Ray-Ban and Meta Platforms have launched Ray-Ban Stories in four new markets as the partnership rolls out its high-tech smart glasses internationally.

The partners also introduced additional color and lens variations and new software features to Ray-Ban Stories, whose tiny dual lenses allow wearers to capture, share and listen to personal moments. The smart glasses launched in select in-store and online retailers in Spain, Austria and Belgium last week and will roll out in France on April 14.

First launched six months ago, Ray-Ban Stories dual cameras provide impressive visuals, while double speakers mean you can easily take calls or listen to podcasts.

From the beginning, Meta, the owner of Facebook, was clearly attracted by Ray-Ban’s iconic status.

“Ray-Ban was born in 1937, and it’s associated with movies, art and music. It’s part of pop culture. It’s authentic, recognizable and a first choice for Millennials,” noted Meta Product Manager Hind Hobeika, who introduced the smart glasses in a Zoom.

Concentrating on classic Ray-Ban shades like the Wayfarer and adding in technology while only increasing the overall weight by five grams. Subsequently adding shapes, and even transition lenses, to create a total of 28 SKUs.

With a $299 starting price, Ray-Ban Stories glasses come with a portable charging case and a companion app, Facebook View, available in French, Spanish, German and Dutch. Editing tools on Facebook View make it relatively easy even for a non-nerd to assemble several videos together, or share to phone roll, Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp.
Tests of Ray-Ban Stories by this author suggest that smart glasses have advanced a long way from earlier fashion/tech linkups. Like Diane von Furstenberg’s Google Glass collection of scuba mask-like headsets back in 2012, which she unveiled live on a New York Fashion Week catwalk.

“We worked together with Diane, and she is super nice. But back then it was a tech exercise, and the glasses were seen as an extension of technology. Which was the way wrong approach. Ray-Ban Stories is a different. Glass and style first and then squeeze the tech inside,” insists Fabio Borsoi, Global R&D Director, Technology, Luxottica, which owns Ray-Ban.

This Italy-West Coast duo has also been careful not to offend privacy advocates, since some might find being videoed by strangers, or parents, in shades a little disturbing.

“We’ve made security a core factor. With an onboarding experience that stressed one should never surprise people. There’s an LED that goes on automatically, so people are aware of the image being captured. The key thing is smart glasses are hands free. So, you can capture Facebook photos or videos when cooking and hugging your child – and stay in the moment,” says Hobeika.

Both execs decline to say how many units had been sold so far, conceding that it’s a small percentage of sales currently. Though the partnership is clearly bullish that techy specs will grow big in future compared to the analog world of classic shades.

Ray-Ban Stories are available in Wayfarer, the most recognizable frame and an icon since the 1950’s, along with the retro Round and Meteor styles. Lens choices include prescription, clear, G15, a new variety of polarized, gradient, and Transitions, an optical lens that intelligently filters light.

Italy-based EssilorLuxottica is the global leader in the design, manufacture and distribution of ophthalmic lenses, frames and sunglasses. Besides its own brands like Ray-Ban or Oakley, EssilorLuxottica has the eyewear licenses to Giorgio Armani, Dolce & Gabbana, Chanel, Prada, Ralph Laurent, Versace, Burberry and Tory Burch; and controls retail chains like Sunglass Hut and LensCrafters. In 2020, EssilorLuxottica had over 140,000 employees and consolidated revenues of Euro 14.4 billion.

Meta is one of the Big Five tech companies along with Google, Amazon, Apple and Microsoft. California-based Meta posted annual revenues of $118 billion in 2021.

By Godfrey Deeny