

## **“VENTURA”**

**Release Dates:**    *January 3, 1957 (14K Yellow Gold)*  
                              *October 17, 1958 (14K White Gold)*  
                              *October 6, 1958 (18K Yellow Gold)*  
                              *June 4, 1959 (18K Rose Gold)*

**Original Price:** \$200 (14K Gold)

**Optional Diamond Dial version:** \$300 (14K Gold)

**Case:** 14K Yellow or White Gold,  
          18K Yellow or Rose Gold (export only)

**Movement:** 500, 500A, 505

**Estimated Production:** 11,750



The first (and to many collectors the finest) Hamilton Electric, the “Ventura” literally started a design revolution at Hamilton, which soon spread throughout the watch industry.

Announced with enormous fanfare on January 3, 1957, the “Ventura” was paired with the conservative “Van Horn” as the first battery powered watches ever sold. Today, as in 1957, the remarkable asymmetrical design symbolizes the unique character of Hamilton Electric watches.

The shape reflects the ‘boomerang’ motif which was so common in coffee tables, ashtrays, and jukeboxes of the era. The design was meant to dramatically underscore the new and innovative technology inside the case. Even the crown made a statement: it was obviously too small to be used for winding.

The “Ventura” was first offered in a 14K yellow gold case with either a black or silver dial, and a matching strap with a stripe of 24K gold applique to accent the striking appearance of the watch. This strap was discontinued within four months of release, replaced with a conventional thick padded calfskin strap with stitched sides. Few original straps have survived.

To package the new “Ventura” and “Van Horn” models the factory updated their mechanical watch box by adding a yellow ribbon marked “Hamilton Electric Watch” inside the plastic lid, and gluing a blue paper label on the outer cardboard box. A custom box for the Hamilton Electric was introduced shortly thereafter.



A 14K white gold version of the “Ventura” was introduced the following year, but white gold was seen as ‘old-fashioned’ in the 1960s and was not a popular color for jewelry. As a result, few were sold and today it is much rarer than the yellow-gold “Ventura.”

The “Ventura” was produced until 1963, consequently it can be found with either the Model 500, 500A or 505 movements. Although some 1960s advertising showed



drawings of dials with the updated Hamilton “H” logo and jagged “electric” script replacing the block letters of the early dials, this was apparently an artist’s conception. No original dials of this design have ever been seen.

Both the white and yellow versions of the “Ventura” were optionally available with a silver or black dial with six large diamond markers, priced at \$300. These are very rare.

Watches which were exported from the U.S. were made of 18K gold because 14K gold did not meet foreign standards of purity for gold jewelry. The 18K yellow gold “Ventura” was sold in the European market, and an 18K rose gold version was made for export to South America. Hamilton’s export sales were never large and consequently 18K “Venturas” are very rare. Typically these export

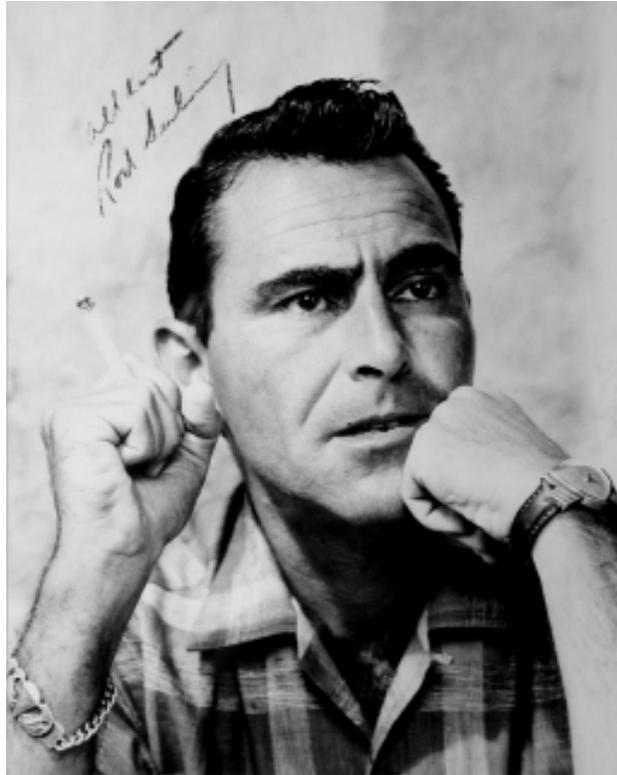
*18K rose gold “Venturas” made for export. These are among the rarest and most desirable of all Hamiltons, and arguably the most beautiful as well.*



watches were fitted with recycled “Model 502” prototype movements, as described in Chapter 9.

The “Ventura” is not a particularly rare watch -- it was one of the most popular solid gold watches Hamilton ever offered and a great many were sold. However it remains a very popular model and for many years collector demand has outstripped supply. It is considered one of the greatest classic watches in the world.

*Author Rod Serling was captivated by the futuristic Hamilton Electric. He can be seen wearing his “Ventura” in the introductions to episodes of “The Twilight Zone.”*



*A new “Ventura” from unsold jeweler stock. This was one of the very earliest “Venturas,” with two-tone strap and the first style of packaging, with a paper label on the outside of the box and a ribbon added to the inside.*



*The original two-tone “Ventura” strap had a stripe of 24K gold appliqué, as indicated by the stampings on the back. It was fitted with a Hamilton-signed 14K solid gold buckle.*

*Reproductions have been made in recent years. Those marketed by the author since the mid-1990s are clearly stamped with “René Rondeau” to ensure that they cannot be passed off as original. However an unknown supplier has produced new straps stamped (illegally) with the Hamilton name and a crude “H” logo. In addition these are stamped “Electric,” while originals were never marked with that word. These Hamilton-signed replicas have sometimes been sold as original to collectors unfamiliar with the real thing.*

*The reproduction straps can be easily recognized by the fact that they are lined with tan kidskin and have two narrow ‘keepers’ rather than the single wide style of the original. Also, they have been made in either 17mm or 18mm metric width, whereas originals were marked 11/16”.*

## “THE ELVIS WATCH”

Elvis Presley has been so intimately linked to the Hamilton “Ventura” over the years that many people, collectors and non-collectors alike, still refer to it as “The Elvis Watch.”

Elvis wore a yellow gold “Ventura” very prominently in the 1961 movie *Blue Hawaii*. In at least one scene it is shown in massive closeup and must surely have impressed many movie



fans at the time. It is unknown whether the watch Elvis wore in that film was his personal “Ventura” or supplied by the studio. There are at least two museums claiming to own the watch from *Blue Hawaii*.

The only surviving “Ventura” with an undeniable link to Elvis is this white gold watch with black dial, sold at an auction conducted by Presley’s estate, Graceland, in 1999. It was auctioned along with the original jeweler’s invoice, dated December 24, 1965. Curiously, the watch has a Model 500A movement, which was obsolete by late 1961. As has been noted, white gold was not very popular at the time and this watch must have sat in the store’s inventory for over four years. No doubt the jeweler was happy to see Elvis come in the door that Christmas Eve! “Venturas” were never sold with metal bands, the one on the watch is from a white gold-filled “Savitar II.” Most likely Elvis preferred a metal band to the usual leather, and the jeweler simply pulled one from another watch to satisfy his famous customer.

At the Graceland auction the watch was bought back by the Hamilton Watch Company. Today it is part of the company’s “museum collection” and has been exhibited around the world.

## *THE MODERN “VENTURA”*



The “Ventura” is such a classic that demand has never abated. Recognizing this enduring interest, the Hamilton Watch Company decided to bring back the “Ventura” in 1988, twenty-five years after it had been discontinued. The new edition is technically a reissue rather than a reproduction since it differs from the original in two significant ways: the movement is a modern Swiss quartz model, and the case is not solid gold. However, overall it was (and still is) faithful to Richard Arbib’s original design and was an instant hit with the public. Two decades later it remains one of the most popular watches in the Hamilton catalog.

The reissued “Ventura” has undergone several incremental changes since it was first released. For the first ten years it was made of plated base-metal, and during its first five or six years the design of the back was modified twice to make it more secure. However the most important transformation came in 1999 when the case was changed to stainless steel, which is far more durable than the previous base-metal watches. At the same time details of the lugs and case edges were sharpened to match the original design more closely. Today’s stainless steel “Venturas” are higher in quality and finer in appearance than the base metal watches of the 1990s.

Hamilton has also used the original design as a springboard to create modern re-interpretations, such as a smaller ladies’-sized version and a men’s “Ventura” with a chronograph movement.

It is fascinating to see a new generation discover the brilliant styling of the “Ventura.” Over fifty years after it was first conceived by Richard Arbib, the “Ventura” is still considered to be cutting-edge by 21st century buyers. The reissue has inspired many people to take an interest in vintage Hamiltons, generating many new collectors in the process.

Hamilton’s support of this model, and the strong public demand, show that this truly was “The Watch of the Future.” Five decades later we are living in the future that our predecessors dreamed about. Technology has advanced immeasurably but the timeless design of the “Ventura” lives on, as popular today as in 1957.