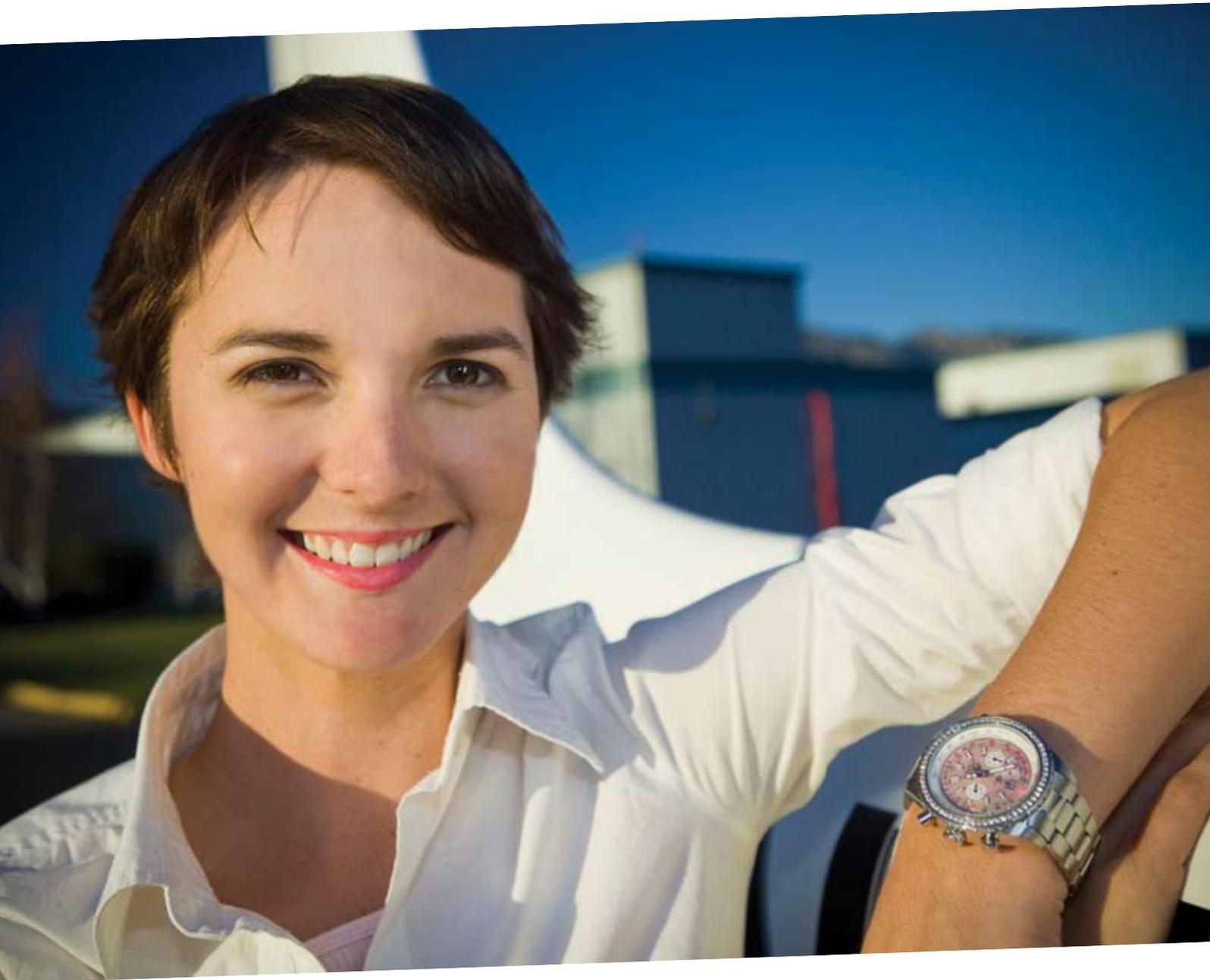


Pilot Project

Female aviator designs a watch





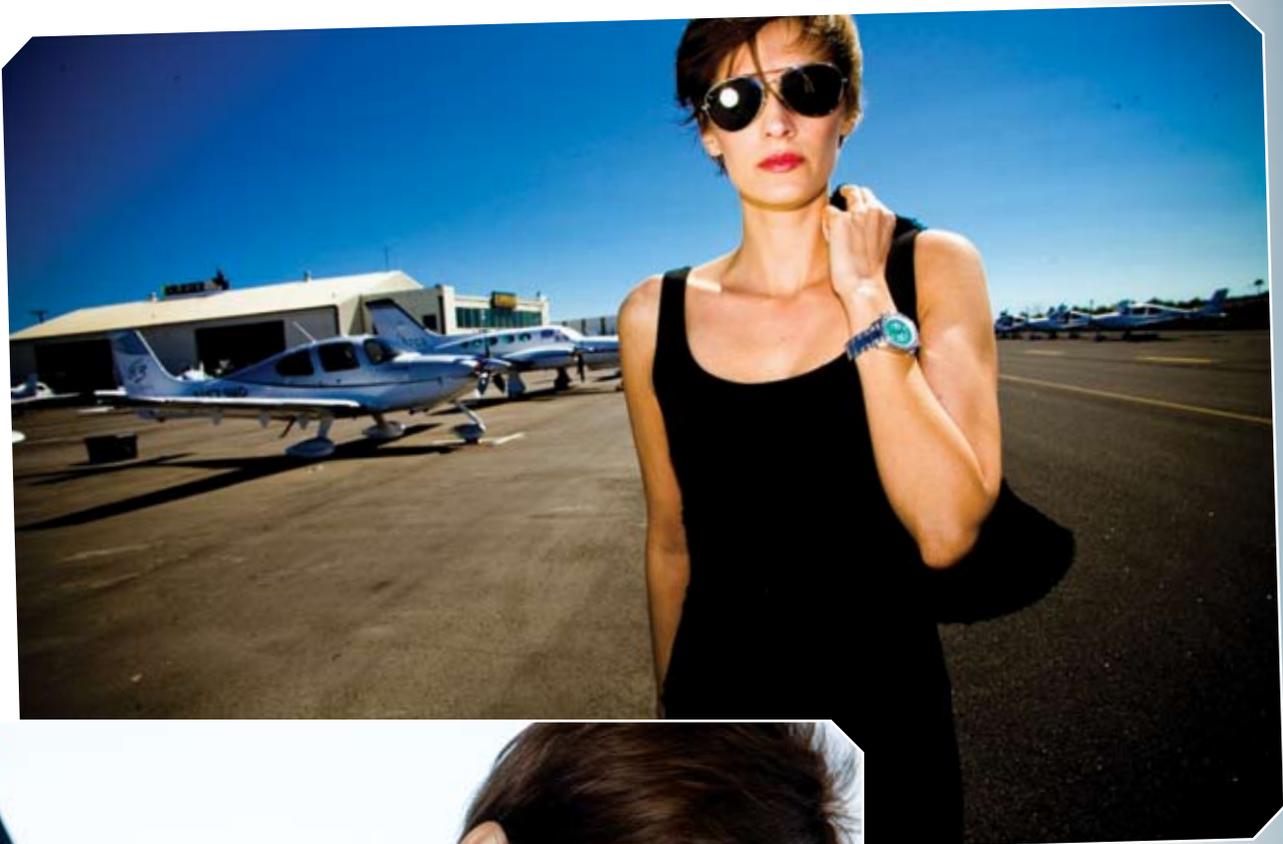
BY NANCY OLSON

When 26-year-old demo pilot Chelsea Welch couldn't find an appropriate aviation watch for herself, she decided to create her own. "I saw my flight instructors with all these great watches, but there weren't any for women," she says. While many such watches are promoted as unisex timepieces, "They are just too big and are really made for men," says Welch, who grew up in San Diego and did her flight training

in Santa Monica. "I'm really not a 'girly girl,' but I didn't want a masculine-style watch."

Though at first Welch thought she might do a custom piece just for herself, she discovered that many of her female pilot friends had similar issues with the current selection of timepieces out there. So she got a "bunch of women" together—about 15, to be exact—and they brainstormed about what would constitute the perfect watch. After the first round of in-

put, Welch, whose friends call her "Juice," reached out to more women through mailing lists to further refine her potential designs. She learned that females want a technically great watch with all the bells and whistles, such as E6B functions and chronograph functions and Zulu (GMT) time conversion, as well as feminine style, such as a mother-of-pearl dial in a variety of colors, and a little sparkle. "They wanted pink," says Welch, adding that women



comprise about six percent of the total number of pilots in the U.S. And that's how the Santa Monica-based Abingdon Watches was founded: on November 3, 2007—Welch's twenty-fourth birthday.

There are currently two styles in the Abingdon collection: the Jackie and the Amelia. The Jackie has a stainless steel case accented with 64 cubic zircons on the bezel and a matte and polished stainless steel bracelet. The mother-of-pearl dial is available



in pink, green and white, with subdials at 3 o'clock and 9; the hands are luminescent, as are the applied indexes. The watch is quartz driven with chronograph and E6B functions, as well as Zulu time conversion. The date window is between 4 o'clock and 5, and the pushers are at 2 o'clock and 4. The Jackie is water resistant to 50 meters, and it is priced at \$400. A custom-order diamond version is available.

The Amelia has a stainless steel

case and a leather strap in black or white. The dial is available in black or white and has a date window at 3 o'clock and luminescent hands and applied indexes. Priced at \$250, this quartz-driven model has E6B functions and Zulu time conversion. Welch says that while her watches are a hit among pilots, they're also catching on among more earthbound travelers who particularly enjoy the E6B for currency conversion.

Abingdon—which, incidental-

ly, is Welch's middle name—will be introducing new products for the estimated 41,000-plus female aviators in the U.S. These days, the Jackie and the Amelia are distributed primarily on the Internet, with some distribution via the aviation industry. And this fall, another line, Elise, will be introduced. "The names don't have affiliation with any specific people," says Welch. Rather, it's with the gender whose time has obviously come. ☺