

CLASSIC DRIVER

SIHH 2011, Geneva: Simon de Burton Picks the Best of the Bunch



Baselworld may be the biggest watch show in the world, but Geneva's invitation-only Salon International de la Haute Horlogerie - better known as SIHH - is undoubtedly the most exclusive. It was instigated by Cartier back in 1991, when the watch and jewellery house decided to abandon the Basel fair and establish a more refined event with two other Richemont-owned dial names, Baume and Mercier and Piaget, plus a couple of guest manufacturers, Gerald Genta and Daniel Roth.

Since then, the SIHH has grown to incorporate 18 different brands, most of which belong to Richemont. This year's 21st edition, held last month, followed news that Swiss watch export figures for November 2010 were a healthy 29.7 per cent higher than in 2009 – in the main, however, the new models shown at SIHH were far from radical, with the emphasis being on 'cautious optimism', and revamping tried and tested 'classics', that promise to be sure-fire sellers.

Classic Driver was there to pick out the best of the bunch from each manufacturer.

A. Lange & Söhne

The Saxon watch brand A. Lange and Sohne (colloquially known simply as 'Lange') has come to be regarded as Germany's answer to Patek Philippe. Its horological mastery is epitomised in the 'Pour le Merite' series of 'grand complication' watches, the fourth of which was unveiled at SIHH in the form of the Richard Lange tourbillon, a fiendishly clever piece of micro-engineering with a tourbillon cage that

- is completely visible between the hours of 12 and six. After six, a segment of the hour dial carrying the numbers eight, nine and ten pivots across part of the tourbillon to complete the scale, flicking back to its original position at the stroke of 12. The design of the watch, which has a regulator dial (ie separate dials for hours and minutes) was inspired by a precision regulator made by the 18th Century German horologist Johan Seyffert, whose watches were accurate to a remarkable four seconds per day.

www.lange-soehne.com

Audemars Piguet

Next year marks the 40th anniversary of Audemars Piguet's legendary Royal Oak, dubbed 'the world's first luxury sports watch'. No doubt AP will do something spectacular to celebrate the Oak's big birthday, which is probably why it kept its powder dry at this year's SIHH with some covetable but not thrilling new 44mm versions of the Offshore chronograph model made from a combination of ceramic and either steel, forged carbon or pink gold. Collectors, however, will no doubt be clamouring to get hold of the limited edition 'Arnold Schwarzenegger The Legacy' chrono, which will be made in just 1500 examples in tribute to Arnie's devotion to the Royal Oak, which he famously wore in Terminator 3. It has a 48mm case in black ceramic with titanium detailing and pink gold chronograph pushers. Sale proceeds will go towards the 'After School All-Stars' foundation.

www.audemarspiguet.com

Baume & Mercier

Baume & Mercier has revamped virtually its entire range for 2011, but the brand has retained its ethos of making great quality, reasonably priced mechanical wristwatches. The most inspiring model from Classic Driver's point of view is undoubtedly the deliciously retro Capeland flyback chronograph, a reinterpretation of a monopusher chrono produced by B&M in the late 1940s. The vintage-look dial features a telemetric scale and is complemented by blued steel hands and pointers. A particular feature of the watch, which is available in steel or 18-carat rose gold, is the domed caseback and sapphire crystal.

www.baume-et-mercier.com

Cartier

Cartier's horological history dates back more than a century, but it is only in the last couple of years that the legendary jeweller has adopted 'manufacture' status, meaning that it can now make virtually every component of a watch in-house. Already, however, Cartier's watch range has been enhanced by some truly brilliant technical pieces, not least of which is the new Multiple Time Zone watch unveiled at SIHH. Entirely developed and produced by the Cartier manufacture, the watch not only shows home time with day or night indication but also accounts for daylight saving time and shows the difference between the two selected time zones. Unusually, it displays the 24 reference cities beneath a magnifying lens on the side of the watch rather than on the dial, and it's nice and easy to set, too. Every press of the pivoting push piece reveals a different city, its local time and the time difference between home time and local time. Genius!

www.cartier.com

Girard-Perregaux

Girard-Perregaux and its parent company, the SoWind Group, is undergoing a period of resettlement following the unexpected death last year of its owner, watch industry legend and former rally champion Luigi 'Gino' Macaluso. Now under the management of his son, Stefano, Girard-Perregaux is 220 years old this year and marks the occasion with an elegant new 'gold bridge' tourbillon model to be made in an edition of 50. More accessible, however, is the delectable Vintage 1945 XXL, an Art Deco-inspired, square-cased watch with blue Breguet numerals and a sunken small seconds dial at six o'clock. Inside the 35mm by 36mm pink gold case resides G-Ps superb calibre 3300 self-winding movement.

www.girard-perregaux.com

Greubel-Forsey

Greubel Forsey was launched in 2004 by Frenchman Robert Greubel and his English business partner (and vintage Bentley fan) Stephen Forsey. The brand has effectively 'reinvented' the tourbillon complication in a series of ultra high-end, uber-expensive collectors' wristwatches, no more than 100 of which are produced each year – and already Greubel Forsey has come to be regarded as the maker of some of the most finely-honed wristwear in existence. GF's latest trick, unveiled at SIHH, is the Invention Piece Two Quadruple Tourbillon, which sports two double tourbillons systems joined by a spherical differential. The time display, found at the five o'clock position, comprises a red arrow to indicate hours and a rotating disc that carries the minutes. Just 11 examples, each in platinum and red gold, will be made.

www.greubelforsey.com

IWC

By far the most interesting stand at this year's SIHH was that of IWC, which stunted-up a scene based on a street in 1950s Portofino, the once tiny fishing village which grew into a playground for the rich and famous. The reason for the stage set is that IWC's major news for 2011 is a re-vamped Portofino line, a range that started in 1953 as an elegant three-handed dress watch. The new Portofino models include a hand-wound version with eight-day power reserve; a pleasantly old-fashioned looking chronograph (go for the mesh bracelet option); a simple automatic and, best of all, the lovely Dual Time (pictured) that features a small, 24-hour sub dial below 12 o'clock. To add to the Italian connection, the Dual Time and Eight Days models are available with hand-made straps by Santoni.

www.iwc.com

Jaeger-LeCoultre

Jaeger-LeCoultre embraces the 'back to the future' theme especially enthusiastically this year, with a range of ultra-thin versions of the legendary Reverso to mark the model's 80th anniversary. The most desirable are the 'tribute to 1931' versions, available in steel with black dial or a pink gold with white dial (the latter limited to 500). Lovers of traditional timepieces are, however, even more excited by the re-edition of the Memovox Deep Sea which harks back to 1959, when Jaeger-LeCoultre introduced the first automatic diver's watch to be equipped with a mechanical alarm. The new 'Memovox Tribute to Deep Sea' uses the same calibre 956 movement as the original, in a case that is just 1.5mm wider. It will be offered in two limited editions: one of 959 replicas of the 1959 version originally intended for the European market, and one of 359 based on the line designed for America.

www.jaegerlecoultre.com

Montblanc

Montblanc's determination to be taken seriously as a watchmaker as well as a producer of 'fine writing instruments' was demonstrated in 2007, when it joined forces with historical movement maker Minerva to give it an in-house manufacturing facility. The result has been the production of some truly innovative, high-end watches in the flagship 'Collection Villeret' line, which is this year enhanced by models such as the lovely Vintage Pulsographe chrono and the Grand Chronographe Regulator. Montblanc's more affordable 'classic' collection, meanwhile, gets the new Timewalker TwinFly, a 43mm chronograph featuring an in-house movement in which the flyback function operates both the central chronograph hand and the minute hand. Standard models have steel cases but a limited edition of 300 in blackened titanium is also available.

www.montblanc.com

Panerai

Panerai, the brand that 'invented' the modern trend for big-cased watches, continues to 'go large' this year with the introduction of four, new, 47mm pieces: the Luminor 1950 three-days; the Radiomir three-days Platino, which features a replica of a minimalist dial last seen in the late 1930s and the Luminor Composite 1950 three-days that features a composite aluminium case. The greatest excitement was, however, generated by the funky Luminor Submersible 1950 'Bronzo', another 47mm job but this time with a case made out of a lump of untreated bronze, which, considering Panerai's historic links with seafaring types, seems a completely logical material to use (I'm thinking portholes, mastlights and so on). Its USP is that the case will age gracefully, taking on a unique hue with the passing years. Prospective purchasers worried about suffering from verdigris of the wrist should rest assured that Panerai's technicians anticipated the problem and designed the new Submersible with a titanium back.

www.panerai.com

Parmigiani

It seems hard to believe, but it is now seven years since the Parmigiani 'Type 370' Bugatti wristwatch first went on sale, a £139,000 accessory to the then still-to-be-launched Veyron that was, originally, only to be made available to Veyron owners. In the event, the extraordinary lateral-movement watch was offered to all (who could afford it) and has since been produced in various guises. The latest is the Super Sport version that pays homage to the ultra-high-performance Veyron of the same name. It has a white gold case, a 337-part movement, costs around £150,000 and just 30 will be made. More practical, however, is Parmigiani's beautifully simple Tonda 1950 extra flat, unveiled at this year's SIHH.

www.parmigiani.ch

Piaget

No self-respecting playboy of the 1960s and 70s would be without a delectably thin Piaget wristwatch to go with his Ferrari 365 GTB, Cote d'Azur villa and Bardot look-a-like girlfriend, so it was fitting that the brand last year reclaimed the title of 'maker of the world's thinnest self-winding wristwatch', with its super-skinny, 5.25mm Altiplano automatic. For 2011, Piaget has taken the traditionally chunky tourbillon complication and housed it in a 269-part automatic movement measuring an almost implausible 5.5mm, with the completed watch being a mere 10.4mm from top to bottom. You'll either love or hate the asymmetrical design, likewise the unusual laser-engraved 'sunburst' pattern on the sapphire crystal.

www.piaget.com

Ralph Lauren

U.S. fashion icon Ralph Lauren moved into the watch game two years ago, but these are not 'fashion watches' in the usual sense of the word. A deal struck with luxury goods giant Richemont means that the movements found in RL watches are all top-quality items supplied by either Jaeger-LeCoultre, IWC or Piaget, while cases and dials are equally well finished. Lauren's car collection is, of course, legendary and the design of the latest RL Sporting mimics the dashboard clock of his 1938 Bugatti Type 57SC Atlantic. The dial has an elm surround that nicely complements the retro markings, while a hand-wound IWC movement lurks beneath the veneer.

www.ralphlauren.com

Richard Mille

Maverick Lola-racing, Le Mans Classic-sponsoring watchmaker Richard Mille can't resist incorporating car-like technology into his high-tech watches. The latest model to take inspiration from the world of automobile engineering is the RM 030, which incorporates a tiny 'clutch' that disengages the rotor from the winding barrel as soon as there is sufficient power in the mainspring to power the movement for around 50 hours. When the amount of stored energy drops below the 40-hour mark, the rotor automatically re-engages and self-winding recommences. An on/off indicator keeps the wearer informed as to whether or not the watch is in 'winding mode', and a power reserve indicator shows how much energy remains. This, by the way, is a monster watch: it measures 50mm by 42.7 and is available in rose or white gold (heavy) or titanium (light).

www.richardmille.com

Roger Dubuis

Until now, Roger Dubuis watches have been what might be termed 'a bit in your face', but since the firm was fully acquired by Richemont last year, plans have been afoot to tone down the look, and make the offerings more appealing to a wider audience. The man overseeing the rebirth of Dubuis is none other than Georges Kern who, as CEO of IWC (a position he holds in tandem with the Dubuis role) has taken the once little-known brand from strength to strength. The first Dubuis models to emerge under the Kern regime look decidedly promising, especially the confidently understated Monegasque chronograph in 44mm steel case. More ostentatious types will also like the 'Big Number' version, a limited edition of 128 in pink gold with dials in the traditional casino colours of black, red and green.

www.rogerdubuis.com

Vacheron Constantin

I always look forward to seeing Vacheron's latest addition to its 'Historiques' range of revamped classics, but this year's – the Aronde 1954 – didn't appeal as much as past models, such as the Ultra Thin of last year or, even better, the American 1921 driver's watch of 2009. I was, however, suitably impressed by the new Patrimony Traditionelle World Time that contrives to tell the hour in all 37 of the world's time zones simultaneously, even those with half-hour or quarter-hour differences. The partially smoked glass disc that covers the world map in the centre of the dial, to indicate whether it is day or night, is especially nifty.

www.vacheron-constantin.com

Text: [Simon de Burton](#)

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