

The Death of the Cog

Clocks, Cars and Music on a Saturday Night

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Free time is an interesting term in 2020. Sure, we can attempt to retain some of the normal day-to-day activities, but most of our schedules, procedures and hobbies have been tossed out the window and replaced by more isolated endeavors. I host a virtual game show with my friends, for example, called *Pandemic: The Home Game*, just to have some laughs and see their faces once a week. I also have taken this opportunity to hit the shuffle button on my music catalog, a fun game if you have an Apple Music, Spotify or Tidal account because you never know what is going to come next. Death metal? Acid Fusion Jazz? Christian Rap? It can be quite the interesting entertainment experiment.

I recently came across a colorful, catchy, steampunk band that released a song in 2010 called, "The Death of the Cog." I had no idea there were so many bands devoted to *spinning* manufacturing and mechanical tales about gears, sprockets, and other components, but the lyrics really spoke of things happening in manufacturing—past, present, and future—that feel very relevant. A sample of the lyrics:

"Clocks used to be such magnificent things, beautiful sprockets and dazzling springs,

but you gave the people your digital beast, and in turn now all gears are deceased!"

The Death of the Cog, by The Cog is Dead (2010)

This song discusses the invention of the first digital watch, a Pulsar prototype that arrived in the early 1970s by the Hamilton Watch Company. The move toward digital time keeping was a real buzzkill to the gear manufacturers back then that provided the components in wristwatches.

The song continues:

"How things have changed since I was a boy! Clockwork would tick and would bring me such joy. But, with your advent, there's no need to wind—everything charming has been left behind!"

The invention of the world's first digital wristwatch was announced May 6, 1970 on *The Tonight Show*. Hamilton presented the Hamilton Pulsar Time Computer: with no moving parts. Two years later, The Pulsar was launched to the general public. The display was created using LEDs activated by a button on the side of its solid gold case. Hamilton produced only 400 pieces, which sold for \$2,100, more than the price of a car at the time.

In recent years, Hamilton has been designing wristwatches for Hollywood films including one used by Jessica Chastain in the film *Interstellar* and one used by Matt Damon in *The Martian*. These unique timepieces hint at the future of the technology and suggest the company will continue to innovate and inspire for years to come.

While listening to this song about how digital products took the relevance—and the momentum—away from gears and sprockets, I was immediately struck by the similarities today between gears and the automotive industry.

More electronics, less components have pretty much been the calling card for the entire transportation industry lately as gear engineers scramble to make sure they will have products to offer GM, Ford and FCA in the future. Some say it's a scary time for gear manufacturing, but it doesn't have to be.

If you look back at the history of the Hamilton Watch Company, they were manufacturing pocket watches as early as 1892. The company never gave-up on gears, they just recognized a digital evolution was coming, and they adapted accordingly.

The cog won't die, in my opinion, but it's going to look very different in many applications in the future. With all this free time lately, it might be beneficial to start thinking about how your products will need to adapt in the coming years to remain relevant in manufacturing. ☀

(www.hamiltonwatch.com, www.cogisdead.com)

Photo courtesy of The Hamilton Watch Company.

