

## Critical Shopper

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## What? Your Watch Only Tells Time?

LIKE the other conductors who worked for the Chesapeake & Ohio in the early part of the last century, my great-grandfather carried a pocket watch whose accuracy had been approved by the railroad. In that pretech era, he set his beloved Hamilton with a lever that popped out of the side of its face. It ran accurately at temperatures from freezing to August and was precise to within 30 seconds a week.

All my great-grandfather had to do to reassure himself that order reigned in the universe was to squint at the sweeping second hand and confirm that the Big Sandy local from Prestonsburg, Ky., would arrive at Beaver Junction at 10:50 a.m., on time.

But he was as fickle as any modern gadget lover; when a jeweler from Ashland, Ky., visited the yard office showing new models, my great-grandfather financed an upgrade through monthly payroll deductions.

A pocket watch may look out of place in these gizmo-happy days, dominated by ever-clunkier digital watches with buzzing alarms, automatic calendars, electro-luminescent backlights and equinox alerts.

But human nature has not changed. So I was not surprised to learn recently that my husband, who for years had professed devotion to a certain bulky Casio G-Shock with a flashing digital readout, a thick red wristband and a water-resistant case, was sneaking around with other watches.

I caught him reading articles at a watch review site called [Watchreport.com](http://Watchreport.com).

Confronted, he pointed to his rubberized wristband.

"It's ripping apart," he said.

Upon inspection, this proved true. But the model I saw on screen was no mere replacement. According to the review, the new \$200 Casio G-Shock GW-400J came with features like a vibrating alarm, a countdown timer, a thermometer and a moon-phase indicator. To synchronize daily, it received radio waves transmitted by atomic clocks.

The only thing that stood between my husband and that watch was that Casio had released the GW-400J for sale only in Asia.

"I bet you could find it for me on the Internet," he said.

Probably. If I could read Japanese. After a Google keyword search for the model number turned up a few Asian online stores, I ran them through Google's translator tool, ascertaining that they appeared to sell the watch. ("It is the New the G which corresponds to various marine sports from surf-



Tony Cenicola/The New York Times



**HOURS OF ENTERTAINMENT** Clockwise from top left: the Suunto X6-HR, the Casio G-Shock GW-400J, the G-Shock GW-400HLJ-9JF and the Inca from Yes.



ing to the yacht," I learned at [G-shock.jp](http://G-shock.jp).) The only problem was I couldn't figure out where to click to buy anything.

Instead I phoned Christian Cantrell, the reviewer who started [Watchreport.com](http://Watchreport.com) a few months ago, to thank him for his detailed descriptions and enticing watch photos.

"Can you take down your site so my husband won't see any more inappropriate images online?" I asked him.

"Sorry, I can't do that for you," Mr. Cantrell said. But as a watch lover, he sympathized with my husband's yearning.

Mr. Cantrell is partial to his digital Tissot

High-T. "You can actually touch the crystal to navigate the watch instead of pushing buttons," he said. (For a list of authorized dealers, see [Tissot.ch](http://Tissot.ch).)

"I've been into watches ever since I was a kid," he said. "I liked to get the geekiest watches I could find, which were usually Casios. I think you have to have a watch you love. There are two genres that your husband might like: high-end Swiss formal watches or geeky watches."

"The geekier the better," I said.

Casio's G-Shock line has historical significance for watch lovers. Introduced more than two decades ago, it emphasized "tough-

ness" and paved the way for other watches that could withstand crushing underwater pressure, falls from extreme heights and high-impact crashes into brick walls.

Still, I hoped to steer my husband toward more readily obtainable digital watches like, say, the Inca from Yes (\$745 at [Yeswatch.com](http://Yeswatch.com)), with an aqua blue backlight and a moon-phase data display. I also suggested the Suunto X6-HR with a heart rate monitor and button locks to preserve settings (\$429 at [REI.com](http://REI.com)).

Although initially intrigued by the high geek factor of those models, my husband had his heart set on the Casio with the vibrating alarm, which a company spokeswoman confirmed would never be released in the United States.

The bad news did not surprise Mr. Cantrell. "All the best Casios and all the best Seikos are available only in Asia because they think Americans are not watch savvy; they're happy with a \$50 Fossil or Timex," he said. "But it's not that Americans wouldn't buy those watches. It's that they don't know they exist."

Mr. Cantrell steered me to two online watch stores in Asia — [Kselya.zoovy.com](http://Kselya.zoovy.com) and [Higuchi-inc.com](http://Higuchi-inc.com) — that he had found reliable. "The problem with evaluating a lot of these sites," he said, "is that they don't really meet the typical American e-commerce standard. They're sort of thrown up there by watch aficionados in Japan."

I met with disappointment at [Kselya.zoovy.com](http://Kselya.zoovy.com), where the home page informed me that the site was temporarily closed to allow the proprietor to "get recover from my tonsillitis."

I had better luck at [Higuchi-inc.com](http://Higuchi-inc.com), where an e-mail inquiry elicited this response: "Dear Michelle-san, Good Morning, Is it mean GW-400HLJ-9JF Hawaiian lifeguard limited ed? If so it is 220USD/inclusive S&H We can be ship it soon (in stock now)."

Although the GW-400HLJ-9JF was a different model and no photo was posted at [Higuchi-inc.com](http://Higuchi-inc.com), at another Asian store I found a description. A vibrating alarm was among the watch's many features.

My husband, who caught me looking at the picture, scrolled through the specifications: stopwatch, temperature measurement function, tide graph feature. When he got to the physical description ("The map of the Hawaiian island is administered to the back hallmark"), he declared, "This is even better than the one I wanted before."

I understood the lure. I bought the watch, knowing he would be able to reassure himself there was order in the universe by glancing at his wrist to ascertain whether the tide was up on Waikiki.