

# 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.

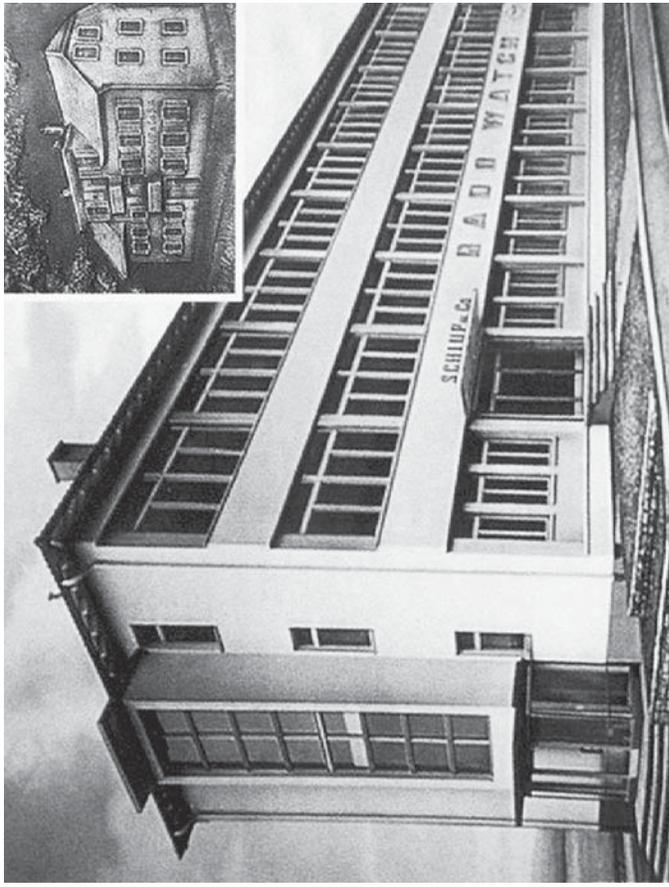
In the days after the Second World War, the growth of the factory was slowed significantly by competition, primarily from the United States. At the same time, the company was faced with an evolving market that demanded ever more automatic, rather than

## 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 it. And if we can make it, we will!", Rado's collections quickly began to stand out from the watchmaking crowd. In 1962, the brand's hunger for innovation led to the birth of the Rado Diastar, marketed as the world's first scratchproof watch. In what may have been a watch industry first, the Diastar was crafted from hardmetal, offering superior scratch resistance and an innovative design approach that would later become an essential strand of the Rado brand DNA.

With each successive collection building on this innovative style, it is hardly surprising that Rado would become an icon of innovation and watchmaking design thanks to its important research and development work, mainly in terms of shapes and materials.

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 Schlup brothers' early worktop.

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

**RADO WATCH**  
LENGNAU

The owner of a Rado watch, made on the latest technical lines, must observe the following recommendations if the watch has to satisfy his entire life:

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.

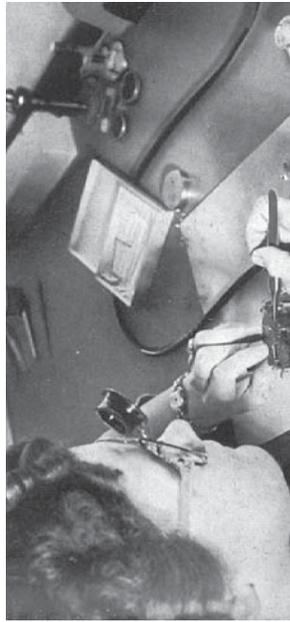
A Rado watch treated under these circumstances will give you satisfaction all your life.  
Oiling and cleaning are not included in the guarantee.

**GUARANTEE CERTIFICATE**

**RADO**

I do certify that the watch  
RADO No. \_\_\_\_\_  
has been completely inspected by trained Swiss watchmakers,  
has been found to guarantee the watch against all manufacturing faults  
I do am therefore able to guarantee the watch against all manufacturing faults  
under normal wearing conditions.

**RADO WATCH**  
Schlup & Co. Ltd., Lengnau  
1950



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