

MOON EXPLORATION

Zenith's new Captain Grande Date Moonphase offers two complications in its manufacture movement. We go past the elegant exterior to see how well it works.

BY ALEXANDER KRUPP

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ince 2009, when Zenith got a new CEO, Jean-Frédéric Dufour, and with him a new emphasis on value, Zenith's primary mission has been to produce *manufacture*-made watches for those who don't necessarily have a year's salary to spend on one. A good example is the new Captain Grande Date Moonphase, introduced at this year's Baselworld. The stainless-steel version costs \$5,800, and the rose-gold version can be had for only \$6,800 more.

What exactly can a watch lover expect for these prices? First of all, versatility. This classically designed timepiece, with a moon-phase dial and alligator strap, is as appropriate for an evening out as it is for an ordinary workday (provided work is in an office rather than at a construction site or restaurant kitchen).

The watch also boasts the two complications referred to in its name. The outsize ("Grande") date is a useful display for everyone. Thanks to separate disks for the "ones" and the "tens" column, it can show the 31 numerical combinations in a larger format than could be



Photo: Nik Schölzel

Zenith Captain Grande Date Moonphase

crowded onto a single date disk. Rather than relying on overlapping disks, as do many other big-date displays, it uses coplanar, concentric disks, with the inner one fitting into the outer one's hollow center. Zenith chose not to deploy its own invention, the three-disk date display, in this slim wristwatch. Including it would have enabled the digits to be even larger, but would have required a thicker, arguably less elegant case.

The quick-reset mechanism for the date display is designed to be as user-friendly as possible: when you pull the crown out to its first position and then turn it either clockwise or counterclockwise, the date will jump one day forward. The advantage here becomes apparent if you need to advance the date many days ahead: simply turn the crown back and forth; there's no need to repeatedly release it and grasp it again. On its own, the date takes about 20 minutes to change. On our test watch, the switching process began at three minutes before midnight and ended at 17 minutes after. This is significantly quicker than most conventional ETA movements, some of which require 90 minutes to move from one date to the next.

THIS WATCH'S OTHER highlight complication, its moon-phase display, is not as obviously useful as the big date indicator, but this circular subdial, with its blue disk to represent the firmament, adds a stylish, classical element to the dial, and one reminiscent of many historical timepieces.

The lunar display on the new Captain Grande has a traditional cover plate with two lobes. Rays of guilloché decoration emanate from its center, and the motif is repeated on the seconds subdial. Beneath

*THE WATCH USES A
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MOON-PHASE
DISPLAY, BUT HAS
AN OUTSIZE DATE
WITH CONCENTRIC
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EASY TO RESET.*

SPECS**ZENITH CAPTAIN GRANDE DATE
MOONPHASE**

Manufacturer: Zenith, Rue des Billodes 34-36, CH-2400 Le Locle, Switzerland

Reference number:
03.2140.691/02.C498

Functions: Hours, minutes, small seconds, outsize date, moon-phase display, stop-seconds function

Movement: Manufacture Caliber Elite 691, automatic; 28,800 vph; 27 jewels; adjusted via index with setscrew; Kif shock absorption; power reserve of at least 50 hours; diameter = 25.5 mm, height = 5.7 mm

Case: Stainless steel, slightly curved sapphire crystal with nonreflective coating on both surfaces, caseback with sapphire window held in place by four screws, water-resistant to 50 meters

Strap and clasp: Hand-sewn cut alligator skin with stainless-steel, pronged buckle

Rate results:

(Deviations in seconds per 24 hours)

Dial up:	+2
Dial down:	+6
Crown up:	+1
Crown down:	+3
Crown left:	+4
Crown right:	+2
Greatest deviation of rate:	5
Average deviation:	+3
Mean amplitude:	
Flat positions	296°
Hanging positions	261°

Dimensions: Diameter = 40 mm, height = 11 mm; weight = 73 g

Variations: Rose gold (\$12,600)

Price: \$5,800



Pros

- + Elegant design
- + Very comfortable on the wrist
- + Clever mechanism for changing the date

Cons

- Sometimes hard to read
- Mediocre clasp

the lobed cover rotates a blue disk that bears, in the traditional manner, two moons and several stars. As the lower disk turns, the waxing moon gradually appears from beneath one lobe of the cover plate, continues to grow until it is completely visible at full moon, and then slowly disappears as it slides under the second lobe. After each full cycle, the moon is no longer visible, because it's now new moon on the dial and in the sky.

Zenith uses a conventional moon-phase display here. Unlike the most precise ones, which deviate from astronomical reality by one full day only after 122.5 years, this moon-phase mechanism will need to be reset forward after just 2.7 years. However, this moderate degree of precision should be accurate enough for most. (After all, it is rather unlikely that any watch will be kept running uninterrupted for more than 12 decades, and if

any owner of such a watch allows it to run down between now and 2133, he would have to adjust the moon-phase anyway.) Resetting the indicator is easy with the aid of a ballpoint pen or other pointed object, the tip of which can be used to press the corrector button on the left flank of the case.

ASIDE FROM ITS TWO complications, how high is the quality of the watch overall? We found no flaws on the polished silver dial, which boasts a variety of decorative guilloché patterns. The indices perfectly harmonize with the hands. And the dial is an excellent match for the tripartite, 40-mm-diameter, stainless-steel case, which is elegantly shaped and a mere 11 mm tall. The case seems even slimmer thanks to its beveled back. A slightly curved crystal rises above the



The Elite 691 (exploded view, above left) is a high-performance movement with an automatic winding mechanism and two additional functions.

Zenith Captain Grande Date Moonphase

bezel and is visible from the side. The lugs are quite appealing because of their attractive, lateral curvature and satin-finished upper surfaces. The case is polished everywhere else, so it is, unfortunately, easily smudged by fingerprints.

If you peek through the sapphire case-back you'll see *manufacture* Caliber 691 from the famous Elite series. This is a well-working, self-winding movement with a ball-borne, bidirectionally winding rotor. The watch has a power reserve of at least 50 hours. The balance oscillates at a frequency of four hertz (28,800 vph), a pace that has become the modern standard. One detail that deserves criticism from a technical point of view is the balance, which is not free-sprung: instead, the rate is regulated by finely adjusting the active length of the hairspring. Furthermore, the driving wheel, which conveys energy from the rotor, is borne on only one end of its axis, meaning its upper side is not anchored. Purely theoretically, this solution is less than perfect, although it's also used in Zenith's legendary El Primero chronograph caliber, which has proven its longevity and reliability. Unlike El Primero, the Elite has a stop-seconds function, which makes it easier to set the time precisely.

Setting the time to the nearest second is worth the effort, because this watch — or at least the one we tested — runs very precisely. Our electronic timing machine calculated a slight daily gain of three seconds and a deviation of five seconds among the various positions. No deviation whatsoever was evident when the watch was worn.

All of the movement's visible components, as well as many parts that are ordinarily hidden, are adorned with decorative patterns, but the sloping edges on some bridges are poor substitutes for manually beveled and polished edges. The rotor bears a black-lacquered Zenith star logo in the center of its large aperture.

The logo also appears on the dial and on the clasp, though on the latter a letter "Z" milled into the star's center detracts from its appearance. The clasp is not as well made as the rest of the watch. Although it is milled from a solid block of



The high-quality alligator-skin strap ends in a rather rudimentary steel clasp.

Photo: Nik Schölz

*THE CAPTAIN GRANDE DATE
MOONPHASE IS QUITE COMFORT-
ABLE THANKS TO ITS SUPPLE STRAP
AND LIGHTWEIGHT CASE.*

steel, it doesn't have much individualized styling and its prong is made from a bent piece of sheet metal. The alligator-leather strap, by contrast, makes a very good impression: it is sewn by hand, its cut edges are perfectly lacquered, and its several layers of leather are fully glued. Plus, its underside is covered with a layer of perspiration-resistant rubber.

THE WATCH'S FINE craftsmanship and user-friendly functions leave very little to criticize, and its wearing comfort is also very good. This 73-gram watch lies flat and snug on the wrist, although the somewhat sharp lugs might occasionally scratch your wrist when you're putting the watch on.

The only real problem with the watch is that it is not always easy to read. The contrast between the hands and the dial isn't especially strong, and the two larger hands are difficult to tell apart at the full hours, when each hand is perfectly lined up with an index so that the hand and in-

dex visually combine to form one long bar. At these moments, the baton formed by the hour hand and its index is almost indistinguishable from the one created by the minute hand and its index. However, this doesn't much dim the glow of this moon-phase watch. ○

The Captain Grande Date Moonphase is also available with a rose-gold case.



SCORES

ZENITH CAPTAIN GRANDE DATE MOONPHASE

Strap and clasp (max. 10 points): The clasp isn't on a par with the very beautiful alligator strap. **8**

Operation (5): The moon's phase must be adjusted via a corrector button; otherwise, very simple thanks to the stop-seconds function and clever quick-adjustment mechanism for the date display. **4**

Case (10): The case is well crafted and looks very slim on the wrist. However, the many polished surfaces mean frequent fingerprint smudges. **8**

Design (15): Elegance in its purest form: all the elements are in harmony with one another. **14**

Legibility (5): The hands are sometimes difficult to see and to distinguish from one another. **3**

Wearing comfort (10): The case, strap and clasp all fit comfortably on the wrist, but the somewhat sharp lugs are noticeable when putting on the watch. **9**

Movement (20): The neatly decorated *manufacture* caliber has a bidirectionally winding rotor, an outsize date display with concentric disks and a moon-phase display. **16**

Rate results (10): The average gain is very small (just three seconds), but points were deducted because the greatest deviation of rate among the various positions was a full five seconds. **8**

Overall value (15): With affordable *manufacture* watches like this one, Zenith continues to make products with a good cost-benefit ratio. **12**

TOTAL: 82 POINTS