



## Precista Czech Air Force - PRS-9

### Introduction

One of my favourite 'days out' is a trip to Cosford Air Museum near Telford. As well as the aircraft themselves I adore the atmosphere of the place; be it a windy wet day or a fine summer's afternoon, wandering around a hangar and just taking in the atmosphere is an experience that I always enjoy. In the days when I flew myself I relished the occasions when instead of jumping straight into an aircraft parked on the apron, I would have to open up the hangar and pull the plane out of its parking place – there was always something magical about the creaking of the sheet metal hangar walls in a light breeze, the faint smell of fuel and the sound of birds taking shelter in whatever niches they could find. I would always preflight the plane in the hangar, taking the opportunity to top up my Zippo lighter with a little Avgas from the fuel sample tube used to check for water in the tanks. Knowing that within fifteen minutes or so I would be winging my way across the sky above the Cotswolds was a truly uplifting experience. During those days I would always wear the same watch – it was a 1980 Rolex Sea Dweller, battered but ever faithful and the one I had worn during so many hours aloft; and that watch was the only thing that was certain to be with me every time – I just flew for fun but the Sea Dweller was, if you will, my lucky mascot. Over five hundred hours or so there were one or two 'hairy moments' and my ever faithful Rolex was with me throughout. The whole flying 'thing' was for me a very special period in my life – and I was just a humble Private Pilot who had a passion for aviation; as the reader might have guessed, I breathed in and thrived upon the atmosphere of it all and even had my own lucky (but useful) trinket in the Rolex.

Now imagine what life was like for RAF pilots of World War II. For them of course, every time they climbed into the cockpit the odds were reasonably high that this would be the last time that they did so. I do wonder if they ever had the opportunity to savour *anything* of the experiences which were thrust upon them; particularly during those early days of the war when to a great degree Great Britain was relying on 'the few'. It is very easy for us to romanticise the times - dashing young pilots, caps tilted jauntily, pipe in hand, sitting relaxed in a deckchair waiting for the next scramble - or when off duty, motoring off to the local inn (no doubt in an MG or Singer). Whilst I am certain that elements of this rose (sepia?) tinted image were indeed true, the *real* truth of the matter during the early days of the war was, I am almost as certain, somewhat different; behind those images of young men lay fear, perhaps anger and uncertainty; statistically it has been calculated that during the Battle of Britain the life expectancy of a fighter pilot was no more than 87 hours in the air. On a daily basis, chairs that had been occupied in the mess at breakfast would remain empty at dinner. Understandably and without doubt, many pilots had their own lucky mascots – often they were teddy bears carried in the cockpit (a few such are displayed at Cosford); who knows what else a pilot would carry and become (perhaps subconsciously) reliant upon to keep him safe in the air.

It is for me quite mesmerising to see mascots of one sort or another on display and whilst not associated with war of any sort, the one item that kept my attention for a particularly extended period of time was the Omega Speedmaster (displayed at the Smithsonian) worn by Neil Armstrong during the Apollo 11 mission – of course this was not a mascot, but an instrument of necessity upon which the wearer was reliant to a degree and which was with him throughout a very dangerous few days. When I gaze upon such objects, be they teddy bears, rabbits' feet or watches, I cannot help but *feel* the history around them – the aura around them perhaps.

For almost a century now, wristwatches have accompanied men throughout all manner of endeavours, be they exploration or wars and of course in the modern age, such watches have attracted a lot of interest from collectors for their historical significance; *association* is of course a tool used by modern marketers to sell a plethora of wristwatch brands/models and such association ranges from the acceptable to the outright ridiculous in my opinion. During the making of history, when watches were being used for what they were intended - that is, telling the time or timing short but important periods then doubtless they were often seen as a tool to get the job done. But I venture that for many wearers, their wristwatch became something more than a small machine upon

their wrist. Perhaps a faithful companion that stuck with the wearer of the time through thick and thin – through trench warfare of WWI, the Battle of Britain and WWII, Korea, Vietnam, The Falklands, The Gulf War and the list could go on. Whatever conflict or adventure in question, then these little machines were beating their way through the wearer's life just as his heart was; and that is where I feel that the wristwatch has such a special place – it measures one's life, day in, day out, wherever it is worn; and until relatively recently it was up to the wearer to ensure that the heart within his wristwatch was kept beating by daily interaction.

The subject of this review is a watch, the likes of which were worn during World War II by some of those men whose life expectancy (as I have mentioned earlier) was a mere 87 flying hours during the Battle of Britain – those flying hours and indeed the precious hours on the ground were often measured by a wristwatch issued to the pilot by his government. Again, I would venture that for many pilots, their wristwatch became more than just an instrument – that faithful companion or just possibly, a lucky mascot too. Handling an original example of a World War II pilot's wristwatch and one can only be cast back to those days of brave young men, buckled into the confined cockpits of Hurricanes or Spitfires, wheeling around in the skies above England, fighting for their lives and the futures of those they were defending – and the wristborne instruments were measuring every second.

What we must never forget is that alongside British pilots during the Battle of Britain there were some 574 foreign pilots too. Of these, nearly 90 were of Czechoslovakian nationality (there were actually around 895 Czech airmen in the UK by 2nd August 1940, of which 481 were at my beloved Cosford). Ultimately, there would be four Czech squadrons – three fighter and one bomber. The first two fighter squadrons (310 and 312) were formed at Duxford in the summer of 1940 and became operational on 17th August and 2nd October respectively. Many of the Czech pilots present in the UK at the time would have been issued with a Longines wristwatch which would accompany them on sorties during Battle of Britain and beyond; 312 Squadron, whose crest emblazons the caseback of the Precista CAF (which pays homage to the issued Longines as we shall see), was made operational some four weeks before the 'official' end of the Battle of Britain and so follows a brief look at 312 Squadron itself.

## 312 Squadron



### 'Not Many But Much'

Soon after formation at Duxford, 312 Squadron moved north to Speke in late September 1940 where it was tasked with providing defensive cover for Merseyside (the first kill was made by 312 on 8th October – a JU88 bomber was intercepted and downed by three Hurricanes; a notably fast kill with the Hurricanes being in the air for less than twelve minutes). This move north was just one of no less than 36 different deployments or detachments around Britain with the 37th being the move to Czechoslovakia in August 1945 and subsequent official disbandment as an RAF unit on 15th February 1946. Within the five or so years that 312 was operational within Britain, the varying deployments found the squadron based at airfields from Devon all the way to the Orkneys and performing varying roles.

From 1940 to 1943, 312 was dutied to Fighter Command and within this period performed both defensive and offensive roles including offensive sorties over France from May to August 1941 whilst stationed at Kenley and Martlesham Heath. From late summer 1941 until January 1942, the squadron relocated to Scotland (Ayr) where they operated in a defensive role (after converting to Spitfires from Hurricanes) before making their way south via stations at Angle and Fairwood Common – eventually becoming stationed in the south west in order to undertake bomber escort duties. By June 1943 and for the next three months the Czech airmen and their Spitfires found themselves in the far north and the Orkney Islands; defensive duties for that period of time were

perhaps the lull before the storm – 312's role was to change with another move south and joining the 2nd Tactical Air Force in order to assist preparations for the Normandy landings.

Having become a fighter-bomber squadron in April 1944, the squadron were active in that role during the D-Day landings and beyond; the 2nd Tactical Air Force relocated to Normandy during July 1944 and at this point, 312's role changed once again – now equipped with the Spitfire IX, the pilots were tasked (as they would be until the end of the war) with long range bomber escort duties out of mainly East Anglian airfields. The final move of course came in the summer of 1945 when 312 Squadron relocated to Czechoslovakia.

During its existence, some 145 pilots served with 312 Squadron; the sheer amount of moving from station to station was, I am sure a further strain on these men although it is without doubt that Czech airmen were brave and particularly fierce fighters and I am equally as sure that they relished the opportunity to take on the enemy. The literature has pointed out that the RAF had intentionally stationed Czech squadrons at slightly 'quieter' posts on occasion simply because it was harder to replace these pilots if they were lost in action; there was no finite pool of Czech pilots available from which to draw. That being said, two 'Aces' passed through 312:

*Tomáš Vybíral* (sometimes mistakenly referred to as Adolphe Vybiral), who had already downed seven aircraft whilst serving with the French Air Force during the Battle of France and who joined 312 at its formation. Vybíral would go on to become Squadron Commander of 312 and ultimately, to lead the Czech Wing, North Weald with the rank of Wing Commander.

*Otmar Kučera* joined 312 on 5th April 1941 and during his year with the squadron, was responsible for three kills; two of which were within a week of each other in the summer of 1941. He had been with 111 Squadron prior to his time with 312 and subsequently, he would be posted to 313. What is tragic, when reading of these heroes is how things changed for them after the war (and their return to their home country); Vybíral escaped to Britain in 1948 after the Czech coup where he would spend the rest of his days but for Kučera, things were worse - persecution, imprisonment and demotion to the rank of private (upon being ejected from the armed forces) – at one point, this fighter ace was working as a 'kitchen boy'.

312 Squadron started out flying Hurricane MK Is, progressing to Mark IIs. During 1941 and the move to Ayr, the squadron converted to Spitfires – it was during this conversion that Spitfire IIA P7540 and its pilot were tragically lost during a training flight; on 25th October 1941 Flying Officer František F Hehl was flying in the area now known as Dumfries and Galloway and made a low pass over Loch Doon; as he banked to turn away from the Loch his wing clipped the water and the Spitfire was claimed by the dark and murky waters beneath. It would take until 1982 to locate and recover the remains of P7540. In terms of the Spitfire, 312 Squadron piloted no less than nine variations of the aircraft between 1941 and 1945. Today, it is wonderful to know that Spitfire MK VC AR614 flown by the ace Tomáš Vybíral (referred to earlier) whilst with 312 was restored to airworthy condition and continues to fly:



Image used courtesy of Bob Harrington - Bobqat.com

By the end of the Second World War, the three (310, 312 and 313) Czech fighter squadrons had flown very nearly 47,000 flying hours between them, destroyed 68 enemy aircraft with another 37 probables, and sadly had sacrificed somewhere in the region of 200 of their lives in doing so. These courageous fighters should never be forgotten and I feel that if tribute is made to them in the form of a reproduction of part of their issued equipment then it should be done so to the highest standards possible; thus, we have some background and perspective as to why perhaps the Precista Czech Air Force watch was conceived, let us now move forward to 2012 and the introduction of the PRS-9.

## Overview

During the Second World War, there were many different watches issued to many different forces. Army, Air Force, Navy, wristwatches, pocketwatches, stopwatches and the list could go on. Furthermore, many brands were involved in the supply of such timepieces and often we tend to associate particular brands with a particular force; taking pilots'/ navigators' watches as an example – Elgin, Waltham and Bulova for the Americans; Omega and Longines for the UK; Lange, Laco and IWC for the Germans and Seiko(sha) for the Japanese. There is of course a thriving market for original examples of the aforementioned timepieces – they are historically significant and played an important part in the war effort of the countries concerned. Indeed, it has been boldly cited that the A-11 standard watches from the aforementioned Elgin, Waltham and Bulova played a large part in the Allied victory. Some are rarer than others, some are more technically advanced (for the time) than others, but what all of the originals have in common, regardless of the issuing country, is that they were *there*. The increasing collectability of these watches has resulted in a steady increase in value over the years with the most sought after examples fetching many thousands of pounds; that being said, there are still certain models which can be bought for considerably less than this but good examples of such will still be many hundreds. As I have mentioned in previous reviews, it can be a very satisfying experience to own an original, issued timepiece; and as I have also mentioned, problems can arise should one wish to use such a piece as an everyday wearer. Some of these watches are just too precious to utilise in such a way.

Re-editions, homages and so on have been manufactured to an increasing degree over the last decade or so; not necessarily of military watches, some of the most prominent manufactures have gone back to their roots so to speak with reintroductions of classic designs intended to appeal, I assume, to those who appreciate the classic over the contemporary. Some have got it right, and in my opinion some have got it wrong – for example I could never quite fathom what Omega were driving at when they introduced the 'Dynamic' in the late 1990s; this watch was touted by Omega as a significant nod to the RAF issue Omega of the mid-1950s – whilst not an unattractive watch in itself, why use an italicised font on the dial and feature a case with shortish and skinny lugs? Of course, and as I am sure many readers will agree, Timefactors made a better job of this exercise with the PRS-53. Why did Hamilton feel the need to start labelling some very nice manual wind US issue style watches with the word 'Khaki'? Marketing, no doubt and desire (understandably) to appeal to a mass market.

In terms of getting it right, Longines have been producing re-editions for some time now and have done so quite successfully (although the WWI 'Greenlander' might be an exception to this). Perhaps the most well known of such are the Weems second setting watch and of course the Lindbergh Hour Angle; both of these are visually very accurate to their forbears and I believe Longines got them just about right. More recently, we have seen the Legend Diver which truly captures the spirit of the original beautifully and is a watch that I feel Longines should be proud of. As I wrote earlier, Longines were a supplier to the British Air Ministry during World War II and one such watch was the aluminium cased, white dialled 'MKVII' standard wristwatch; contemporaneous suppliers were of course Omega and Jaeger Le Coultre. Longines also supplied other forces both before and during World War II and it is a *very* pre war watch to which the subject of this review pays homage. That watch was of course the one supplied to the Czechoslovakian Air Force and which traces its roots back to the early 20th Century. Known to collectors as the Longines CAF, the watch is of a very distinctive design compared to most other aviators' watches.



Image used courtesy of Colin Millar



Images used courtesy of 'Austerpilot'



Image used courtesy of Colin Millar

A 1935 advertisement for the watch shows us how it was marketed at the time:

**Longines hodinky vítězí!**

Ve všech státech je věnována v poslední době zvláštní pozornost především letectví, s čímž souvisí i nutnost vyzbrojit letce nejdokonalejšími vynálezy moderní techniky.

Letectví nezkracuje jen vzdálenosti, ale více než každý jiný dopravní prostředek závisí od přesnosti. Proto zejména v letectví hraje významnou roli přesné a dokonalé hodinky. Naše dozorcí letecké kruhy rozhodly se, aby u našeho letectva byly zavedeny LONGINES-HODINKY, které po všech na ně kladených technických a přesnostních stránkách a odborných zkouškách nejlépe vyhovují.

Letecké LONGINES-HODINKY vyznačují se především jedinečně krásně utvářeným pouzdem z nerezavějící oceli. Je jistě naší radostí a chloubou, že to byla naše tuzemská Poldi-ocel, která se osvědčila mezi ostatními zahraničními druhy oceli nejspolehlivěji. Po měsíce pracují dlouholetí zaměstnanci továrny LONGINES na těchto leteckých hodinkách, aby zhotovili vyzkoušené a bezvadné malé mistrovské dílo.

Letecké HODINKY LONGINES Cal. 15.94, Ref. 3582 s 15 kameny, vyznačují se přesným strojkem s velkou antimagnetickou setrvačkou. Pouzdro jest vrcholem technické dokonalosti, neboť vzdoruje účinkům změn a vlivům povětrnosti, je prachu a nárazuvzdorné. Zvláštní pozornost byla věnována studiu přesnosti těchto hodinek a to zejména proto, aby poměrně v malém tvaru vykazovaly pokud možno naprosto přesnost. Skla jsou rovněž nerozbitná.

Letecké LONGINES - HODINKY osvědčují se zejména jako ideální časoměry při dálkových letech.

I sportovci s oblibou volí tyto osvědčené letecké LONGINES-HODINKY a to nejen pro jejich vkusný sportovní tvar, ale zejména též proto, že se při všech, i nejnámáhavějších sportech osvědčují jako nejdokladnější a nejspolehlivější hodinky vůbec.

Letecké LONGINES-HODINKY, aby bylo vyhověno oběma účelům, prodávají se nejen s dlouhým koženým rukávníkovým páskem, určeným pro skutečné letce, ale i s krátkým (normálním) páskem z boxu nebo z vepřovice, určeným výhradně jen pro sportovce.

Velmi originální výkladní stojánky s vrtací jako odznakem letectví, dává generální zastupitelství LONGINES pro ČSR. zájemcům ochotně k dispozici



**LONGINES**

vedoucí švýcarská značka hodinek - 10 velkých cen.

A reasonably accurate translation follows:

### Longines Watches Win!

*"In all countries, there is currently an increased awareness of aeronautics, with which comes a requirement to equip fliers with the latest in modern technology.*

*Flight does not only reduce distance, but more than any other transportation method depends on precision. For this reason, accurate and sophisticated watches play a key role in aeronautics. The supervisors of our flying clubs have therefore decided to introduce Longines watches which, in all scientific publications and tests, have demonstrated their suitability for the task.*

*Longines watches are housed in uniquely attractive cases crafted from stainless steel. It is our pride and joy that our domestic "Poli" steel which has proved to be more reliable than competing foreign products [was used for the case]. The highly experienced watchmakers working in the Longines factory spend many months making these pilots watches to produce such sophisticated and advanced workmanship.*

*Pilots watches from Longines (cal. 15.94, ref 3582) with 15 jewels are equipped with a precise movement with significant antimagnetic shielding. The case is the pinnacle of modern technology as it is resilient to changes in pressure and is dust and knock proof. Particular attention has been paid to checking the accuracy of the watch, in particular to ensuring that in spite of its small dimensions absolute precision is achieved. The glass is similarly practically unbreakable.*

*Longines watches distinguish themselves as timing instruments during long distance flights.*

*Even sportsmen choose these proven Longines watches, not only for their handsome appearance but also because even during the most strenuous sporting activities these watches show themselves to be the most resilient and reliable available.*

*Longines pilot watches, in order to meet all customers requirements, come not only with a long leather strap used by professional fliers but also with a short (normal) strap made from either box calf or pigskin designed purely for sportsmen."*

The advertising of the time was wonderful in its direct simplicity and didn't resort to some of the more complex associations that we see today; but the word 'association' is of course valid with this watch being intended for aviators or even the armchair aviators of the day. Flight was still in its relative infancy at the time and I assume that the thought of wearing the same wristwatch as daring aviators was quite an incentive to purchase.

But what of the watch itself? For its day, the Longines was sizeable at a good 40mm in diameter and a lug end to lug end length of over 50mm. In some ways, it could have been construed as the last of the early aviators' watches – that is, those that were perhaps recased pocket watches. By the time of the Second World War then aviators' wristwatches from many manufacturers would be very much smaller – standard issue items alluded to earlier in this review were often 33 or 34mm in diameter and thus 'small' by today's standards. It is ironic that the Longines would nowadays be considered a 'normal' size whereas many other collectible military watches might be construed as too small to be worn seriously. Despite its longish lug to lug dimension however, the watch incorporated sharply downswept lugs which ensure that it was a comfortable fit even on sub 7 inch wrists.

Construction wise, the Longines case was manufactured using an unusual technique whereby 1mm layers of stainless steel were folded, pressed together and further folded to form the distinctive splayed lug case shape with which we are familiar. Evidence of this technique can be seen when an original is turned over; the backs of the lugs show the seams resulting from the folding and pressing. The crystal was of a domed plexiglass set within a rotating knurled bezel/inner rehaut – thus, when the bezel was rotated, the inner rehaut would do so as well. A triangular pointer was affixed to the inner rehaut which formed the basis of a simple timing device for counting up or counting down.

The movement was screwed into its own holder, incorporating the crown tube; the whole assembly could simply be lifted out of the case once the back had been removed. Of course this meant that there was just about zero water resistance but to paraphrase an oft cited observation: if a pilot finds himself 'in the drink' then his concerns maybe other than whether or not his watch is still working. The crown was large and flat to the inside. The case back was a press fit and upon attaching it then the movement was held in place and the watch became a whole. Issued watches will bear the engraving 'MAJETEK VOJENSKÉ SPRÁVY' (Property of Military Affairs) along with a unique serial number. The following example has had the back brushed at some point but shows the script that should be present as well as the folded construction, visible on the lug:



Image used courtesy of Colin Millar

The Longines was officially supplied from 1935 until 1947 to the Czech Air Force. Within that time the watch changed in terms of its dial three times; in addition, three different movements were utilised.

### ***Version 1***

Featured a matt porcelain dial with slightly 'woolly' script. The dial was marked 'Anti Magnetique' above the subsidiary seconds dial at 6 (although examples do exist without this indication). Hour and minute hands were of the svelte type with radium fill. The movement used was the Longines 15.94 which had originally been designed at the turn of the century as a reduced size pocket watch calibre. 34mm in diameter, the 15.94 featured 15 jewels and beat at a standard for the time 18,000 bph with a screwed balance wheel.

### ***Version 2***

Dating from the very late 1930s, the second version featured a glossy porcelain dial with sharper script than the original. The 5 and 7 of the dial were less 'eaten' than those of the previous matt porcelain dial. Svelte hands were still used although examples have been seen with simple, plain hands which are believed by many to be original. The other change with the second version was the movement; in this case, Longines used the calibre 15.26 which beat at the same rate as the original, had the same jewel count and bridge layout. Interestingly, this calibre was also used in the very rare Serbian Army Corps watch from 1939.

### ***Version 3***

The final version of the Czech Air Force issue Longines (circa 1946/7) switched to the use of a metal dial which was perhaps more durable than porcelain. Design wise, this was very much the same as the original in terms of the incursion of the seconds dial into the 5 and 7. The biggest change was the use of the Longines 15.68Z calibre, again featuring 15 jewels (it was produced in a 17 jewel version too) and with a different bridge layout. This calibre held a timing record for no less than ten years from 1945 to 1955, having won a competition with an accuracy of 0.09 seconds per day.

In terms of desirability, then many would argue that the first version would be at the top of the tree; this may simply be due to the fact that one way or another, some of these watches could have found their way into the skies above Britain during the summer of 1940. Whatever the case, the Longines Czech Air Force is a fascinating watch; until relatively recently little known, and of course worn by those whose contribution to our freedom has in some ways perhaps gone a little underappreciated. Its design is quirky and was even possibly anachronistic at the time it was being manufactured and issued. Nonetheless, there is little doubt that it was fine timepiece, built by a leading house. Ownership of an original is still relatively easy to achieve at the time of writing, there were thousands issued and many survive. Prices have increased however and I feel will continue to do so (as with many military timepieces), particularly given that the Longines is becoming more and more appreciated as time passes. Owning a Longines CAF is one thing, wearing it is another; no doubt more than suitable for special occasions or for watching war films – everyday wear could very well be inviting disaster particularly given the pretty zero water resistance of the watch. As with many historical timepieces, there are many people who love the design of an original and would equally love to be able to wear a 'new' example. As regards the Longines, there have been one or two attempts at something very similar over the years and *reasonable* attempts they were too, but not the proverbial cigar. Longines haven't thus far been inclined to produce a re-edition and so it wasn't until 2012 that a watch came along that might capture the true spirit of the original.



Image used courtesy of Eddie Platts

The Precista PRS-9 Czech Air Force was launched by Timefactors on 17th April 2012 after quite some time in development; in fact it was originally conceived back in 2003. One would wonder as to why it should take some nine years from drawing board to release. A good part of the reason for this can be attributed to Timefactors' penchant for doing things properly or indeed improving upon the original of any watch to which the company pays homage; the Precista PRS-18Q is just one example where the original specification was improved upon, the PRS-10 was another. But as well as improving upon specification, it has become apparent to me over the years that wherever possible, Timefactors will take the time and effort to get the aesthetic details just right. Again, the PRS-18Q is a shining example of a watch that is wonderfully close to the original issued piece. But enough of late 20th Century dive watches! I feel that the PRS-9 is possibly Timefactors' most ambitious project yet; certainly so in terms of recreating the spirit and feel of what is now a true antique; furthermore an antique with such important historical significance. Of course, in addition to recreating the aura of the original, the challenge that Timefactors faced was to make the watch practical in terms of everyday use – it would be of little store to market a watch fit only for kid glove treatment. Could therefore the Precista PRS-9 Czech Air Force become a trusty companion, wearable through thick and thin *and* give the wearer (me) that feel of history on the wrist? Read on.

### **Packaging**

As is par for the course with any purchase from Timefactors, the Precista CAF came securely packaged in a stiff outer card box with enough padding within to ensure that the watch would survive the longest and most brutal of journeys; a good thing as I would anticipate collectors from around the world purchasing this edition. This care and attention to outer packaging was a precursor to the packaging and presentation of the watch itself I have to say. I am not usually one to attach much, if any importance to a watch box or pouch or whatever, but I have to concede that in the case of the Precista CAF then for some reason I thought that it would be appropriate for such a piece to come in something that perhaps reflects the times from which the watch is descended. At worst, it would be good to have a receptacle that could at least be used for something on an ongoing basis (the twin watch case provided with the PRS-5 is a good example).

It would seem that this Precista was given the appropriate attention when it came to the watch 'box'. Thus, upon opening the postal outer I was presented with what could only be described as a small crate! Adorning the top of such:

**PRECISTA  
MAJETEK VOJENSKÉ SPRAVY**



Image used courtesy of Carl Webster-Dowsing

Whilst the brand name is no doubt familiar, the words underneath are those which were engraved on the case backs of the original issued watches and which (as mentioned earlier) translate to 'Property of Military Affairs'. The font is suitably utilitarian and likewise the ply used for construction of this most unusual outer box. The sidewalls are actually some 9mm thick with the top and bottom sheets being 4mm so. A simple brass catch keeps the box closed securely and it really does feel very strong. I feel that this approach was an excellent and fitting one given the history of the watch and the times during which the original was issued; yes, this little crate will definitely not win any awards for cabinet making prowess but therein lies its 'beauty' – it does the job in a functional manner with scant regard for the current predilection for perfectly polished fine wood watch boxes; wonderful! As a slight aside, the box opens flat thus can be used for a multitude of purposes – pens, pencils, compasses or even for the watch itself!

On first opening the afore described mini crate then we are presented with a leather pouch (containing the watch), a large blue polishing cloth, a Timefactors pen and a chunky springbar tool. Firstly to the accessories – the springbar tool appears to be of good quality with removable tips; double ended for use with solid and drilled lugs this item is etched with the Timefactors name which is a nice touch and negates any feeling of the item being included as an afterthought. In the case of the Precista CAF then the tool, will I am sure prove to be a boon for many purchasers as without doubt I they will wish to try different straps on the watch. The pen is a nice touch too and a practical item – Timefactors' telephone number and website address are present, correct, and will ensure that we are aware as to where we made our purchase! The blue microfibre polishing cloth is of generous proportion at almost a foot square and eminently useful for giving the watch a quick wipe over. Once again, the Timefactors logo is present along with brand names which the company has used and continues to use.

These little extras *do* make a difference and all are personalised. Quite obviously, care and thought has gone into the presentation thus far with it seeming that Timefactors' approach is one of any purchase being important for the customer – so do it thoroughly and do it right. Not all people are watch collectors – the CAF may be the only watch they buy with the intention of wearing and keeping for many years so the experience should be complete. And complete it is with a comprehensive, illustrated instruction/information leaflet and separate guarantee card (thoughtfully dated to take into account any postal delays). Thus to the final and possibly most important element: the leather pouch containing the eagerly awaited new Precista.



Images used courtesy of Bestak

If I were to be told that the very dark brown leather pouch within the unfinished ply box was from a cache of old leather items found in a disused building then I would believe it. Fitting snugly into one side of the box, the pouch with its precious contents looks totally in keeping with the whole; the leather looks slightly aged, rustic and possibly that used for flying jacket straps – it looks perfect. The red tag sewn into the left seam of course gives the game away – the pouch has fittingly been manufactured by Aero Leather in Scotland. In addition to looking totally suitable, the pouch I received actually *smells* old too! I am so pleased that Timefactors have presented the Precista CAF in this way – I cannot fault the presentation at all; had the watch been boxed in a silk lined, laquered and polished wood masterpiece then I would have been disappointed – the CAF is utilitarian and so should be its protection – thus I am not disappointed. It all feels ‘period’ and *smells* period!

Flicking the popper on the Aero Leather pouch, the CAF can be pulled from within; when I did so for the first time I felt the excitement of opening a time capsule. The watch itself was further protected by a small cloth and on removal of this all was revealed. For many people, first impressions count, myself included. On first seeing the Precista in the metal I was (as on other occasions) quite taken aback. The shape of the CAF is quite unusual anyway but there was a ‘presence’ that I cannot quite describe. It seemed bizarre to see something looking so new and pristine that should look old and battered – why should it look old and battered? – simply because it was evident at first sight that the years taken in perfecting this watch had paid off (the Zeno and Davosa attempts at a CAF type watch were way off the mark compared to the Precista).

What I saw in front of me was rather like something that had been buried and rediscovered years later; what (poignantly) sprang to mind was the recent discovery of a quantity of Spitfire aircraft in Burma – wrapped in waxed paper, crated and buried, only to be discovered some sixty years after their entombment. It seemed that taking the Precista from its little crate and leather pouch was rather like I had found it hidden away and I was now showing it the light of day for the first time in seventy years or so. At first sight then the ‘feel’ was there; the crisp clarity of a brand new military wristwatch evident in abundance. Could the Precista PRS-9 Czech Air Force be Timefactors’ finest hour? Before we consider the watch in detail, the official specifications:

#### CASE

Material:	316L stainless steel, polished
Diameter:	41mm, 44mm across including crown
Lug to lug height:	51.5mm
Thickness:	13.7mm to top of crystal
Lug spacing:	24mm
Anti-magnetic:	4800 A/m
Water resistance:	30 metres
Weight:	95 grammes with strap
Features:	Friction bidirectional bezel with pointer

## DIAL

Colour: Semi-matte black  
Luminous: Hour numbers Super Luminova C3

## HANDS

Style: Squelette hands, luminous filled  
Luminous: Super Luminova C3

**CRYSTAL:** Hi-dome acrylic

**MOVEMENT:** AS1130 "Wehrmacht" movement, 17 jewels Swiss Made

**STRAP:** Custom strap in contemporary style

## Case and Crown

As noted earlier, the case of the Longines Czech Air Force was constructed in what would now be considered a most unusual way – pressed and folded steel. The Precista CAF is not. In terms of the design style of the case then it would be difficult to justify trying to 'improve' such a historic watch; changes of dimensions (or rather scale) can make things look awkward if not executed very carefully. Thankfully for today's market, the dimensions of the original watch were such that they are totally acceptable some seventy years later. Thus, no scaling up was felt necessary and the dimensions of the Precista are very much true to the Longines. The Precista is of modern construction consisting of a solid case band with bezel atop and solid case back below.

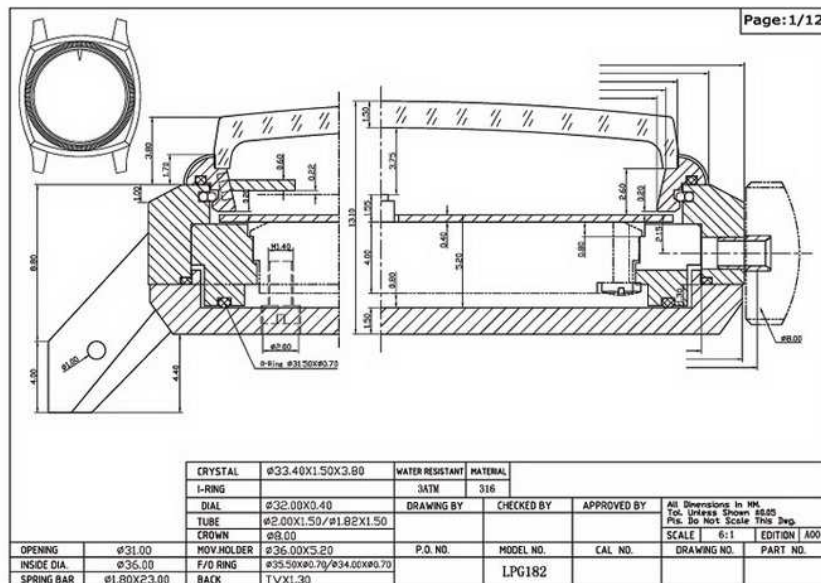


Image used courtesy of Eddie Platts

The case band itself is an intriguing shape; tonneau with multi facets. Here in the 21st Century it is a true blend of the old and the new – the resurrection of the Panerai range back in the 1990s has certainly brought the old back into vogue and thus made the CAF an 'acceptable' shape. The difference of course is in the lugs which in such a splayed fashion are unique to this watch. The Precista case has been cut and finished beautifully – the perfectly flat top giving way to a bevel which runs the entire circumference of the watch; this attention to detail (apart from being a true representation of the original) also ensures that proportions are kept correct. Discarding this important facet of the case would either have resulted in a smaller watch or an oversized bezel, thus throwing things out considerably. The retention of, and *angle* of this bevel very much determines the size of the bezel and thus crystal/dial diameter and it would seem that the Precista has got it just right – the whole look of the watch would have been spoiled considerably should it have become 'all dial'. As already mentioned, the cut

and finish of everything is exemplary with no unevenness or sharp edges – where one plane changes to another, it does so crisply enough yet smoothly enough to indicate that no short cuts have been taken.

This observation also extends to the sides of the case; whereas we might expect these to be slab sided in the vertical plane, there is a very small indication of a concave finish – this is so subtle as to possibly remain unnoticed by many, but it is there and allows any reflections to play wonderfully as the watch is tilted back and forth. Where the case sides curve into the outer facets of the lugs then this has been achieved in a perfectly fluid manner – in fact it is almost impossible to determine where exactly the case side ends and the outer lug side begins. And those lug sides themselves have a graceful curve to them which complements the opposing camber of the case side superbly; the inner faces of the lugs are curved too, almost imperceptibly but enough to confirm that no facet of this watch case has been starved of attention. Interestingly, the only flat plane to the main case of the Precista is the top, within which the bezel resides.



Image used courtesy of Eddie Platts

What characterises this watch perhaps more than anything else are those lugs! In the past I have seen images of the Longines (and other watches with splayed lugs) and I always thought they looked ‘odd’. I never had the opportunity of handling a watch so equipped before the Precista arrived with me. It was not until being able to rotate and turn the watch (and wear it) that I began to warm to this unusual design, a photographic plan view of the watch does nothing to put the splay into context with the angles and curvature of the rest of the piece. Furthermore, growing appreciation of the historical significance of the watch in hand meant that any previous doubts I had held about lug design were quickly consigned to my watch appreciation history.



Image used courtesy of Eddie Platts

The outward splay of the Precista's lugs determine that 24mm straps will need to be worn with the watch; this is a relatively wide lug width for a 40mm or so case but it works; it works *because* of that splay – at the case, the width is 22mm and it is to that fusion of lugs and case that my eyes are drawn. Thus, the relatively wide strap appears narrower than its 24mm would suggest. I have never been able to 'get away' with such a wide strap, but with the Precista I can. The whole case is a fascinating myriad of angles and curves, optical illusions even – add to that the polished finish and it is very easy to simply sit and handle the watch, turning it over and round, just to try and make sense of the visual gymnastics taking place. A major and vital point of note is that downsweep of the lugs when viewed in profile – this is where others (viz Zeno) have gone spectacularly wrong in my opinion with lazy downsweeps not bold enough to match the Longines. Timefactors has grabbed this one by the horns and produced a downsweep to die for! It would appear to be something in the region of 45 degrees which also appear to be on par with the original. Such a marked angle (aside from being correct) serves to negate some of the Precista's lug to lug length of 51.5mm – thus, the watch hugs the wrist when worn and even wearers such as me, with (very) sub 7 inch wrists can wear the watch comfortably. Where the Precista is different to the Longines is the concession to drilled lugs with the resultant ease of strap changing (and of course we have the tool to do so in the box with the watch).



Image used courtesy of Eddie Platts

As it happens (and as expected) the case has been polished to perfection, no lines or imperfections; and this leads me to the question of an all polished watch – this would be a no go for a modern, issued military timepiece but the PRS-9 isn't such. The original was polished and so should be the Precista. Were it all brushed or indeed sand blasted then the beauty of the case would be totally lost in my opinion. Furthermore, as the watch gets worn and picks up the scratches and nicks of everyday life then I feel that such can only add to the character and beauty of such an unusual design.

Protruding from the 3 o'clock position is the winding crown. The crown tube, it should be noted, is set into the case in modern manner and thus some contribution made by this arrangement to the water resistance. But the design of the crown itself is basically as per the Longines of so long ago. Thus, the inner face is completely flat with a discreet dome to the outer; a classic 'winding button' if you will. The Precista 'P' is etched into the crown and looks to be totally in character; however (in a positive sense) such is the high level of polish that it does in fact take a second glance to actually see this signing, almost as if it is there if one wants it, but not if one doesn't. The teeth of the crown are all cut accurately and deeply, ensuring that it will give many, many years of service I am sure. Accurately cut teeth are one thing but it is the diameter of a winding crown that is crucial – both in terms of aesthetics and practicality (particularly when the watch is manually wound). I am pleased to say that the Precista's winding crown measures in at a not insubstantial 8mm! This is aesthetically perfect for the watch case and of course ensures easy manual winding on a daily basis – those people with perhaps 'chubbier' fingers will have no problems at all in gripping and turning this crown and its diameter makes the process easy, pleasant and by no means a chore. 'Pleasant' as per the previous sentence comes as a consequence of the combination of the well proportioned crown and the movement itself – I can report that the feedback from the movement when winding the watch is reassuringly crisp with a satisfying sound from the click; not buttery smooth and not agricultural by any means - exactly how I would expect it.



Author's Images

So to the back of the Precista CAF and the part of the watch that will usually remain hidden. It would seem that Timefactors have given equal attention to this aspect as would appear to have been to the top of the case. How easy it would have been to specify a flat piece of metal to attach to the underside of the watch; but no, here again we can see the use of chamfers to give a visually appealing look to something that we won't often cast our eyes upon! This is a thick, chunky piece of steel that has once again been polished to perfection and which features four deeply sunk holes through which screws pass in order to attach it to the watch. The use of screws can be considered an improvement, with caseback removal easy on the one part and contribution to the 30m water resistance another; an o-ring within a groove on the rear of the case itself ensures no water ingress can occur.



Image used courtesy of Carl Webster-Dowsing

Such is the heft of the case back that it feels totally as one with the case itself – indeed, at its thinnest, the back is no less than 1.5mm thick. Overall, it contributes 3mm of the total height of 8mm that constitutes the case excluding bezel and crystal. As well as advertising the PRS-9 model number, WR 30 Metres and individual watch serial number ,\*\*\*/11 (the 11 denoting 2011) the Precista CAF proudly displays an etched 312 Squadron crest. This has been achieved neatly, accurately, and is deserved of its place on the reverse of this watch. All too often we see cheaply manufactured, shoddy goods which purport to be ‘in honour’ of particular wartime groups and which, quite frankly are more of an insult than a compliment. The watch case thus far is of such exceptional quality and such an accurate representation of the original that I would reiterate that the 312 Squadron crest looks (and is) appropriate in every way.

At this point of the review it might be becoming obvious that I am very enthusiastic about the Precista CAF. This is indeed true and my positivity toward the watch at this juncture stems from the absolute quality that I am experiencing. In terms of the metalwork of the case then the material, the proportions, the cut, the finishing, the attention to detail would all indicate a labour of love and a resulting watch case that defies the price being asked for this watch. Aside from the winding crown, *interaction* with the Precista consists of reading the time (obviously) and using the unusual bezel arrangement for timing events when necessary. Let us now consider these elements and whether they are worthy of the case within which they reside.

### **Bezel, Crystal, Dial and Hands**

The bezel of the Precista CAF is, as can be seen of the coin edge variety (in stainless steel). The design itself is typical of wristwatches of the 1920s/1930s and has featured varying levels of functional complexity since that time. Thus, it can be of a fixed nature or indeed rotating. The simplest implementation of the rotating coin edge bezel would that with a painted marker at a certain point which could be used for simple timing activities; such an arrangement can be seen on Hanhart chronographs of the 1930s and 1940s and indeed on re-editions or variations of the same since then; Tutima offer time only watches with the classic rotating coin edge bezel equipped with a red marker as part of their current range and these are styled very much along the lines of watches manufactured during the first half of the 20th century. From a construction point of view, this would seem a relatively simple solution.

What is more difficult to achieve is a pointer beneath the watch crystal but which can be operated via the outer rotating bezel; ‘difficult’ in this respect might ultimately be defined as providing the facility yet engendering the watch with some protection from the outside elements. IWC have achieved this with their (large at 44mm and priced similarly at over GBP£4000 in steel) ‘Vintage Pilot’ model of recent years. Of course, back in the 1930s things were a little different in this regard – here we come back to the aforementioned adage that should a pilot find himself in the water etc. etc., and as such (certainly in the case of the Longines Czech Air Force watch), little attention was given to giving the watch any meaningful water resistance. From an engineering perspective then it would seem that the rotating bezel should be connected to the inner rehaut which in turn has a pointer attached to it – in the process the crystal turns too.



Image used courtesy of Carl Webster-Dowsing

Certainly the Longines CAF has become well known (perhaps now the most well known) for its bezel operated inner pointer but it wasn't the only watch thus equipped; time only watches came from Omega, Zenith, Helvetia and Rellum to name a few, many of which were supplied to the German forces. Heuer produced a chronograph with the arrangement. In many respects, these watches were the original aviators' pieces, mostly featuring small seconds hands and in some cases featuring full size pocket watch movements. Interestingly, when viewing the Longines in comparison with some of the aforementioned, the Longines looks positively modern for its time.

But back to the bezel arrangement of these watches; it is a discreet solution for the provision of a simple timing device on a wristwatch and in terms of measuring minutes can be relatively precise particularly when one wishes to measure elapsed minutes from a certain point – in this case the point of the marker can be precisely positioned over the needle end of the minutes hand and thus the elapsed time read within a perhaps quarter of a minute. Likewise, countdown either *of* a certain number of minutes or *to* a particular minute can be measured very accurately. For non-pilots and on a day to day basis I feel that this solution is more than adequate and pleasing to use. Of course we can use dedicated chronographs and watches with external rotating bezels but these are more specialist than a simple everyday watch and maybe some wearers prefer a simple dial over the complexities of a chronograph or indeed dislike wearing a dive style watch.



Image used courtesy of Carl Webster-Dowsing

The Precista would seem to have conquered the challenges posed by the internal marker (it is after all water resistant to 30m). As far as I am aware the whole project has taken considerable time due to the issues associated with such provision. The external part of the bezel is traditionally milled with the serrations being of a medium coarseness and it is easy enough to grip and turn the bezel – given that the crystal rotates too then this makes things easier still. At first sight I thought the bezel serrations were of slightly alternating depths and indeed, under a loupe this is the case – the variation is extremely slight and fractions of a millimetre; I remain surprised that I even noticed but no doubt light conditions play a part.

As it should be, the bezel is bi-directional with no clicks – friction is partially provided I assume by the o-ring which prevents the ingress of water and the ‘feel’ of the bezel is good, easy enough to turn yet hard to turn accidentally. Delving deeper inside the watch the milled bezel extends downward and is one with the inner rehaut – the whole thing is machined and turned from one piece of steel as expected. The rehaut is the only part of the watch to feature a brushed finish with which I am in full agreement; a highly polished affair can often cause distracting reflections which can be quite blinding in direct sunlight. The rehaut is angled inward very slightly with the whole assembly being held in place (and further friction provided) by what I assume to be a metal, sprung double ring (circumferential) set into a recess in the watch case and an opposing recess in the inner (hidden) face of the rehaut. Such are the tolerances of the whole case that specification calls for a 0.20mm gap between the underside of the rehaut and the dial; this gap is of course important as the rehaut turns, taking its red pointer with it. The pointer is inset into the rehaut at a height to ensure plenty of clearance above the minutes hand and is of a bright red colour, thus ensuring it is very easy to see. Many of the original watches had a radium coated pointer though I have seen red on some examples too.

Atop the whole assembly is the acrylic crystal. As a unit, this projects a fraction over 2mm in total above the bezel. The sides rise almost vertically to a smooth, rounded corner from which a medium dome then extends across the dial. Without labouring the point, the use of acrylic I consider to be completely correct; the original had it and it suits the whole feel of the watch. Given the construction of the bezel I assume that sapphire could have been specified but the dome necessary to keep the watch looking authentic would have made a substantial difference to the asking price of the Precista I am certain. The 1.5mm thickness of the Precista’s crystal coupled with its domed profile ensure that it feels solid and will withstand all but the most severe of knocks. Polishing any accumulated scratches out will be a breeze with Polywatch or toothpaste should the need arise. Distortion of the dial when viewing at an angle is minimal given the crystal's profile.

The crystal, bezel, rehaut and red marker assembly has been executed excellently; it does the job intended and does so smoothly and satisfyingly. Obviously, care and attention have been invested into this most important aspect of the watch and Timefactors has succeeded where others have either failed or compromised. Had the Precista been fitted with a non rotating bezel and mineral crystal then despite having the ‘look’, the watch would have failed in my opinion. So, we have a watch case which is replete with the features (and benefits) of the original; everything looks as it should, operates as it should and through judicious use of design and sealing techniques an improvement has been made over wartime watches, giving us a water resistance rating of 30 meters. For everyday wear with the occasional dunking this is fine; if one’s everyday routine involves swimming fifty lengths of the local baths then a different watch might be appropriate; the Precista is an aviator’s watch first and foremost and the case serves this purpose perfectly.

As mentioned earlier in this review, the Longines CAF utilised three variations of dial over the years during which it was produced. The basic design is with classic Arabic numerals, traditional for military dials of most types with its inherent characteristic of unbeatable readability. Such readability does depend on the handset used and with the squeuelette design then there is little room for confusion between hours and minutes. Squeuelette hands are very much a ‘classic’ and have been used since the days of the earliest trench watches.

Firstly to the dial of the Precista; I feel that the first point to be addressed is the brand name that Timefactors chose with this watch – the company had a choice in this regard – the watch could have been branded Smiths, it could have been branded Sewills, or even Speedbird; but Precista was chosen and I feel that this is entirely appropriate and more so over the other options. At its simplest, the Precista logo is a perfect example of a classic, period script which is uncannily similar to that used by Longines. It looks completely correct on this dial, more so than the others within the Timefactors stable would have done I feel. Yes, Precista (as far as we know) wasn’t around way back when the original Longines was conceived (Smiths was, Sewills was) but it *has* since been used on issue military watches both dive and aviator. At the end of the day, Timefactors has set out

to produce a quality homage to the Longines, not a copy, not a reproduction so to speak, but a watch that does justice to the original and the men who wore it. Above all else, Precista looks right – simple as that. Furthermore, Timefactors has been discreet in the use of the Precista logo – the ‘P’ is at most 2.5mm in height with the rest of the name being less than 1mm so. The printing in white gloss is extremely precise, accurate and completely in proportion to the other elements of the dial. Were this watch branded any other way then my enthusiasm for it might not be quite what it has turned out to be.



Image used courtesy of Carl Webster-Dowsing

The dial base is quoted as a semi matt black finish and this has produced the extremely dark charcoal colour effect that many of us are familiar with and which of course is very easy on the eye in bright sunlight. The painted finish is even and well applied with no ‘bobbles’ or imperfections at all. At the outside of the dial we have the rail track in white gloss paint which once again has been executed superbly – the fineness of the minute markers is such that they match the width of the minute hand needlepoint almost exactly and it is very pleasing to see the minute hand approach and pass a particular marker. Under a 10x loupe all looks well with the paint being thick with almost no distortion at the edges. Viewing without any aids and the railtrack looks as good as any I have seen. At each hour we have a small square of white gloss which again cannot be faulted – there is a finesse and precision to the outer track which was probably never there on the originals, particularly the ‘fuzzy dial’ incarnation of the porcelain version.

Moving inboard to the bold Arabic numerals and these consist of a white base with a thick, pillowed application of Super Luminova C3 atop; the luminous compound in this instance, whilst being pillowed (which I adore) does not have the glossy effect should one tilt the watch back and forth and this is very much in keeping with the finish that the original, volatile radium would most likely have had. Such is the thickness of the compound upon the dial of the Precista that without fail I can read the time well into the early hours of the morning. Colourwise, the C3 is a very light green with the whole application smacking of precision and quality – the application remains within its white confines perfectly and has been applied accurately and precisely. Timefactors has chosen to use the serif font for the hour numerals which was used on one variation of the Longines and I can report that those important numbers are accurately sized and spaced – proportionally it looks pleasing and correct.



Image used courtesy of Carl Webster-Dowsing



Image used courtesy of Eddie Platts

Thus we move to the lower quadrant of the dial and the seconds sub dial. This does actually reside within an almost imperceptible recess, visible only under very close scrutiny. The outer track, five minute hashes and numerals are once again in white paint, applied as thickly as practicable given the slight texturing of the dial paint itself and indeed the fact that the track lines are probably no more than 1/15 of a millimetre wide. The Arabic font used for the numerals is different to that of the main dial as was the case with some examples of the Longines and the font size used on the Precista would appear to be exactly correct. The diameter of the sub dial at 10.5mm would seem to be proportionally correct to that of the main dial – it is 1/3 the diameter of the latter and it works very well; not overbearing and not lost. Purists might argue that the sub dial should be a little lower toward the outer track – achieving this would entail either reducing the size of the whole watch (wrong) or utilising a movement dimensionally exact to the Longines (difficult, if not impossible). Thus, if we compare the Precista to the Longines then yes, the sub dial is a little nearer to the centre pinion than the originals but for the first part, the Precista looks fine from an aesthetic perspective and for the second, the Precista (as I have mentioned) is not trying to *be* the Longines or a direct copy of it.

What we do see of course below the running seconds dial are the words 'Great Britain', discreet but there. This watch was conceived in Great Britain and is a tribute to a timepiece that was worn here by brave men who fought with us, during and after a famous battle which also bears the name Britain. Enough said. Overall, the dial of this watch looks excellent, looks correct and importantly has been manufactured to a superb standard. The finish and attention to detail are commendable and I cannot fault it. So we move to the timekeeping hands.

In the past I always had 'trouble' appreciating the svelte design – I always considered it to be old fashioned and somehow odd. Of course it is old fashioned because it is an old design! And it *can* look odd if used on the wrong watch (I have seen svelte hands on a modern Aristo dive watch, what were they thinking?). But, as my watch appreciation has matured then I have come to appreciate the classic designs of times long gone, in fact I have come to, dare I say it, *like* the svelte handset! However, what can make it or break it for me are the relative lengths of the hour and minute hands – for example I have seen variants of the Longines CAF (pictured earlier in the review) with what to me is a slightly overlong hour hand, thus making the 'teardrop' toward its end appear something of a protrusion. Overlong needles at hand's end can also look wrong in my opinion. Another aspect of the svelte design is of course the use of 'crossbars' which divide the length of the hand in question. These serve to break up the hand visually and also I assume, to prevent large expanses of luminous fill which might be difficult to achieve without 'thinness' occurring and subsequent dark areas at night.

The Precista utilises flat, polished steel hands with Super Luminova C3 fill (which matches the colour of the dial numerals perfectly). The luminous compound is obviously of a not insubstantial thickness; as per the dial numerals, it glows well into the early hours and has been applied with precision. The hour hand is long enough just to nudge one or two numerals on its journey round the dial without being overly intrusive in any way; from a

proportional perspective the teardrop and needle are perfectly in keeping with the main parallel shaft of the hand which features one crossbar. Deferring to an earlier observation, the Longines I have seen with longish hour hands had no crossbar, exaggerating the length. The Precista most certainly possesses a perfectly sized hand which looks in keeping with the dial and of course the other hands with which it works.

The *minute* hand projects to within a fraction of a millimetre of the outermost line of the railtrack – no ‘short hand syndrome’ here and reading the minutes can be done with as much precision as even the most anal of us require. In the classic svelte style, this hand features a gradual splay through its length, ending in a curved point which transforms into the needle tip. Using the rotating red pointer to measure elapsed time *from* a certain point is extremely easy given that the minute hand needle/red pointer are perfectly matched lengthwise and thus the pointer can be positioned directly above. To break up the minute hand then two crossbars are used; this is true to many of the originals and looks perfect aesthetically. Aside from the fact that the two hands are well replete with luminous fill, their different shapes and perfectly matched lengths make time reading easy; there is absolutely no possibility of mistaking hours for minutes or vice versa. Working together, these hands reflect any available light given their high polish finish and when the watch is tilted or the light changes, the Super Luminova takes over, day or night. We must not forget the hardest working of the three timekeeping hands - positioned above the 6 and again in highly polished steel, the seconds hand is of standard design, very slightly tapered all the way through from the counterbalance to the tip; the tip itself projecting just over half way into the railtrack of the dial. The quality of this hand matches the other two and of course it is quite discreet by default – however tilt the watch slightly and the steel shines as brightly as does that of its brothers.

Overall, does the handset of the Precista live up to the quality and execution of the dial? Without doubt, this is a resounding ‘yes’. Indeed, all elements, (static or interactive) of the watch thus far are extremely impressive. From the case to the bezel, from the bezel to the crystal, and beneath to the dial and hands the Precista PRS-9 smacks of care, attention and quality. We must now delve inside the casing to examine just what makes this watch tick.

## **Movement**

Of crucial choice when the Precista CAF was being conceived was the movement. Without doubt a manual wind calibre with small seconds was required but getting the right sized movement would I am sure have been paramount. Widely available and relatively easily obtainable would be the ubiquitous ETA 6498; it certainly has the correct functions and layout but at over 36mm in diameter might have meant that the watch would have to be scaled up slightly case wise. Conversely, the ETA 7001 (again possessing the correct functions and layout) at less than 24mm would be dwarfed by the casing (and the seconds dial would have looked most odd). The final choice consisted of a cache of new old stock AS1130 calibres which were cleaned, oiled and pressed into service long after they were manufactured.

The AS1130 calibre dates back as far as 1932 – exactly the period from which the Longines CAF emanates. Known as the ‘Wehrmachtskaliber’, the name itself gives an indication of its main user(s) – German forces. Indeed, the movement was adopted following an invitation to tender for a robust, dependable manual wind movement which could withstand the rigours of military use as well as that of the police and fire service. In addition, the movement was to be of relatively low maintenance design attained through a sizeable diameter and thus large gears/wheels. Throughout World War II, the AS1130 equipped many watches worn by German forces and continued to do so for some time – as it happens, despite increasingly demanding tests on movements by the German authorities, the AS1130 continued to win reissued tenders until the 1960s. It wasn’t just German military watches that use this movement however; it has been utilised by a plethora of brands in an equally numerous number of models – even the likes of Piaget and Girard Perregaux are on the list. Whilst therefore it is best known as the Wehrmacht movement, it is more than that and we mustn’t forget that it was manufactured by a Swiss company. Interestingly, an AS movement (1203) powered the Timor WWW (Watches Wristlet Waterproof) used by the British forces during WWII.

What is without doubt is that the AS1130 calibre is ‘period’, robust, well proven and suitable by definition for a regular everyday wear timepiece. Over the years, it was developed and came in various guises; 15, 16, 17 and 18 jewel versions have been available. The bridges have been subject to differing designs and shock protection added (possibly in the late 1950s); regulating devices have ranged from the very simple through to swan neck regulators, the balance wheel, originally screwed gave way to simple ring balances and so on. Limited edition

watches of recent times have featured the calibre but in highly decorated form; it has been and I would say continues to be, a highly versatile movement.

The basic specification of the AS1130 (as used in the Precista) follows:

- Manually wound calibre with seconds at 6 – non hacking
- Diameter: 29.00mm
- Height: 3.85mm
- Jewels: 17 (jewelled to the centre)
- 1 screwed chaton for the escape wheel
- Shock protection: Incabloc
- Balance: Monometallic, non screwed
- Beats Per Hour: 18,000
- Power Reserve: 41 Hours



Image used courtesy of Eddie Platts

It is of course a utilitarian movement that is ‘oversized’ - there is little if any finesse to it and therein perhaps lies its beauty. Of all the specification noted above, there is one figure which for me makes all the difference and that is the Beats Per Hour; 18,000 BPH is by today’s standards a slow beat rate for a mechanical watch – many of us are more used to the clickety clack of a 28,800 BPH ETA of some description. Just listening to the Precista is like going back in time – the original Longines calibre strolled along at 18,000 per hour and putting the Precista to one’s ear it is a joy to hear the same. There is no hurry, the watch is measuring the passage of time at its own pace thank you very much, as did the Longines all those years ago.

There is enough space within the Precista’s case to ensure that the beat of the watch is amplified just enough to make it nicely audible when placed near to the ear and as well as sounding like ‘granddad’s pocket watch’, the leisurely tick should theoretically mean that it will continue to do so for many many years to come without wearing itself out. The movement is held in place within the watch case by a substantial metal movement holder which is what I would have expected from Timefactors; the movement holder itself features an o-ring which serves the purposes of affording extra dust resistance and of providing a little acoustic dampening.

In terms of accuracy, my experience has been a daily gain of around 7 seconds – this is fine as far as I am concerned though I do admit that for some reason I tend not to take as much notice of accuracy when wearing a

small seconds equipped watch; furthermore, as I get older I am coming to appreciate living my life within a minute or two a day as opposed to within the split seconds afforded by radio controlled watches! Was the AS1130 a suitable choice for the Precista? Again, I would suggest a definite 'yes'. It befits the intended use of the watch, dates back some eighty years and is proportioned such that it has prevented any character destroying rescaling of the watch itself. Its history provides a somewhat ironic talking point too! Oh, and it sounds wonderful.

So there we have the Precista Czech Air Force watch head in its entirety. It must of course be strapped to the wrist to fully enjoy it...

## Strap

As the Longines advertisement shown early in this review indicates, the original aviator watch was supplied with two straps – an extra long one for wear over a flying jacket and a standard length example for normal wrist wear. These were made from calf or pigskin and were likely to be cut edged.

Timefactors supply one strap with the Precista CAF. This has been designed in a very much 'contemporary to the time' style with two 'rivets' at the head end and a roller buckle. Keepers consist of one fixed metal and one moveable leather. The metalwork (which is all steel) upon the strap has been finished in a bronzed effect which looks very authentic. Lengthwise, the strap's buckle side is 85mm and the holed, 125mm. There are eight buckle holes which ensure that the watch will fit wrists from around 9 inches down to around 7 inches; those with smaller wrists (myself included) will need to punch an extra hole or two to get a good and comfortable fit. Taperwise, the strap reduces from 24mm to 22mm.



Image used courtesy of Bestak

The leather employed is an extremely soft and luxurious feeling glove in a medium brown; construction is remborde, the strap is padded (approximately 3mm thick) with the strap lining being of a natural nubuck type. It is when we turn the strap over that all is revealed – the words 'Pittards Leather' are stamped into the buckle side; Pittards are a long established (1826) English leather supplier, noted for their quality and innovation. Indeed, they supplied the leather known as 'Pilot's Leather' which was used in the manufacture of gloves for the Royal Air Force during World War II. It does therefore seem appropriate that they supplied the leather for this Precista. This attention to detail and involvement of a supplier dating back so fittingly is a commendable indication of the way Timefactors have approached this project. It seems that no stone has been unturned. Of course, stamped into the holed side of the strap is the Precista logo. The quality of the supplied strap cannot be faulted; it is beautiful to the touch and can only age well and gain character if worn regularly.

I do suspect that many purchasers of the Precista will be keen to try other straps given the ease with which they can be changed (evidence of this is shown in images within this review!). Doubtless, different leathers in different colours would all suit the watch; dare I say it even the ubiquitous NATO strap will have its place for some people:



Image used courtesy of Carl Webster-Dowsing

Nowadays, there are plenty of strap suppliers offering the 24mm width off the shelf, though such am I impressed with the quality of the watch that I could easily justify the outlay of having a custom strap made – the watch is worth it.

### **The Whole**

Within this review I have considered the history behind the watch, the men who wore the original version and times during which it was worn. I have looked at the recently introduced Precista PRS-9 aspect by aspect; but what of the watch as whole? When handling the PRS-9 or wearing it one cannot help but be impressed by the quality of *everything*; the execution of the casework is superb, no proportion looks out of kilter; each facet and curve takes one on a journey back to a period when perhaps the wearers of the original didn't *have* the time to admire such. All but the very smallest wrists will feel unencumbered by the Precista CAF; on the wrist, the watch feels substantial yet elegant at the same time; this watch is by no means clumsy - the milled bezel and fine steel framework of the hands put paid to any such notion.

And it is indeed a pleasure to read the time on the legible, well finished dial via those hands, the likes of which would have been seen in the trenches of World War One. The *discretion* of the anachronistic timing device is as satisfying as is its deployment, once again taking one on a journey back in time. That journey back in time is where the Precista scores a bullseye; early in the review, I posed a question:

*Could therefore the Precista PRS-9 Czech Air Force become a trusty companion, wearable through thick and thin and give the wearer (me) that feel of history on the wrist?*

I feel that I am now qualified to say 'yes' to that question. More than any watch thus far produced by Timefactors, I feel the Precista oozes with the atmosphere of those distant days – it does so because it has been manufactured with authenticity built in, it is totally old fashioned in the ways that it should be, yet modern in ways that remain hidden – those hidden elements will ensure that it can indeed become a trusty companion for

many years; this watch takes one on a journey back in time on the one hand, but will be with the wearer on a long journey forward on the other.

## Conclusion

The Precista PRS-9 Czech Air Force is priced at GB £385.00. Had the watch been produced by Longines then I suspect that figure might be nearer GB £1885.00 and I feel that given the quality that has been achieved by Timefactors, *the Longines would be no better*. The Precista has met and exceeded my expectations in terms of its physical presence and just as importantly, the aura which I can practically *feel* when the watch is present upon my wrist. Therein lays my recommendation to potential purchasers. For me, other watches from Timefactors have had a similar effect (Smiths Military) but none, Smiths included, have achieved what the Precista CAF has. I feel it may very well be the best yet from Sheffield.

I am absolutely certain that the next time I am stood in an aircraft hangar on a blustery day and the metalwork is creaking, my spine will tingle and the hairs stand up on my arms as I look down at the Precista CAF.

I end the review by answering another earlier question:

*Could the Precista PRS-9 Czech Air Force be Timefactors' finest hour?*

It is.



Image used courtesy of Carl Webster-Dowsing

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*A heartfelt thanks goes to those who have given me permission to use their excellent images:*

Eddie Platts, Colin Millar, Carl Webster-Dowsing, 'Austerpilot', Bob Harrington, and Bestak.