

Best versus Quality

The clocks in this article are amazingly similar overall but startlingly different in the details. One is from a shop where every part was hand-finished; the other is from a factory. Because I am a collector and a dealer, I am often asked: Which is better, a Viennese or a German factory "Vienna" Regulator? It is a very simple question, but, in the historical context of the time they were made, there really is no simple answer. It is like comparing an Aston Martin with a Ford Taurus:

- Which car/clock will require higher skill levels to maintain it? Clearly, the Aston Martin and the Viennese clock.
- Which will run longer, given proper maintenance? The Viennese clock.
- Which will have less wear to the pivots and components? The Viennese clock.
- Which case is more attractive? In truth, the Becker is a very attractive piece and many think it is more attractive.
- Which case is likely to maintain structural integrity? The Austrian, with its dovetails and inset panels that can move without cracking.
- Which cost less originally? – Likely the Becker.
- Which is more valuable today? It is interesting that both are probably worth about the same amount of money.

For the question of quality, even this point is debatable:

- Is it better to have very fine pivots, which require less drive weight, which means less wear, but which require a higher level of skill to maintain, or is it better to accept larger pivots, more drive weight, more wear and to know there are more repairmen who can effectively service your mechanism?
- Are highly polished and very fine components that are easier to break better than more robust ones?
- Are fixed pallets and pivot holes, which make repairing worn pallets more difficult, better than having adjustable pallets and pivots that make it very easy to repair worn pallets?

Today, as in the day these clocks were new, the definitions of "best" and "quality" depend completely on the buyers. When we compare the millions of clocks with the name Becker on them with the hundreds or perhaps even thousands of Salfers, it is clear that the marketplace in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century voted for the Beckers.

tails nor door locks, and lacks the fine carving found on the Salfer, but it is very attractive and has a novel feature in the glazed trunk door.

Here we have two clocks; both are very rare and both are very special. If asked, most Vienna Regulator collectors would say the Salfer is a better clock, hands down. But again, from a collector's standpoint, both are probably about equal in value, given the extreme rarity of a long-duration Becker and the strong following that Becker has engendered, even today.

I included pictures in this article that most readily showed the differences between these two fine clocks. For those who want to see these pictures in much greater detail, the rest of the pictures of these mechanisms and the clocks, as well as the two tables mentioned above, please refer to these photo galleries on the Web:

Comparison pictures: <http://sn-clocks.smugmug.com/Technical-Article/Comparison-Vienna-and-Germany>

The Becker clock: <http://snlocks.smugmug.com/Fantastic-Clock-Mechanisms/VR-639-2-Month-Duration>

The Salfer clock: <http://snlocks.smugmug.com/Fantastic-Clock-Mechanisms/VR-641-2-month-3-Weight>

Notes

1. Victor Kochaver, *Beautiful Vienna Regulators of the 19th Century* (Minneapolis, MN: Victor Kochaver, 1999).

2. Frederick Kaltenbock, *Viennese Timepieces* (Publisher: Nicholas Gunter, 1993).

3. Thomas Walsh, *The New Geneva*, <http://www.hooklessvillage.com/heritage1.htm>.

4. Douglas K. Stevenson, "Traditions and Industry: German Factory-Made Viennas," *NAWCC Bulletin*, No. 332 (June 2001): 325-336.

5. Karl Kochman, *Clock & Watch Trademark Index of European Origin* (West Sacramento, CA: Clockworks Press International, Inc., 2001).

6. F.H. Van Weijdom Claterbos, *Viennese Clockmakers and What They Left Us* (Interbook International, 1979).

7. Tran Duy Ly, *Gustav Becker Clocks: A Guide to Identification and Prices* (Arlington, VA: Arlington Book Co., 1997).

8. Philip Rasch, "The Clocks of Cen-

tral Europe—Part Two," *NAWCC Bulletin*, No. 367 (April 2007): 145-162.

9. E. J. Tyler, "From Hand to Mass Production in Germany," *NAWCC Bulletin*, No. 282 (February 1993): 4-16.

10. Philip Rasch, "The Evolution of the Vienna Regulator," *NAWCC Bulletin*, No. 320 (June 1999): 293-304.

11. Douglas K. Stevenson, "Remember Remember—The Gebrüder Resch Trademark & The Wedding Tale," *NAWCC Bulletin*, No. 381 (August 2009): 449-454.

12. Rick Ortenburger, *Vienna Regulators and Factory Clocks* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer, 1990).

13. Douglas K. Stevenson, "German Patent Letter Clues," *NAWCC Bulletin*, No. 328 (October 2000): 587-603.

14. Rick Ortenburger, *The Vienna and German Regulator* (Pendel Uhr Publications, 1979).

15. K. Kochmann, *Clockmaking in Europe: The Gustav Becker Story* (Antique Clock Publishing, 1976).

16. Vienna Regulators of Lenzkirch and Lorenz Bob (Bristol, CT: American Clock & Watch Museum, 1981), reprint by Dana Blackwell.

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About the Author

Steve has been collecting Vienna Regulators since he was lucky enough to buy his first one over 20 years ago. It was a *dachluhren* in terrible condition and in many, many pieces. Fortunately, he had collected anniversary clocks before becoming enamored with Viennas, so he had already learned a bit about the need for good pivot and pallet work. A retired railroad watch inspector helped him develop his appreciation for Viennese regulator mechanisms and taught him the skills needed to restore the finer, long-duration pieces. While this article is focused on pointing out the good points in these wonderful and rare mechanisms, Steve's love is the fantastic mechanism work done by the Viennese.

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