

# MODEL "A" ERA MEN'S AMERICAN WRIST WATCHES

By Donna May Bewley

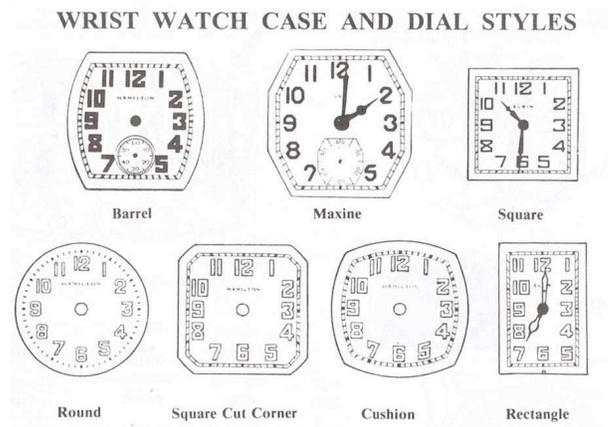
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My husband I enjoy collecting men's American Model A Era wrist watches to wear while riding in our Model A. We have found that obtaining them is both affordable and easy to do.

Queen Elizabeth wore a small jewel-studded watch that was made to fasten on the arm called a watch-bracelet. Such watches were created for royalty and the very rich. In the late 1600's David Rosseau made a watch about the size of a dime. Breguet made his first wrist watch for ladies in 1810. Most men continued to wear pocket watches until after World War I. During the Boer War in South Africa (1899-1902) some officers wore wrist watches during battle to tell time at a quick glance. This practice continued during the First World War as soldiers found wrist watches were crucial when necessary to synchronize watches. Early aviators also found the wrist watch very convenient to use and thus added to its popularity. Soldiers after the war were allowed to keep the wrist watches they had been given which also contributed to their popularity. Men preferred designs that were suitable for sports while women chose slimmer more decorative designs. Pocket watches were still preferred for evening wear. The Bulova Watch Company in 1928 produced a Lone Eagle model wrist watch, which it presented to Charles Lindbergh to commemorate his solo flight across the Atlantic. By the late 1920's wrist watches were outselling pocket watches.

Collecting American manufactured Model A era wrist watches such as Hamilton, Elgin, Waltham, Gruen, Illinois, Benrus and Bulova and others has become relatively easy since the advent of the Internet and ebay. Other sources are antiques shops, auctions, flea markets, yard and garage sales, friends and family members. One can learn about wrist watches just by searching for vintage wrist watches using Google and ebay. By focusing on wrist watches made between 1928 and 1931 it is possible to simplify the task.

Many collectors believe that wrist watches made during the Model "A" era are the most attractive because of their art deco styling. Case shapes such as "Cushion," Square, Rectangle and Tonneau were very popular. Cases were 12K or 14 K solid gold, gold filled, gold plated or gold reinforced. White gold was more popular than yellow. Green gold was also used. Some cases were chromium nickeloid finished. A few cases were even made of Platinum. Radium dials and hands were common. Case bezels were often engraved and or enamel inlaid.



The number of jewels in the movement and the metal used in the case, for the most part, determined the value of the watch. Synthetic rubies and sapphires were commonly used as bearings in wrist watch movements. Higher-grade watches had 17 or more jewels.

Dating wrist watches is both easy and difficult, depending on the brand of the watch you are dating. Waltham, Elgin, Hamilton, Illinois and Hampden serial number lists can be found on the Internet by using Google. Gruen serial numbers were destroyed in a fire in the 1940's. By knowing what serial number is stamped on the watch movement, not the case, you can determine the year of manufacture of some wrist watch brands. Dating Bulova watches from the Model A Era is made easy by using the chart shown below. Remember these marks are on the movement not on the case.

MARKS INDICATING AGE OF BULOVA MOVEMENTS			
1924	✳	1937	→
1925	○	1938	☾
1926	△	1939	∩
1927	□	1940	∞
1928	☾	1941	✳
1929	∩	1942	⊥
1930	∞	1943	×
1931	∩	1944	○
1932	⊥	1945	△
1933	×	1946	46
1934	○	1947	47
1935	△	1948	48
1936	□		

Here are some pictures of Model A Era wrist watches taken from era catalogs and jewelry book



1931 Illinois



1929 Waltham



1930 Elgin



1931 Hamilton

Like our Model A's, vintage watches when found usually need some TLC. If running when found or purchased, the watch should be cleaned, adjusted and oiled. This should be done by a qualified watchmaker and as soon as possible. Running a dirty watch is bad for it. Watches should be cleaned every two or three years. Store your watch in a dry dust free place, perhaps in a box.

Winding a watch every day at regular intervals will keep it lubricated and running smoothly. Also, fully wound watches can sustain a jar easier than a watch that has run down and will keep better time than one only partially wound. Vintage watches are more fragile than modern watches. They are not for wearing while doing yard work, working out or swimming.

Here are some Model A Era wrist watches owned by author's husband.



1928 Benrus



1929 Bulova



1928 Bulova Lone Eagle



1931 Bulova Lone Eagle

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### SOURCES

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