



SimpleModernClassic

Fresh from the exotic confines of SIHH and with lust-after lists still at the forefront of our brains, *QP* has decided to dedicate this edition of Three of the Best to *manufacture* movements. And to reflect the step up in our demands we have increased our fantasy budget to £5,000. **Robin Swithinbank**

It can come as a surprise to novice horolophiles that very few watch brands make the movements inside their watches from scratch. The luxury watch industry prides itself on quality and integrity, and watch house PR departments have grown adept at merrily insisting every timepiece in their collection has been honed, buffed and perfected by craftsmen cast only slightly lower in the mythological hierarchy than the white wizards of Middle Earth. But until a brand actually controls the watch manufacturing process end-to-end, details of its movements' true genealogy are not often made public.

And that's because, deep down, it matters to consumers whether a wristwatch has been developed, produced and assembled entirely under one roof or not. The argument tends to be that watches with proprietary movements are purer, more romantic and possibly better quality than those powered by an outsourced calibre, however heavily it's been modified. That's why so many brands that don't have *manufacture* status are scrambling to be the next to join the elite group of brands that do. The moniker is good for business.

Breitling announced its first in-house movement in 2009 with the Calibre 01; Chanel is surely working towards it after two years' worth of exclusive launches with top-end movement makers and rumours other brands will join the club at this year's Baselworld show will, without doubt, be proved right.

True *manufacture* status remains in the hands of a select few, though. Patek Philippe has built a brand around keeping things in-house and in the family. Audemars Piguet, Vacheron Constantin and A. Lange & Söhne also spring to mind. Experts in watchmaking, these leviathans of the in-house movement are also experts in lightening your wallet. What hope if you're on a budget? Well, bad news if you have under £2,500 to spend, but from there, the picture is more positive.



The Zenith Elite Captain Central Seconds automatic watch is one of the most affordable dressy timekeepers powered by a superbly designed, in-house movement.



It only takes a glance to recognise the style and design of the 1960s and Glashütte Original's Senator Sixties Automatic celebrates the style of the decade in an elegant and retro-modern way.



The Jaeger-LeCoultre Master Grande Ultra Thin is the very essence of sophistication. The perfect balance in its proportions gives the piece an aura of sturdiness behind a delicate appearance.

Zenith Elite Captain Central Seconds

'Under one roof' was the mantra of Georges Favre-Jacot, Zenith's founder. Favre-Jacot set up his company aged just 22 in 1865 and soon decided that to make precise, reliable watches, he would need to bring the various aspects of watchmaking together in one place. This decided, his Zenith manufacture in the Swiss town of Le Locle changed watchmaking forever.

Zenith movements are – and not just according to the PR team – legendary. More than 40 years after its launch, the El Primero is still the world's most accurate series-produced chronograph, capable of measuring time to the nearest one tenth of a second, while the Elite, unveiled in 1994, is ultra-thin and widely recognised as one of the movements that defined the revival of high-end mechanical watchmaking.

Last year, under the guidance of its new president, Jean-Frédéric Dufour, Zenith overhauled its collection, placing these two movements at the core. Among several standout launches was the stainless steel Zenith Elite Captain Central Seconds. It's spot on trend, picking up on the vogue for understated timepieces that show the wearer something of a brand's heritage.

The automatic Elite movement is a mere 3.465mm thick (or should that be thin?), and the whole Captain watch measures a lithe 8.1mm. Depth comes from the dial details, including the gold-plated, faceted hands (note the stylish blue central seconds hand), which catch the light beautifully.

A date at 6 o'clock is the fanciest addition, and it's no great stretch to imagine your great-grandfather warming to the style, nor, for that matter, your great-grandson. Perhaps the best part though, is the price – an elegant snip at £2,800, it is undeniably one of the best value watches with an in-house movement on the market.

Glashütte Original Senator Sixties Automatic

If you've yet to cast your search for a *manufacture* status timepiece beyond the Helvetian borders, you might want to think German for a moment. Germany's reputation for rigid engineering excellence often casts a shadow over its more artistic merits, such as those found in the region of Saxony, home of Dresden (the Florence of the North), and the small town of Glashütte. Glashütte has been a watchmaking mecca for over 160 years and is today the base of the aforementioned A. Lange & Söhne, Nomos Glashütte and the up-and-coming Glashütte Original.

Because of their geographical parity, Glashütte Original and A. Lange & Söhne share a similar history – founded in the 19th century, cannibalised during the World Wars, expropriated by the Soviets, cast into ignominy for 45 years and then revived in the 1990s to become a thriving watch concern, celebrated for proprietary movements.

Mercifully, Glashütte Original now seems settled and set to make a significant impression on UK watch buyers in search of a watch with an in-house movement. The brand's collection includes some quirky but genuinely pleasing additions to the watch world at large, like the Senator Diary, which features an alarm you can set 30 days in advance. More affordable pieces meanwhile, come in the form of the Senator Sixties models, a series of watches inspired by the eponymous decade.

The range is available in yellow gold, with or without a date or chronograph, but sacrifice the extra functions and opt for the simple three-hand stainless steel version, and you get the Sixties Automatic, which comes in at a palatable £4,100. Whether with a black or white dial, it's a striking piece, thanks to a domed sapphire crystal and the slight, curved numerals at 3, 6 and 9 o'clock. Its modernist look is *de rigueur* and should mean it sits well with a British audience.

Jaeger-LeCoultre Master Grande Ultra Thin

Bonafide movement manufacturers don't come more prolific than Jaeger-LeCoultre, whose current tally of in-service base calibres made at the company's Le Sentier base comes to an astonishing 60 (Patek Philippe have 17). I once saw the brand's entire portfolio of calibres laid out on a tray. Together, the thousands and thousands of tiny, meticulously assembled parts looked like a dismantled Terminator brain, which is a derogatory way of saying how impressively technical they looked.

One of them is the Calibre 896, Jaeger-LeCoultre's skinny automatic movement, which loses all sign of science fiction when housed in the Master Grande Ultra Thin. In fact, the Ultra Thin's stainless steel case, black dial and rapier hands and indexes cut a distinctly analogue dash.

Jaeger-LeCoultre has pedigree in the field of ultra thinness. Back in 1907 Jacques-David LeCoultre answered a challenge set to watchmakers by Edmond Jaeger to create the world's thinnest movements. LeCoultre's 1.38mm Calibre 145 pocket watch is still the record-holder in its category. The Master Grande Ultra Thin may not slip under your front door as effortlessly, but it's still a time-keeping delicacy; that gently purring small seconds at 6 o'clock a reminder the watch isn't just a work of art, it's a finely tuned time-keeping device.

At £5,100, it's just outside of our budget but sneaks into our selection as it's a whole lot of reputation for the money.

Further information:

www.zenith-watches.com
www.glashuette-original.com
www.jaeger-lecoultre.com