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STYLE & FASHION

High Flying Watches by Abingdon Welch

All pilots are required to have special watches. Yet, being in a male-dominated field, female pilots have always had to use watches designed for men. Luckily, **Chelsea "Abingdon" Welch** is a pilot and designer who integrates fashion with sensibility for women on the go.



Abingdon's inspiration for being a pilot was almost accidental. "I used to attend the career lunches at my high school for the free food," she laughs. "At one of those lunches, two pilots talked about traveling the world and getting paid for it." Abingdon had always been interested in exploring the

world and its cultures. Born in England, she herself is half British and half Mexican. As a teenager, she realized that flying was right path for her. Fascinated by the endless possibilities, she set about realizing her dream. "When you're young, you want to be an astronaut one day and a ballerina the next," she smiles. "I had the support of my family emotionally, but not financially-- so I saved up all of my money from high school, worked summers in college, and the second I graduated, went to Santa Monica Airport to get my license."



Abingdon primarily works as a ferry pilot. Essentially, this means that she retrieves planes for clients who cannot fly a plane themselves. Someone in the market for a plane will have to do research on what kind he would like, and where it is available. Often, the right plane for the right price is nowhere nearby. Abingdon is then hired to fly to the location - be it Australia, France, or another state - to pick up the plane, and to fly the plane back to its new owners. Given that she is located on the West Coast, she is frequently assigned to pick up planes from South America, Australia, and Asia.

As far as the types of planes she gets to ferry, they can be anything from small jets, to very small airplanes, to everything in between.

While Abingdon makes sure to fly two or three times per week, her present career is also extremely focused on designing. This second passion was initially sparked during her training. She had a work-study job at Santa Monica Airport to fulfill her scholarship requirement. While there, Abingdon noticed that the instructors always had incredible aviation watches. When she wanted one of her very own, her fellow female pilots told her she was in for disappointment. Pilot watches were too large for many ladies' wrists. Color options were limited. Plus, they were all designed with a masculine edge. Yet, Abingdon decided that if there were not any watches for women who flew, she would create them herself. Thus, Abingdon Watches was born.



"The watches are absolutely a fashion statement," Abingdon beams. "The 'Jackie' is currently our most popular model." All the watches are high end, and made with entirely real materials, including gold and crystal. The company creates the only aviation watches in the world designed specifically for women, by women. Typically, an Abingdon Company watch is designed to then be worn by a test pilot customer. After wearing the watch for two weeks, she is to report back with feedback: what compliments the watch received, what could be improved, and so forth. The final touches on the watch are made from there. This method of crafting the perfect watch is more accurate, and enjoyable, than trying to get a design team to follow concepts and create a product.

Many of the watches are designed for female pilots. Some are stopwatches, others have specific flying functions, and others still can do conversions, such as the metric system to standard. Yet, several of the watches are also geared towards women who travel, made evident by the fact that some watches show multiple time zones on the clock-face. The Abingdon Company even aims to create future watches that will have a currency converter function.

Abingdon has high hopes for the future. The Abingdon Company plans to branch out: not only with more watches with additional products. Sunglasses, accessories, and sensible-luggage are a few of the items on that list. For this very reason, the company decided to change its name from Abingdon Watches to The Abingdon Company Just as with the watches, Abingdon is making this move to cater to women who deserve more choices. "There are women in the boating, car, and equestrian industries," she concludes. "They all have to wear products that are geared towards men." Luckily, The Abingdon Company is going to be giving them new options.

- Donna Letterese

For more information on The Abingdon Company, visit: www.TheAbingdonCo.com

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