

CiRCULA ProTrail – Video Review

Credits: Original review by Teddy Baldassarre on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cFiyRM5fFVs>

Edited and structured YouTube transcript:

Although I am a firm believer that a watch's specifications or features can only go so far, and that a purchase of a watch can be heavily weighted by an emotional connection, I will say that finding a watch that overdelivers on the spec sheet can make a more compelling package overall. Now, many of the watches that can deliver on value are usually very much out in the general discourse, but every once in a while there is a watch that is not likely appreciated as much as it should be by the collector community — in most cases as a result of being from a smaller brand.

Today we're going to be looking at a watch that qualifies for that assessment, being from a German family-owned company: the CiRCULA ProTrail. This piece serves as a complete package for everyday wear on paper, with solid wearability, a water resistance rating to go along with it, a high-grade caliber on the inside, magnetic resistance, and a scratch-resistant case — all while sitting at around \$1,000.

The CiRCULA brand

CiRCULA is a brand that has roots in Pforzheim, in the Black Forest region of Germany — an important hub for watchmaking in the country as a whole. It's now led by the third generation of the Huber family. Heinz Huber founded the company back in 1955, after working with his family's watch wholesale business, Huber and Company, which was established back in 1926. He took the name CiRCULA as a nod to the circular balance wheel of mechanical movements — a tribute to his passion for the traditions of watchmaking.

CiRCULA produced a wide range of quality timepieces with an emphasis on mechanical tool watches, including divers and chronographs. The quartz crisis took a toll on the company during the 1970s, forcing it to pivot to the production of quartz watches in order to stay competitive. Heinz's son, Klaus-Dieter, led the business from the mid-1980s, focusing on the wholesale side, but the brand put a new emphasis on watchmaking when the third generation came into the fold.

Heinz's grandson, Cornelius, took the reins in 2019. Under his leadership, CiRCULA repositioned to reach more of that collector-minded customer base, beginning with a Kickstarter campaign built around a core series inspired by historic 1950s designs. CiRCULA then released the AquaSport, their 1970s-style dive watch, and it's this model that brought the brand to a new audience, remaining a strong part of their line-up today. The ProTrail, first released in 2022, is the brand's everyday-style watch, serving as a robust offering that delivers on concepts from German standouts like Sinn — with case-hardness treatments and magnetic resistance that are among the best in class.

Personal relevance

My first time hearing about the CiRCULA ProTrail was shortly after its release. Some people in my circle had one of these watches and I thought it was pretty interesting. Then, another day — I was at Watches and Wonders, I can't remember which year — I was on a bus. When you're in Geneva you basically just use public transport to get to the Palexpo, and there are other shows happening in the city at that time. I ran into Cornelius, the grandson of the founder, on that bus. It was a quick hello and goodbye, but I was able to see the watch on his wrist — if I remember correctly, it was a ProTrail.

Ever since that moment I've been following this brand from afar, liking what they're doing. It's pretty cool for what they offer for the money, and yet there's never been a moment where I actually looked at this piece with a definitive highlight and spotlight on the channel. That ends here today, because I have a couple of different ProTrails that we're going to be looking at, including the very popular Sand version — the bestseller for the brand.

Das Gehäuse und die Verarbeitung

It's clear when you first look at the ProTrail that it is no traditional field watch. The almost brutal angularity of the case has a profile that's thoroughly modern, and rest assured, its rugged appearance isn't just posturing as some tool-watch wannabe. The closer you look, the more you recognize that this watch is more of a tool than even it lets on.

The sandblasted stainless steel case undergoes a proprietary low-temperature hardening process, which diffuses carbon into the surface lattice structure without creating unwanted chromium carbides — preventing surface peeling while maintaining corrosion resistance. The resulting surface boasts a hardness of 1200 on the Vickers scale, bringing it to far more elevated levels than untreated stainless steel, which has a typical hardness between 150 and 300. This is probably one of the more attainable watches getting this case treatment. The most famous example just above this price would be Sinn with their Tegimented cases, but 1200 Vickers at this price is pretty crazy, and something you typically do not see. And if you prefer a stealthier look, CiRCULA also offers a model with a black DLC-coated case.

The dimensions are easy-wearing: a 40 mm diameter, a 12.5 mm case height, and a buttoned-up 46 mm lug-to-lug measurement that should give a variety of wrist sizes the ability to pull this one off. The multi-angled surface gives off a sense of aggression, with its matte finish offset by a touch of polish on the transitional facet side of the bezel. One of the striking design cues comes from the inset section of the case side, which features an almost pebbled texture — offering a ton of visual interest while reinforcing the watch's tool-like attitude.

The dial is protected by a gently domed sapphire crystal, offering a clear view thanks to double inner anti-reflective coating. The signed screw-down crown helps bring water resistance up to 150 m — an elevated spec for a field watch — and the screwed-in solid caseback features a simple engraving of a topographic map.

The case treatment was one of those hidden features of this watch. However, there is another one that is not in plain sight but can surprise you as you learn more: the ProTrail also has a soft-iron inner cage surrounding the movement, which raises the magnetic resistance to 80,000 amperes per meter, or 1,000 gauss. The ISO 764 standard for magnetism in watches only calls for 4,800 amperes per meter. In other words, the ProTrail delivers a magnetic-resistance standard 16 times that of ISO.

Comfort, strap and wristband

As far as the wear experience goes, there are both strap and bracelet options for the ProTrail. The strap is made from a color-matched nylon canvas and has a reasonably comfortable leather lining on the underside. It gets quick-release spring bars and a signed stainless steel pin buckle with a matching sandblasted finish, which actually has the same scratch-resistant properties as the case — so no corners being cut there.

Likewise, the three-link bracelet features the same hardened finish, giving the watch a virtually everything-proof build quality. The links are screwed in for added security. The interior of the clasp has an engine-turned look, and the clasp features dual push buttons and tool-free micro-adjustment. As an added bonus, if you specify a bracelet with your ProTrail, CiRCULA will throw in a strap as part of the package. And if you decide to experiment with other straps, the 20 mm lug width keeps your options wide open.

The dial

Moving to the face of the ProTrail, this is a dial that prioritizes legibility above all else. Several variants are available, including gray, a brown tone called umber, an earthy green, basic black, and — the most popular, from my understanding — the Sand colorway, which has a couple of aesthetic differences from the rest.

For the other colorways, the format sticks to the same playbook. At the outer edge you'll find a railway minute track with small lume plots every five minutes. Just inside the track are large printed Arabic numeral hour markers, also featuring Super-LumiNova and set against a matte backdrop. Toward the center of the dial is an Arabic 24-hour scale printed on a concentrically lined background for some added visual interest. Dial text is minimal, with the CiRCULA word mark below 12 and "ProTrail" sitting atop "anti-magnetic" above 6. Each colorway uses different accent colors for the printed elements, but they all complement their dial colors nicely.

The brushed handset is appropriately wide, with a profile that resembles a broadsword, ensuring easy reading at a glance. The silver-tone hands are filled with the same Swiss lume as the dial markings, and the needle second hand is tipped in a coordinating color.

As for the previously mentioned Sand colorway, this is where we see some distinct differences in terms of the dial. While the initial versions of the khaki-colored dial featured the same inner dial as the rest of the colors, newer versions get a grainy pressed texture that resembles — you guessed it — sand. Another difference is that we have heat-treated blue hands: they're heated so an oxide layer forms on them, which is beautiful to look at but also adds corrosion resilience. Dial text is done

in black and blue that closely matches the hands, bringing a cohesive look to the total package. The final difference is the implementation of lume: while the hands are lumed normally, the dial markings are not — instead, the outer dial is fully lumed, a small design choice that offers maximum contrast in both day and night settings.

Update: the movement

Just a quick update — as we were editing this video, there was some new, relevant information about the movement that I thought was important to add. Although the models we reviewed did not have this included, it appears that CiRCULA has since replaced the SW200-1 movement used in the ProTrail with the new SW200-2 caliber, wrapped in the protection from magnets mentioned earlier via that soft-iron inner structure. The big news is that Sellita has upgraded the power reserve from 41 hours to 65 hours, leveling the playing field with much of the competition.

The ProTrail will feature the élaboré-grade SW200-2B version, which removes the date function so there's no ghost position with the crown. In addition, the movement is fine-adjusted in-house to minus 5 / plus 7 seconds per day. The brand says prices for the ProTrail will be \$1,090 on the strap with this new movement and \$1,290 on the bracelet — around \$100 more per version, which I think is reasonable considering the movement upgrade.

The SW200 has settled in as more of a drop-in replacement for the ETA 2824-2. A supply of ETA movements to brands outside of the Swatch Group's umbrella is pretty much eliminated completely nowadays. Further, this élaboré grade increases the movement finish and has a better stated range of regulation out of the factory. The rate of the caliber is 28,800 vibrations per hour, or 4 hertz. It features hacking and hand-winding — the seconds stop when you pull the crown to the farthest position. It has 26 jewels, one more than the ETA 2824. The SW200 also features a Nivaflex alloy mainspring, an Incabloc shock protection system, and a bi-directional winding rotor.

Final thoughts

Now some closing thoughts. Despite \$1,000 not being what it used to be years ago in watches — and really just in life in general — it's still a lot of money to spend on anything. The good news is that you are not faced with a shortage of options in today's watch market if your budget is \$1,000. Many pieces from the likes of Hamilton, Seiko, Tissot, and a long list of other microbrands and others are well documented by the community in this range.

Deciding which is right for you, as stated earlier, is a decision based on logic as well as emotion — and only if you can find a marriage between those two opposing perspectives will you come out with the right choice. What consistently becomes the leading trait at this tier is the idea of value for money. This unofficial class is often represented by the list of features on a spec sheet, where a watch can deliver more than its peers.

What makes this ProTrail an interesting talking point, and a lesson in collecting, is that on paper this watch is maybe the most complete you will come across for \$1,000. Let's recall those specifications: 150 m of water resistance; a sapphire crystal with stellar AR coating; a case-hardness treatment that

resists scratches at multiples of the standard for stainless steel or titanium; a soft-iron cage with magnetic resistance to 1,000 gauss; stellar lume; heat-treated blue hands; an elevated caliber grade regulated just outside of COSC standards; and a robust bracelet with that same surface treatment, screwed-in components, and on-the-fly adjustment.

You say all this out loud, hear the asking price of around \$1,000 on a strap, and you think to yourself: this would be the best-selling watch of all time — it has all the specs you could ever need. And as much as I believe this watch deserves more attention than it gets, it serves as an important reminder to enthusiasts. Watches can wow us with features, and we can often be quick to ask brands to include new features in existing designs. But if you look at your collection and ask, “Why do I love this watch?” — I'd imagine your answer isn't the water resistance or the notes on a spec sheet. It's probably your interest in its design: how you identify with a piece and how it expresses you. Perhaps it's the history of the model, or better yet, your sentimental connection to the watch.

Recapping this CiRCULA: it's a great representation of that idea, because on paper this is an unbelievable watch — and a great watch at that. I think more people should start to look at it and consider it, because I don't think it's from a brand many people know about. But it also serves as a great reminder that it's not just about specs on a sheet. That is not why you ultimately buy a watch; there should be an element of personal expression, and that should never be a casualty in the pursuit of the best value for money. If watch collecting all boiled down to specs on a sheet, that would not be as fun, and I would not want to be a part of that world of collecting.

So that's my take on the CiRCULA ProTrail. On paper, one of the most capable watches in its class at \$1,000 — maybe the most capable. You heard all those lists of specs; it's crazy what they're able to pack into this watch, and it gives pretty much everything else a run for its money, at least in that regard. But again, there's more to watches than just that.

Outro

If you enjoyed this video, please give it a thumbs up, subscribe, and hit the bell button — I really do appreciate that. Also, if you own this watch, leave some comments down below. I've talked about this watch before on the channel, but this is probably the biggest spotlight I've shone on it; in the past it was more listicle content. So this is the first full review I've ever done of this piece, and I'm impressed with what they're doing here.

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