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WATCHES


AN AFTERNOON WITH THE HYT H1 AZO PROJECT

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The word innovation is one that appears all too often in press releases and brand catalogues. While there have been several advancements by watchmakers in the past few years, in my eyes few are as groundbreaking and distinguishable as the HYT hydro-mechanical watches.

In this post I won't attempt to discuss the inner workings of the hydro-mechanical movement, as that deserves a whole series of posts (and a lot more education on my part). Instead, I would like to share with you a new version of the HYT H1 that is innovative on the inside and out, the HYT H1 Azo Project.









While the showstopper at HYT's Baselworld booth this year was the H2, another piece that resembled nothing else caught this horophile's eye. With its unearthly fluorescent green case iridescent against the black leather tabletop, the H1 Azo Project had me at hello.

The case is made of a newly developed translucent and tinted resin known as Azo polyepoxyde. Besides its unique in-your-face appearance, the material boasts some pretty impressive properties. Azo polyepoxyde is seven times lighter than stainless steel, four times lighter than titanium yet three times as resistant to abrasion. Definitely not your average resin.

The best way I can describe the color and fluorescence of the case within my frame of reference is what I imagined radioactive material looked like when I was a kid (you know, from the opening sequence of The Simpsons). Striking as it is, the Azo case has a certain geeky coolness about it I absolutely adore. On the wrist the watch is surprisingly comfortable, thanks to the light case as well as the integrated rubber strap. At 48.8mm it's definitely not one to hide under the cuff (nor should a watch of this nature), but I still find it quite wearable.

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I was also interested in finding out how the H1 would perform under different climatic situations. The H1 loaner was from a more recent production batch, which features an upgraded reservoir and bellow system fitted with a thermo-regulator to compensate for temperature fluctuations and their effect on the fluid's density.

It just so happens that the week I wore the watch was one of the coldest autumn weeks I've experienced in my 14 years in Switzerland. Up at La Chaux de Fonds, we were experiencing subzero temperatures during the day that week and the H1, which sits outside a shirt and jacket cuff, was hardly affected. While waiting for my train out in the blistering cold, I did notice a very slight deviation of the green fluid that you could equate to about 5 minutes, but after a few minutes indoors the liquid was back in its precise location.

So, how easy is it to read the time? I like to think of it as a jumping hour or even a "regulator" layout. It's intuitive. The off-centered minutes dial is easy enough to read and with a bit of practice, you'll start reading the peripheral fluid hour display without much effort. The meniscus is quite pronounced, and once you get used to the positions of the hours you won't even need to read the numbers.

One of my main concerns before receiving the H1 was the liquid's legibility under different lightings. To my surprise, the H1 was easier to read than I had anticipated. Under direct sunlight or fluorescent lighting, the green fluid has a remarkable neon quality about it that makes it stand out from the rest of the dial. Under incandescent lighting and in darker situations, the green liquid appears more transparent but it still quite distinguishable. The only situation where you won't be able to read the H1 is in pitch-black darkness, as the fluorescent liquid isn't luminous. But hey, that's what smartphones are for!

Finally, an important aspect to consider with such a watch is the "wow factor". Does it wear off after a while? Maybe it's because I don't own a "concept" watch, or maybe it's because a week isn't long enough to judge, but I honestly found the HYT H1 just as intriguing to observe after a week as I did when I first strapped it on. The fact there's a moving, functional fluid in a mechanical watch just doesn't get old for me. And besides, who could ever get tired of seeing the fluids in retrograde action?

I can tell you that at the end of the week it was a very heartbreaking experience returning the watch to HYT. Not only was it a mechanical marvel to behold, but the fact that it performed above my expectations without any hiccups only increased my confidence in the brand. I have no doubt that someday, a HYT watch will join my humble watch case...

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