

WELCOME TO STRAP SENSE

Site Dedicated to Watch Strap reviews

HIRSCH JAMES CALF LEATHER PERFORMANCE WATCH STRAP IN GOLD BROWN

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When a company has been around persistently since 1765 they learn to do quite a few things very well. They have become part of the local culture. They have employed generations of people from around the area. They have adapted and survived countless political and social and technical challenges. That kind of longevity does not happen by accident or luck, but rather by a stalwart dedication to quality with an accompanying appreciation of what value means. Hirsch is based out of Austria which is a country steeped in history and beautiful natural surroundings. The watch straps they make are both impressive and innovative. I want to really focus on the last part in this review. The Hirsch James Performance Watch Strap is extremely heavy on innovation while keeping those stalwart traits of Hirsch intact. Quality and value.

Hirsch keeps its definition of this watch strap very 'to the point'. Here are their words below:

MATERIAL

- *Natural, vegetable tanned, supple Italian calfskin with a unique structure*
- *HIRSCH Premium Caoutchouc core*

STRAP DETAILS

- *Sporty, classic design*
- *Accentuated patented seam*
- *Embedded fixed loop*
- *High-quality buckle in HIRSCH Classic Design*

I think I can be a bit more verbose if you would permit me.

DIMENSIONS

Like most of my straps, this particular model of the Hirsch James I am reviewing is 20mm. All dimensions listed are particular to that model. The length of the strap is 120mm at the free end and 80mm at the buckle end. This means on my 6.75" wrist it is on the second to last adjustment hole for that perfect not too loose not too tight fit. At the lugs it is an as advertised 20mm, and tapers down to 18mm at the buckle and free end. That is a good universally acceptable taper for a watch that is both not purely rugged nor purely dressy. It is a good mid point. The strap at the lugs is 'padded' to a thickness of 5mm in the center than slopes down to 2.5mm at the threading. The padding subsides to a flat even 2.5mm thickness at the free end and buckle end.



DESIGN

I waited a long time before writing the review of this particular strap. I have enjoyed it for well over a year and a half now. It has been on dress watches (Seiko SARBS), field watches, (Hamiltons and Seiko 5's), divers (Zodiac Super Sea Wolf) and is currently on a Sinn 104. It is the most unique strap I own. The best way I can describe this strap to a potential buyer is that at its very core, it is an engineered strap. I mean that as a compliment. This is no raw leather, back of the shed, hand cut, hand stitched strap (although to be fair, Hirsch makes those as well). I can only speculate as to the origins of this strap within the company, but to me it takes all the shortcomings leather can have like easily being scratched, delamination, stiffness, and susceptibility to water and engineered those issues away through clever material selection and manufacturing. The genius of this strap though, is that it still comes off warm and natural while being a very intelligent and modern in its construction.



An example of ingenuity meeting craftsmanship is on display in the construction of this strap. It is made up of two distinct and very different parts. The top is made of a smooth vegetable tanned calf leather dyed in a nice medium brown in this example. The finish on this leather is extremely smooth and amazingly flexible, yet at the same time, it is almost impervious to fingernail scratches and exhibits zero color distortion when bent sharply. The combination of this

durability and flexibility is like no other strap I have in my collection. The strap has nice light brown or golden stitching around its edges which add just that bit of extra sophistication to the strap. Unlike in other straps, I think this stitching in this strap is purely aesthetic and helps an engineered strap appear to be more natural and crafted. It is a tie in to old world construction in this very modern made strap.

The underside of the Hirsch James Performance strap is where things get really interesting. Instead of this being another piece of leather or nylon stitched on, the portion of the strap that touches your skin is made up of caoutchouc natural rubber. I can see you scratching your head. Time for some background:

Caoutchouc rubber is just another word for natural rubber. It was known to the Native Americans in the 15th century and used for making shoes, plates, balls, and anything they needed to be unbreakable. It was made from the using the sap from trees in South American called Hevea Brasiliensis (yes, I had to google that). It is naturally white and gets different colors due to modifiers to achieve different traits. Fun fact, Christopher Columbus was the first European to witness Caoutchouc in the form of a white rubber ball being used in Haiti for play.



So what Hirsch has done is take this material and created a mold which contains the unique vented underside that touches your skin as well as a channel for the calf leather to sit. Let me add more clarity to that. The calf leather sits IN the rubber liner, not ON it. So, on three sides of the strap you have the smooth, flexible, well ventilated, and extremely waterproof rubber liner. This liner protects the leather from sweat and moisture and fraying while giving it a shape and flexibility that only a rubber liner can produce. The underside is free from any stitching from the top, as the leather is bonded to the rubber. The result of this impermeable membrane is extreme comfort and durability. The slots in the rubber allow the skin to breathe and keep the strap extremely flexible. From tip to tip and top to bottom, the Hirsch James Performance strap is engineered to have the style of a leather crafted dress strap with the durability of a rubber diver strap. A combo that seems impossible to pull off until you see and wear it.





KEEPER AND BUCKLE

This strap uses the dual keeper design most other watch straps use. One keeper is bonded into the rubber liner, and the other is free floating. The keepers have wonderful color saturation like the rest of the strap, and the sides of the keepers are rolled so no raw leather is exposed. The 2.5mm thick free end fits perfectly in the keepers with no slack or slop. The stainless and polished buckle is standard Hirsch, which is to say nicely designed with some personality with an H embossed into it.



HOW DOES IT WEAR

Confident comfort. Those are the words I would describe this watch strap. Its production lines are crisp, and its rubber backbone conforms to the wrist like a diver silicone strap. It stays put without ever getting sweaty or hot. While being smooth, the rubber also is tactile enough to prevent rotation around the wrist, or sliding up or down the wrist. The go anywhere nature of this strap means it is not scared of water (comes with 300m WR and a 30 months warranty) or daily abuse. It is not bulky or stiff at any time. The tough outer calf leather pulls up through the buckle without any signs of wear or discoloration after a year and a half of use. The color is still as true as it was when I bought it. Very impressive feat.



WHAT IS THIS STRAP GOOD FOR

Well here is where this gets fun. I think this strap would look amazing on anything from a dress casual watch to a hard core dive watch. Many folks want to put a leather strap on a diver because of how it changes the personality of the watch but won't because leather and water are not good long term companions. This is the ideal strap for any watch destined to see water or sweat in any quantity. This includes but is not limited to divers, field watches, casual watches, work watches, sport watches and you can add whatever else you want. I have described this as an engineered design that walks the line between dive and casual or dive and dress. It depends on your definition of each term I suppose. Do I think it is perfect for every watch? No, I get the impression whether it is used on a dive watch or a more dressy watch, with its crisp lines, and depth and singularity of color I think it would be more suited to a newer watch. I think it may be a bit out of character for an old vintage Hamilton or Longines. Of course if you see this strap and think 'This would be perfect for my blue vintage Longines Conquest' by all means disregard what I just said and try it! Please send me a picture though!

WHERE CAN I GET IT

This Hirsch James can be purchased in several places:

Holben's Fine Watch Bands sells them

<http://www.holbensfinewatchbands.com/hirsch-james-tan/>

You can buy them directly from Hirsch as well:

<https://www.hirschstraps.com/collections/hirsch-performance-straps/products/hirsch-james-calf-leather-performance-watch-strap-in-gold-brown-0925002070?variant=1317539640>

And naturally Good ole Amazon sells them:

<http://amzn.to/2pesQjM>

This watch strap continues the Hirsch march of well made, dependable and beautifully made straps. While natural leather is still more common, this is a strap that sheds the limitations of leather and wants to accompany you on any adventure you see fit.

