

THE ORIGINS OF RADO

Rado has been an actor on the Swiss watchmaking scene since 1917 and an innovative, unconventional brand since at least 1957. From a movement and component manufacturer to a designer of iconic timepieces, from a family workshop to a global brand: This is the story of Rado.

By Davy Locatelli

A family affair (1917–1929)

The boom in the Swiss watchmaking sector at the beginning of the 20th century encouraged a large number of entrepreneurs to try their luck. Among them, the Schlup brothers: Friedrich (1883–1951), Ernst (1887–1936), and Werner (1893–1970), who paved the way for Rado in 1917 with the founding of a company named Schlup & Co.

Below: First known advertising of Schlup & Co (1923) and first known advertising featuring the brand "Rado" (1929).

Opposite: Lengnau, Switzerland, in 1917.

MANUFACTURE D'HORLOGERIE
SCHLUP & Co. : Longeau
 Téléphone No. 15 près Biemme
Montres ancrés 5 à 19"
Mise à l'heure positive et négative
Fabrication pour tous pays
Qualité garantie Spécialité: Pièce de forme

MANUFACTURE D'HORLOGERIE
RADO
SCHLUP & Co. : Longeau
 Téléphone No. 15 près Biemme
Montres ancrés 5 à 10"
Fabrication pour tous pays
Qualité garantie



To face this new challenge, Schlup & Co. turned to a two-pronged strategy: making movements as well as finished watches.

The finished watches sometimes featured the brand name Rado on parts of the movement.

Paving the way for a true watchmaking brand (1930–1957)

Over the course of the 1930s, the strategy established by the brothers made it possible to reinforce links with a large section of their commercial network on the other side of the Atlantic.

The new dimension entered into by Schlup & Co. can also be seen in the

transformation of its structures. It became a limited company in 1937, followed by the opening of a branch in New York.

The successes enjoyed by the manufacturer from 1941 onwards – at that time, the company boasted over 200 employees – paved the way for the construction of a real factory in Lengnau in 1948.

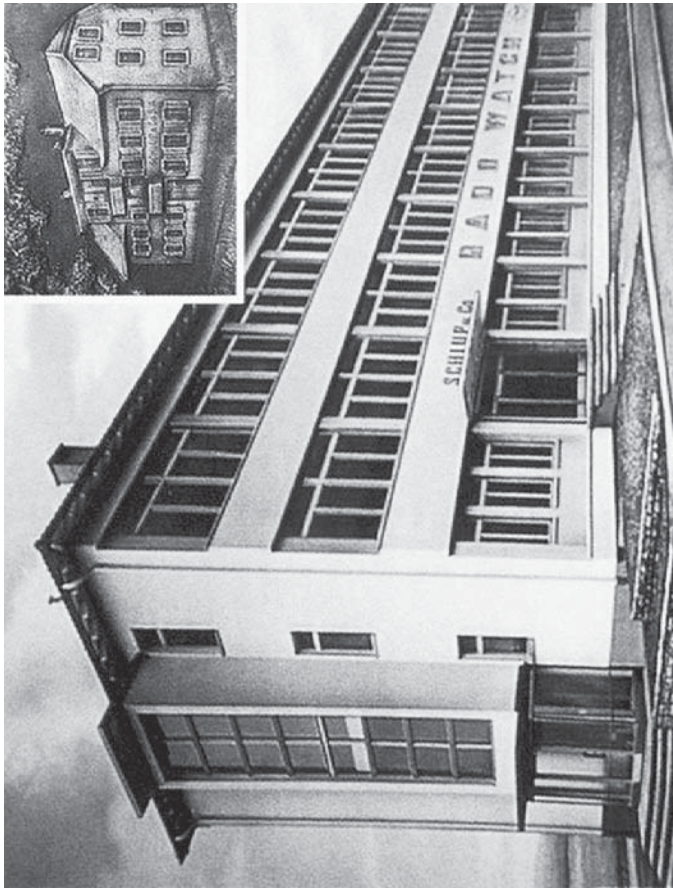
In the days after the Second World War, the growth of the factory was slowed significantly by competition, primarily from the United States. At the same time, the company was faced with an evolving market that demanded ever more automatic, rather than

What's in a name?

Registered in 1928, the "Rado" brand name most likely comes from Esperanto, although no archive can formally attest to this.

In this would-be international language of the time, the word "Rado" means "wheel", one of the most important components in any mechanical watch movement.

The gear wheel was one of the essential elements produced at the Schlup & Co. factory in Lengnau.



hand-wound, movements. These profound changes forced the company to abandon the production of movements in favour of focusing on manufacturing something more profitable: finished watches.

This major turning point came in 1953 with the launch of small volumes, first under the Rado Exacto brand, and then, in 1956, also under the name Exacto.

Initially associated with the Rado brand, the term “Exacto” was only used on watches from the Schlup & Co. workshops in 1956. However, it turned out that the Exacto brand could not be used globally: In the United States, a brand with the name “Exacto” was already owned

by a watchmaker based in New York, and several other countries rejected its registration – forcing the Schlup brothers to abandon it. The success of these initial watch collections, despite the branding problems, reassured the managers of the company with regard to their strategy.

A brand marching to its own beat (1957–1985)

Based on the success of the first product launches, management decided to rely on the Rado brand name for their watch brand, as the name had been synonymous with Swiss-made quality in numerous countries for three decades.

Launched in 1957 under the motto “If we can imagine it, we can make

At the heart of Swatch Group innovation (1986–2017)

During the reorganisation of the Swiss watchmaking industry orchestrated by Nicolas G. Hayek, Rado became part of the Swatch Group (known as SMH at the time) in 1986. From then on, the brand was able to draw on expertise from within the whole Swatch Group, which buttressed its research into original materials and designs.

This increase in access to cutting-edge technologies, the best engineering and design departments, and the most high-performance materials offered Rado an ideal framework for quenching its thirst for innovation.

It was Rado’s mastery of high-tech ceramic in particular that led to the creation of new iconic designs: the

Opposite (left): An early watch bearing the Rado name, circa 1930s.
Opposite (right): Certificate of brand name registration for Rado (1928).
Above: The Rado building contrasted with the Schupbach valley early watch.

Right and opposite: Glimpses of Rado's premises and marketing from the 1950s.

The owner of a Rado watch, made on the latest technical lines, must observe the following recommendations if the watch has to satisfy him entirely.

1. Wind up your watch at the same time every day.
2. Avoid dirt, damp and brusque changes of temperature.
3. Have the movement freshly oiled and cleaned once a year.

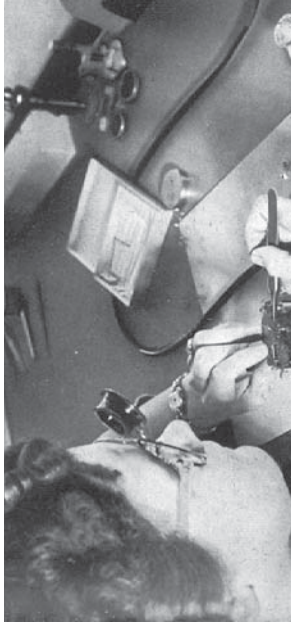
A Rado watch treated under these circumstances will give you satisfaction all your life. Oiling and cleaning are not included in the guarantee.

GUARANTEE CERTIFICATE

RADO

I do certify that the watch
 RADO No. _____
 Date _____
 has been most carefully inspected by trained Swiss watchmakers,
 and is guaranteed to give perfect service under normal wearing conditions.
 I do am therefore liable under normal wearing conditions.

RADO WATCH
 Schlup & Co. Ltd. Lengnau



The Integral, the brand's first watch to make use of high-tech ceramic; the Ceramic, the first Rado watch to use black high-tech ceramic for both the case and bracelet; and the Coupole, the brand's first foray into pure white high-tech ceramic – to name just a few.

With the same momentum, from the start of the 1990s, Rado created its first watch made from a titanium carbide-based composite, combining lightness, hardness and stiffness in a sensually curved shape: the Sintra. A decade later, the brand presented the Rado V10K, which featured perhaps the world's hardest watchcase thanks to a coating made from synthetic monocrystalline diamond.

Today, true to its innovative culture, Rado is writing a new chapter in Swiss-made watchmaking history by developing and mastering coloured high-tech ceramic. Rado's craftsmanship pays homage to a century of creativity and expertise while also opening new doors for the Swiss-made watches of tomorrow. ©

RADO
 SCHLUP & CO. LTD. LENGNAU - BIENNE SWITZERLAND