

Watches & Jewellery New Models

Banking on imagination in harder times

INNOVATIONS

Simon de Burton looks at the latest offerings of leading makers

Sales of luxury watches have been rising fast for the past four years without showing signs of faltering. Last year, the giant Swatch Group saw a 21.4 per cent rise in profits, and sales growth of 17 per cent to SF8bn, across its 20 dial names.

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But experts are predicting a slowdown in the coming months, amid weakening currencies, a sharp rise in the price of gold and other raw materials, and financial uncertainty in the big markets of the US, Europe and Japan. Buyers are likely to think twice about spending large sums on luxury items such as wristwatches.

At the same time, many brands have found themselves using profits to invest in the machinery and know-how required to produce more components in-house. ETA, a movement maker owned by Swatch, intends to restrict the supply of some of its products to non-Swatch companies.

The brands will, of course, be hoping that the fast-expanding markets of China, Russia and India will continue to grow, but the fact that competition is only going to become more fierce means that the products will have to be more appealing than ever. Innovation and imagination look set to be big themes at this year's Baselworld and SIHH shows. Here are the most interesting new models.

A. Lange & Söhne: Cabaret Tourbillon

A tourbillon watch is one in which the escapement is contained within a revolving cage to counteract the effect of gravity on accuracy. Originally designed for pocket watches, the complication has recently come to intrigue wristwatch makers. Lange & Söhne's Cabaret is the first tourbillon to feature a stop seconds feature that enables the watch to be set to precisely the right time – so taking full advantage of the enhanced accuracy the tourbillon is claimed to provide. In order to do this, a minuscule braking mechanism had to be devised to stop the rotating cage until the exact second that the watch is to be re-started. Price: from £123,000 www.alange-soehne.com

Bremont: EP 120

Nick and Giles English, the founders of Bremont, demonstrate their love of historic aviation with this watch, which takes its name from the serial number of a 1942 Spitfire MKV that shot down seven enemy aircraft during the second world war. Both the chronograph dial and the propeller-shaped winding rotor are made from actual components removed from EP120 during its restoration. Price: £6,450 www.bremont.com

Chopard: L.U.C.

Chopard's innovative L.U.C. manufacture in Fleurier has developed an entirely new high-frequency escapement capable of reaching a cadence of eight to 10 Hertz, the equivalent of up to 72,000 vibrations per hour – more than two-and-a-half times that of a conventional watch. This reduces the period of time between the "tick" and the "tock" to a mere five-hundredths of a second. The new escapement is expected to be introduced in Chopard's high-end L.U.C. models within the year. Price: not available www.chopard.com

de Grisogono: Meccanico 40

The latest creation of Fawaz Gruosi, the jeweller-watchmaker, combines a startling 721 components and features two time displays. One uses a conventional dial and hands while the other is a mechanically-propelled digital display that can be corrected and set by a pair of rubber-covered crowns. Just 354 examples will be made. Price: £140,000 (approx) www.degrisogono.com

Dior: Christal Midnight Dazzling

Dior's latest Christal model is a gem-set version that puts the Superlumina quartz coating usually used to make dials and hands glow in gloomy conditions to a new use: it has been applied beneath the diamonds, causing them to sparkle in the dark. Price: £12,950 (chronograph version).



Ready for sale: the Maurice Lacroix Meimori One (top left), the de Grisogono Meccanico (centre), the Bremont Spitfire (below) and the Jaeger-LeCoultre Gyrotourbillon Two

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Ebel: Calibre 245 "Bayern Munich"

Ebel's watches have improved hugely since the brand's takeover by Movado in 2004. The latest of its new, in-house calibres appears in the football-inspired Bayern Munich watch that has a central dial that measures two periods of 45 minutes and an extra time indicator. Price: £8,900 www.ebel.com

Girard-Perregaux: WWTC 24 Hour Shopping

This tongue-in-cheek take on the 24-hour time zone watch sees the world not in cities, but in locations famous for luxury goods retailers, Bond Street, Madison Avenue, Rodeo Drive and rue Faubourg Saint-Honore are among the vital locations. Price: £12,200 (platinum) www.girard-perregaux.ch

Hamilton: X-Copter

This new watch from Hamilton shows that innovative thinking need not cost a fortune: aimed at helicopter pilots (either real or "wannabe"), it features a Fahrenheit/Celsius temperature converter, a maximum take-off weight calculator, a bezel marked with compass pass bearings and temperature scales, a minimalist utilised bezel and a rotor-shaped cut-out in the case back. Price: £70 www.hamiltonwatch.com

Jaeger-LeCoultre: AMVOX Transponder and Gyrotourbillon Two

Jaeger-LeCoultre is taking its links with Aston Martin to James Bond heights with the latest model in the "AMVOX" line-up designed in honour of the British car marque. It will feature a transponder that will lock and unlock the car and arm the security systems. The brand has also created a watch called the Gyrotourbillon Two, which comprises a rectangular Reverse case fitted with the highly acclaimed tourbillon movement launched in 2004. Just 75 will be available. Price: Gyrotourbillon £250,000, AMVOX Transponder N/A www.jaeger-lecoultre.com

Manometro: Contagiri

The few lucky owners of the new Alfa Romeo 8C supercar can now buy a watch made especially for them by Manometro, the brand established by Giuliano Mazzuoli, an Italian designer. The Contagiri's watch dial was inspired by the SC's rev counter and places the numbers one to 12 in a 270 degree arc starting with one at the usual eight o'clock position. The retrograde hour hand is complemented by a digital minute indicator. The watch is wound and set by turning the bezel. Price: £7,000 www.stilnomanometro.it

Maurice Lacroix: Meimori 3

Unveiled as a concept watch last year but now ready for sale, this is claimed to feature one of the world's most complicated movements. Described as the first mechanical watch with a memory, the Meimori can be switched between "time" and "chronograph" displays by a single button without affecting the accuracy of the standard timekeeping mode or that of the chronograph. The latter continues to record elapsed time until it is re-set. Initially, just 20 will be made. Price: £120,000 approx. www.mauricelacroix.com

Maitres du Temps: Chapter One

Christopher Claret, Roger Dubuis and Peter Speake-Marin have joined forces to form this new dial name. Chapter One, its first product, is as brilliant as one would expect. This is the world's first watch to combine a calendar with a moon-phase, retrograde chronograph, retrograde date and GMT indicators, moon phases and a calendar that displays days of the week on a system of rolling bars. Price: £150,000 plus

Richard Mille: RM020

Richard Mille, an avant garde watchmaker, has gone back to the future" by producing a high-tech pocket watch for the 21st century. The RM020 tourbillon features a movement baseplate made from carbon nanofibre and a lightweight titanium case with front and back bezels available in a choice of red gold, white gold or titanium. The winding crown is designed to move like a car gear lever to select "winding", "neutral" or "hand set" modes. Each watch is supplied with a titanium quick-release chain and a hanging stand that converts it into a desk clock. Price: around £200,000 www.richardmille.com

Hour Vision

A co-axial movement devised by George Daniels, an English horologist, has been available in Omega's premium watches for 50 years, yet it has rarely been as desirable as it is in this new annual calendar model. The movement remains unaffected by the deterioration of its lubricating oils. The watch is available in various versions, including a limited edition white gold model of which just 160 will be made. The "Hour Vision" case features sides made from transparent crystal. Price: £4,800-£15,825. www.omegawatches.com

Patek Philippe: World Time

It is difficult to improve on the brilliant World Time mechanism invented by Louis Cottier in the 1940s, which can display the hour at 24 time zones simultaneously. Patek Philippe's World Time watch remains a favourite, and this latest model combines horology with the work of the artisan enameller. The dial is exquisitely decorated with a stylised map of the world in homage to a design created in the 1950s. Price: £25,000 (A.P.P.O.X.)



Van Cleef & Arpels: Emperor Cousin Perpetual Calendar

Van Cleef & Arpels continues its quest for greater complexity with its perpetual calendar model that contains an all-in-one movement that is programmed not to need adjusting until 2100. Price: £37,000 www.vancleef.com

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Romain Jerome: Titanic DNA Day and Night tourbillon

Whatever you decide, there is no denying that Romain Jerome's rusty watches containing trace elements of metal from the Titanic are very different. Perhaps the strangest feature of the 'Day and Night' model, however, is that it has no hands. Instead it indicates the time with two tourbillons that run consecutively for 12 hours each. Price: TBC. www.romainjerome.ch

Van Cleef & Arpels: Zenith: Defy Xtreme Zero G

Zenith can always be relied on to come up with something different, and this new watch is no exception. The dial and timekeeping function becomes almost secondary, as this watch is in the unique, gyoscopic cage that contains the movement regulating organ. Visible through an aperture in the crystal, the cage contains 160 separate components, including 10 tiny gear wheels and 53 ball bearings. Price: £290,000 www.zenithwatches.com

Look – no hands: the Romain Jerome Titanic DNA Day and night tourbillon (above), the Zenith Defy Xtreme Zero G (centre), and the manometro Contagiri (below)

www.patekphilippe.com

Midnight in Paris

This latest men's creation from Van Cleef & Arpels is a true work of art. An all-new complication, it features an adventurous glass rotating dial that accurately recreates the look of the night sky above Paris. Turning at imperceptible speed, it tracks the sun's position in the Parisian sky with everything to know exactly what the sky is doing above his city wherever in the world he may be. A hinged cover at the back opens to reveal a calendar wheel protected behind a sapphire crystal. Price: £48,000 (pink gold) £80,000 (white gold). www.vancleef.com

Vogard: Stockmaster and Radiator F1

The Stockmaster is a new addition to the Vogard range of ingenious watches that can be instantly switched from one time zone to another by twisting the bezel. This version has been produced for high-flying traders with a bezel marked with the code letters of the world's leading financial centres. Baseworld also sees the launch of the Radiator F1 which has an openwork dial based on the look of a car radiator grille and a bezel marked with the world's top race circuits. Price: £4,200 (Stockmaster) www.vogard.com

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