



Peter Stas and his wife, Aletta Stas-Bax, of Frédérique Constant navigating Venice



Venice is a superlative among cities. Other cities may be favorably compared to it (as an example, the Chinese city of Suzhou is sometimes called the “Venice of the East”), but no other city matches the unique combination of geography, historical importance and captivating beauty that is found in Venice. The fact that it is more than sixteen centuries old and made up of more than 100 small islands, linked together by beautiful bridges—about 400 in total—makes Venice mysterious, intriguing and romantic. No wonder so many consider Venice one of their favorite cities—including Swiss watch brand Frédérique Constant, which chose the Italian city as the site of the introduction of a beautiful new watch, dedicated to the city and to the classic wooden motorboats known as Runabouts. The city of canals was a wonderful place for guests of the brand—customers, journalists and VIPs—to explore and discover the newest Runabout timepieces.

VENETIAN TREASURE HUNT

FRÉDÉRIQUE CONSTANT TAKES OVER THE CITY OF BRIDGES
BY KEITH W. STRANDBERG

WATER WAYS
Venice is filled with light boats like the Runabouts, wooden water taxis that ply the Grand Canal as well as the smaller waterways that snake through this amazing city. And the head of Frédérique Constant is an unabashed fan. “I have a Busch mahogany boat with a marine version of a Chrysler engine that I bought secondhand,” explains Peter Stas, founder and managing director of Frédérique Constant. “And I am a member of the Nautique club in Switzerland. When the club was organizing a meet for Runabouts, they asked me if Frédérique Constant would be interested in sponsoring it, since we were already involved in vintage car rallies.”

“The Runabout is a classic boat,” Stas continues. “So it fits with the positioning of Frédérique Constant, and it has a beautiful design, which is another pillar of the brand. We wanted to develop a new collection around these gentlemen’s sporting boats, so we registered the trademark for watches, and we created the first limited edition Runabout watch.”

That was in 2009. Since then, Stas has followed up with a new limited edition every year and event sponsorships tied to the new watch. “We have sponsored the Nautique club’s Hélice Classique in Geneva twice, the Lake Tahoe Concours d’Elegance once.” This year, following the Nautique society’s Hélice Classique, Frédérique Constant decided to organize a Runabout-centered event of its own. Says Stas, “In Europe, most of the Runabouts are in Italy, so we chose Venice.”



The Runabout's presentation box with model boat

Photo at left by the author; all others courtesy of Frédérique Constant



TREASURE SEEKING

And what an event it was. Frédérique Constant's Runabout Challenge introduced two new limited Venice Edition Runabout watches with a scavenger hunt that sent guests—organized into teams—racing around the city of canals in a fleet of Runabout boats, in search of a lesser-known side of Venice. The teams tracked down historic sites, answered questions about famous Venetians, and uncovered city lore by finding specific churches, bridges and even fish markets, reading inscriptions and quizzing locals. Members of the winning team were presented with men's and ladies' versions of the Venice Edition Runabout watch. The fact that the remaining teams cried foul—albeit good-naturedly—not to have won the watches is a clue as to how much everyone liked the new timepieces: a chronograph and an automatic three-hand/date model. Frédérique Constant's event concluded that evening in grand style. Everyone was ferried to a lovely 16th-century Venetian palazzo for a black-tie dinner and prize presentation. Afterward, the revelers partied the night away in true Venetian fashion.

The overall success of Frédérique Constant's elaborate product introduction is perhaps only matched by the success of the popular Runabout Collection watches, themselves. Combining elegance with casual, sporting style, these limited editions have seemingly unlimited appeal. If only my team had come in first!

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RUNABOUT VENICE EDITION

Both of the Frédérique Constant Venice Edition Runabout watches—a chronograph and a three-hand automatic with date—feature a 43-mm stainless steel case and a silvered dial with applied, rose gold-plated Arabic indices and fine guilloché decoration at the center. The decorated automatic movement can be admired through the sapphire caseback. And a light brown strap with off-white stitching accentuates the warm color of the markers. The sophisticated combination of design elements was developed with defining input from the maker's Italian customers. Like the Runabout yachts that inspired them, the watches exude an uncluttered elegance. As with previous Runabout editions, each of the new Runabout timepieces comes in a handmade wooden case with a miniature reproduction of a classic Runabout boat presented alongside the watch. The two new Runabout models are being produced in limited editions of 1,888 pieces each.

< Venice Edition Runabout chronograph



Venice engraving on the partially open caseback