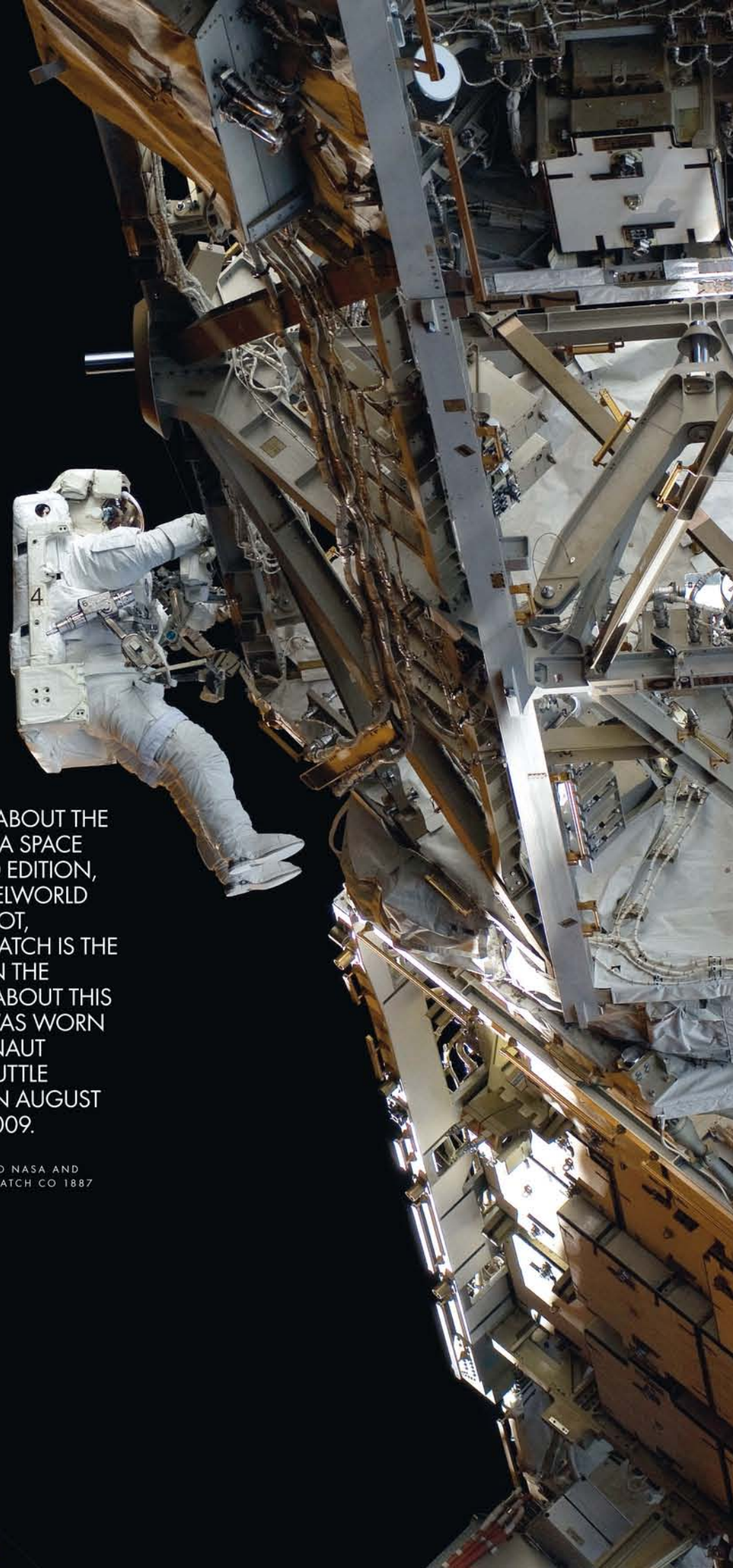


WATCH THIS SPACE

HAVE YOU HEARD ABOUT THE BRAND NEW HALDA SPACE DISCOVERY LIMITED EDITION, PRESENTED AT BASELWORLD 2010? PROBABLY NOT, BECAUSE PLAZA WATCH IS THE FIRST MAGAZINE IN THE WORLD TO WRITE ABOUT THIS WATCH, WHICH WAS WORN BY AN ESA ASTRONAUT DURING SPACE SHUTTLE MISSION STS 128 IN AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER 2009.

WORDS ANDERS MODIG PHOTO NASA AND JOHAN HORNESTAM/HALDA WATCH CO 1887



Total silence and weightlessness, the Earth hovering like a giant bluish ball approximately 400 kilometres below. Or above? Your sense of direction tends to diminish when you're in zero gravity. But at the moment there is not a lot of time to enjoy the breath-taking view. Right now the maintenance work on the International Space Station takes all of your attention.

FUNCTIONALLY YOURS

Those were the conditions when ESA Astronaut Christer Fuglesang tested the Space Discovery, a brand new watch from the resurrected Halda Watch Co 1887.

The experienced astronaut had designed the functions together with the No Picnic design agency and CEO Mikael Sandström, and he started testing them soon after the launch at 11.59 pm EDT on 28 August 2009.

– I compared the G-meter of the watch with that of the spacecraft. It worked. However, the most important functions in space are countdown, normal time, timing and Earth time (quick and easy access to time all UN countries in the world).

– The function I perhaps used the most was event time. You press one button at any time, and the current time is stored in a memory. This was great for my logging, as one of my missions was to do research on a light phenomenon in space. Every 5 to 10 minutes so-called subatomic particles – protons or alpha particles which are strongly ionised – come through the walls. This can be

experienced as a flash, says Fuglesang about a phenomenon that must be dealt with by future space hotel chains.

FOR REAL

The space instrument is a module which can be released from a docking station attached to your wrist with a stainless steel bracelet or a flight strap. The latter resembles a Nato strap, but with stronger velcro and a soft lining. To the docking station you can also attach a mechanical module – after all, you are not in space every day. Inside this Earth-oriented module you will find a New Old Stock movement from the early 1970's, an automatic, extremely accurate 36 600 vph high frequency engine. These reliable workhorse movements from A. Schild have been modified and decorated by no less than Svend Andersen.

– We hope this will trigger the connoisseurs, says Sandström, about the 8 000 euro watch, which will be made in 128 pieces to honour the number of the mission.

It is not only the functions that are for real – so are the materials. The 45-millimetre case is made from Tecamax, which is harder than steel and lighter than titanium, and the bezel is made from coromant sintered carbide, making it extremely heat, corrosion and wear resistant.

After landing on Sep 11(!) at 08.53 pm EDT Fuglesang only requested minor adjustments before the prototype went into production.

After fixing these things, No Picnic and

Mikael Sandström decided to equip the modules with sapphire glass, rather than the shatterproof Hesalite crystal which is a necessity in space.

– Hesalite is scratch sensitive, and on earth it is just irritating if you scratch your watch. I promise – if you are going to space we will modify your watch with Hesalite for free, says Sandström.

This is a promise that he might have to fulfil quite soon:

– At the moment we are negotiating with six ESA astronauts that might wear the Halda Space Discovery on a future space mission.

Horological space

Somebody high up at NASA must have a "for real" watch addiction. How else can you explain the fact that watches are almost exempt from the strict luggage restrictions? (Which are even tougher than those of budget airlines since it costs about 10 000 dollars to send a kilo into orbit.)

I would have loved to be part of the boardroom meeting when somebody slammed their fist onto the oak table, exclaiming "The crew members must be allowed to wear up to four watches of their choice!" And so it is to this day.

Editor's choice of four watches to bring on a space trip: Halda Space Discovery, My beloved Omega vintage 1940 pocket watch, TAG Heuer Silverstone 1974, MCT Sequential One.