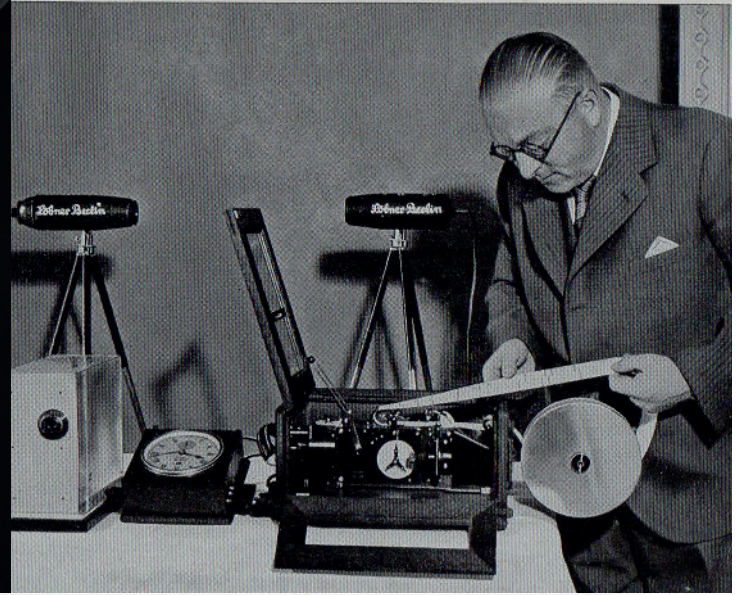


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With a history inextricably tied to sports timekeeping, Löbner timepieces were used at early Olympic Games, and after an absence of 85 years, they announced their return to the global stage with the Steelracer (right) which is inspired by racers of the 1920s and 1930s, while the Rocketman (above) is a stealthier version in full black PVD



LÖBNER

The revived racing timekeeper is revving their engine with the inaugural Steelracer Chronograph

It's not at all rare for the name of a watch brand to be revived decades, if not centuries, past its presumed death knell. In fact, you could argue that most heritage watchmakers have gone through the same process; other than grand maisons like Vacheron, very few have had an uninterrupted journey into the modern era. But for a newly revived name to stake a claim in one of the world's most important watch retailers – in this case Bucherer – is another matter entirely. And that's because, unlike many of the brands out there that rely on perception over performance, Löbner have some serious chronometric heft, past and present.

The history of Löbner is inextricably tied to one thing above all else: sports timekeeping. Founded in 1862 by Franz Ludwig Löbner, the company was creating 1/100th and 1/1000th second stopwatches before it was cool. We're talking wooden boxes of ticker tape linked to pocket watches and oversized clocks like a timekeeping Rube Goldberg machine. However, while Löbner timepieces were used at early Olympic Games (sorry, Omega), their first love has always been racing.

Indeed, Löbner were responsible for putting many a racing record into the books. In 1928 they timed the Opel RAK 3, a rocket-powered car that hit 256kmh (just under 160mph), an insane feat back in those Wild West days of early cars. They timed Bernd Rosemeyer when he became the first ever man to go faster than 400kmh (around 250mph) in the late 1930s and Rudolf Caracciola when he smashed that speed a year later in 1938 with a top speed of 432kph (nearly 270mph). In short, the Löbner name has been present for some incredible milestones in automotive history.

Unfortunately, that wasn't enough to save the brand. Despite his imperial links (the Perpetual Calendar in the Reichstag is a Löbner) and insane fractional timekeeping, there just wasn't the demand for what the watchmaker was doing. In October 1938, the brand went, as the Germans say, kaput.

And yet it's a story of horological specialism that has legs – legs that exactly 85 years later, in October of last year, saw Löbner striding back onto the global stage with a shiny new collection of beautifully solid sports chronographs.

Hammering home the German connection, Löbner is the latest watchmaker to call Glashutte home, classical home of Saxon watchmaking that it is. It means that from the get-go they're rubbing shoulders with the likes of Glashutte Original and A. Lange & Sohne. Fortunately, their inaugural collection, the Steelracer, proves that they're in the

right place. It's not just that it's priced at €13,800, just under £11,800, but that it's worth every penny.

While the Steelracer is inspired by the 1920s and 1930s racers Löbner cut their teeth timing, there's a healthy dose of 70s-style integrated sports watch in there too. No, there's no hexagonal, octagonal or multi-faceted bezel here, but the flat, almost industrial planes of the case and bracelet very much have that sports luxe feel down to a tee, right down to the muscular shoulders.

What sets the Steelracer apart however is that it is, of course, a chronograph. But if you were expecting vintage mushroom pushers, think again; the entire right half of the watch is taken up by long, curved pushers that if it weren't for the tachymeter and subdials, you could think of as an intense crown guard. Instead, it has some of the most aesthetically curvaceous chronograph pushers around. The crown itself is actually hidden underneath a patented sliding block of metal they're calling a 'Sledge' crown guard. There's also something innately charming about an asymmetrical silhouette like this – and asymmetry that carries through to the very, very German dial.

Available in a deep black or shimmering blue, the dials forgo your standard triple register layout, with subdials of equal size nestled at cardinal points of the watch. Instead, you have running time – seconds, minutes and hours – all on a single, larger dial at 10 o'clock. The two other, smaller dials indicate chronograph minutes and hours at three o'clock and six o'clock respectively. That leaves the vital chronograph second hand to dominate the entire main face of the watch. It might be inspired by archival Löbner racing timekeepers, but the format, case and pushers combined make for an intensely modern watch.

To launch, the Steelracers are joined by the Rocketman, a stealthier version in full black PVD and with a rubber strap in place of the integrated bracelet. It's a cool, monochromatic take on the formula but is otherwise the same as the Steelracers. It is however limited to 50 pieces, so don't expect to see many of them, even at Bucherer stores.

While the watch is assembled in Glashutte, the movement powering the Löbner collection is Swiss – specifically a La Joux-Perret number with a 4Hz frequency and 60-hour power reserve. However, an entirely new module has been added in order to allow for the Steelracer's signature off-centre display, so calling it a stock movement isn't entirely true.

Despite an 85-year hiatus and a name only die-hard fans of sports timekeepers will have heard of before, Löbner not only has a German timekeeping heritage that many of its neighbours would kill for, it has come out swinging hard with a downright fantastic – and fantastically Saxon – chronograph. It's only been a few months since they launched, but watch this space.

Find out more at lbnr.com