. Like other Raketa watches, it is powered by an automatic movement designed and made at the Raketa factory. This piece costs **€1,150** inclusive of tax.



You can [read more about Raketa and their entirely in-house watches at their website.](#)

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