

This page: The 9452 MC calibre, Cartier's emblematic Geneva Seal movement, was presented at 2008's SIHH and first used in the Tank Américaine in 2009.

Opposite page: Powerful, robust and refined, the Flying Tourbillon is also equipped with the 9452 MC movement.





Doing It Their Way



Cartier's *haute horlogerie* collections, introduced over the past two years, have established the company as a serious player in fine watchmaking, able to stand comparison with any of their peers. *QP* recounts the journey.

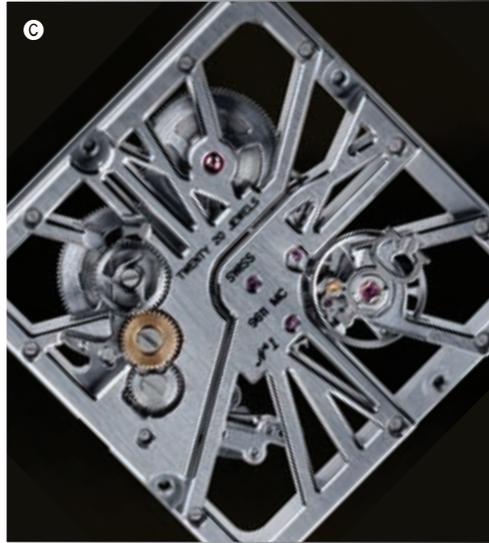
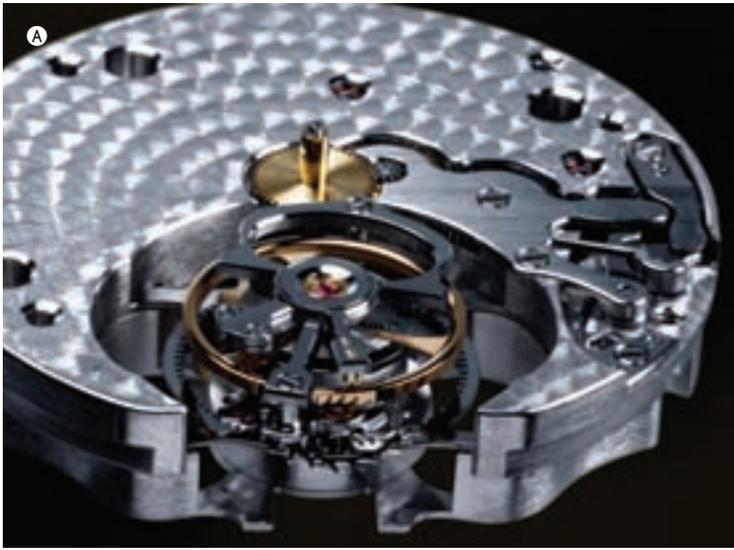
James Gurney

Cartier occupies a unique position in the watch world, simultaneously a leviathan to compare in raw numbers with Omega or Rolex, a watchmaker that lays claim to the first pure wristwatch and a jeweller to whom others are compared - "the Jeweller of Kings and the King of Jewellers," said Edward VII. As Bernard Fornas, the company president is fond of saying, Cartier is like a multi-engined plane, able to stay aloft under almost any combination of its engines.

The obvious flaw in the argument is that it takes some pilot to fly each engine in harmony with the others, each having different needs and stresses

and each tending to pull in varying directions. Perhaps out of modesty, Fornas does not dwell on Cartier's remarkable ability to compete in so many fields. Not to say that there have been no misfires; set against objects of desire such as the Santos 100 and Ballons Bleus are designs unlikely to be resurrected anytime soon such as the Autoscap and then there are the odd jewellery creations that can take the breath away.

As wide as Cartier's range is, definition about the brand is possible: it is not all embracing, it is decorative more than functional, though not to say unserious. But as the phenomenal growth of the watch industry



A Mechanical manufacture movement with manual winding, 9452 MC calibre, stamped with the Geneva Seal; flying tourbillon with seconds indicated by a C-shaped tourbillon carriage.

B 9452 MC tourbillon movement, seconds indicated by a carriage in the shape of the Cartier 'C'.

C An iconic Cartier model, the Santos watch established a new lifestyle in 1904. In 2009, it took on new and momentous proportions for the launch of the Santos 100 with 9611 MC calibre, manufactured entirely by Cartier.

D The 2009 Rotonde de Cartier single push-piece tourbillon chronograph is powered by the 9431 MC calibre and combines two of the most outstanding complications: the single push-piece chronograph and the tourbillon.

With the acquisition of Roger Dubuis, possessors of the single largest and most up-to-date *haute horlogerie* manufacture in Switzerland, the Cartier team had it all

in the past decade has been driven by functional and complicated watches, Cartier's comparative lack in these areas was always going to need attention.

Though the watch made for Santos Dumont could be held up as the original sports watch, this is hardly Cartier's heritage, certainly not in comparison to its much richer past in fine watchmaking. Of course, with such a hyperactive company, it is possible to pull almost anything from its history to argue a point, but any company with the Mystery clocks in the back catalogue has to be considered a serious contender. Cartier in fact used movements from a variety of sources including Audemars Piguet and Jaeger, with whom it set up a subsidiary to produce specifically for Cartier, and in a range of qualities that even included minute-repeaters. Almost nothing need be said of the standards of Cartier's designers who set the rules for wristwatch design and then promptly broke them with watches such as the Crash and the Maxi Oval.

The changing years

Even in the industry's early 1980s nadir, Cartier still produced serious watches albeit in vanishingly small numbers, these models being sold under the Collection Louis Cartier label as opposed to the more approachable Must de Cartier. However, it was not until the establishment of the Cartier Collection Privée Paris in the early 1990s that Cartier began to produce exceptional watches again in any number.

Although some of the watches produced under the CCPC banner were truly at the highest level – not least being a Tortue-cased monopusher chronograph designed by a then unheard of François-Paul Journe – the perception was that such watches were neither important in their own right nor of any wider significance to Cartier, except as a sort of placeholder at the horological top table. CCPC after all, accounted for barely 1 per cent of Cartier's output even by value. This impression was reinforced by Cartier's then unique admission (this at a time when ETA movements were routinely claimed to be in-house) that many of the movements used came from external suppliers, a veritable roll-call of the finest makers then operating ranging from Piaget to Renaud et Papi and Christophe Claret.

The CCPC watches gained good press, however, and a healthy following among serious collectors laid the foundations for the much more ambitious programme that was to inevitably and eventually follow. Cartier was too light in the *haute horlogerie* sector, the one area that had seen the most spectacular growth over the previous decade and a failing that was thrown into sharper relief by the obvious success of Richemont stablemates such as Jaeger-LeCoultre or Piaget in riding the crest of the wave of growing interest.

The second half of the decade saw the literal foundations of Cartier's new *haute horlogerie* collection take shape in the form a new *maison* in La Chaux-de-Fonds and the coming on stream of the rapidly expanding Valflourier component business. The development of this activity was suddenly advanced however by the part (now complete) acquisition of Roger Dubuis, possessors of the single largest and most up-to-date *haute horlogerie* manufacture in Switzerland. At this stage, the Cartier team, lead by Carole Forestier and Hélène Poulit-Duquesne, had all that it needed and more.

The arrival

Infrastructure is, of course, only part of the story. Anything produced by Cartier is always going to be worth looking at, but what makes Cartier HH exceptional is what Forestier and Poulit-Duquesne did with the capabilities they were presented with. Introduced at the 2008 SIHH, the Ballon Bleu Flying tourbillon was seen as an eccentric, but undoubtedly successful, high end take on the Ballon Bleu that was first shown to the world in 2007. What was already quite a contemporary shape, though originally shown with very traditional dials, had a completely reinvented Cartier aesthetic and a Geneva Seal quality flying tourbillon.



The Rotonde de Cartier Astrotourbillon watch powered by the Calibre 9451 MC. The fruit of five years of development, the 9451 MC movement incorporates a tourbillon carriage with a rotational axis positioned at the centre of the movement.

The Tortue perpetual calendar watch containing the unique 9422 MC movement.



The plaudits arrived quickly generating a surge of interest that was crowned later in the year with an award at the Grand Prix de Genève. More importantly, Cartier subsidiaries quickly realised its potential and moved fast to secure supplies for their markets. However, as far as the outside world was concerned, the Ballon Bleu Tourbillon was an intriguing one-off, an impression Cartier did nothing to correct.

The bomb landed at the 2009 edition of SIHH, which saw the launch of a complete collection of pure *haute horlogerie* watches following the Ballon Bleu in terms of design and, more importantly, the in-house *manufacture* movements they are fitted with. It was as Cartier stated, a quantum leap, the ten new watches included an ambitious range of movements and case shapes, all given the design treatment first seen in the Ballon Bleu, which should have been no surprise given the obvious care and detail invested in that design. Again to paraphrase Cartier the collection has an array of shapes designed to a dynamic impetus that is expressed in the striking silhouettes, inventive graphic designs and spectacular volumes.

Yet these watches also fit seamlessly within the Cartier universe. All brands try to define and remain consistent with their design codes (a step on in jargon from brand DNA), but few have as clear and consistent a set of codes as Cartier. Look at the new watches and those codes are clearly visible from the Roman numerals, the blued sword hands and rectangular inner track on Tank Américaine.

Heart of the matter

While the design is rewarding to say the least, the point of this new direction is the movements inside. The Flying Tourbillon calibre is based on a Roger Dubuis design and is made at the Geneva *manufacture* allowing the watch to qualify for the Poinçon de Genève (Geneva Seal) which is a powerful statement of Cartier's ambition here as well as an absolute assurance of craftsmanship – though perversely the Poinçon standards prohibit some advanced manufacturing techniques, the standard is still highly respected and rightly sought after by collectors. Under the guidance of Forestier, the movement was substantially

reworked to match Cartier expectations in terms of durability and ease of use.

The tourbillon sits alongside two new movements designed from scratch by Forestier's team at La Chaux-de-Fonds. The first is the skeleton 9611 MC calibre, a product of Forestier's experience at Renaud et Papi and Valflourier. Creative and highly contemporary, the 9611 uses the cut out Roman numerals as part of the bridge structure making for a far more open and less busy design than is the norm for such watches. But look closely and all the codes are there from the intertwined C's on the regulator to the inner square from which the numerals spring.

The second is a central counters chronograph (running all the hands from the centre – a minor but noticeable vogue among the more serious watchmaking circles). Taking advantage of the fact that each hand is on a separate plane, Forestier's solution to what could be a bulky problem is elegant and practical. Despite the necessarily complex transmission system, the whole movement gets away with around 280 components and an 11½ Ligne movement.

A second chronograph in the collection derives from a commission Cartier gave to Renaud et Papi in 2005. The idea was championed by Forestier as being true to Cartier's heritage – the Paris company had created a mono-pusher Tortue-cased chronograph in the late 1920' – and Cartier wanted an alternative to the simple tourbillon in the form of a further complication. "I suggested to marketing that we should produce a single push-piece chronograph combined with the tourbillon movement, as it is the emblematic complication at Cartier," said Forestier.

SIHH 2010 saw the collection added to with new models such as a skeleton Rotonde de Cartier and the incredible Astro-Tourbillon, while Cartier simultaneously launched Calibre de Cartier, a more affordable collection of *manufacture* watches that sits comfortably with the Haute Horlogerie collection. ☺



2009's new 9907 MC calibre, produced, developed and prototyped exclusively in-house allowed Cartier to revisit the chronograph function through the Rotonde de Cartier central chronograph.



View of the 9907 MC movement, which reveals the chronograph mechanism and notably the flexible linear hammer, the chronograph's column wheel, the balance in gold-coloured Glucydur and its regulator in the form of the Cartier 'C'.

The Rotonde de Cartier skeleton flying tourbillon watch features the ultra-contemporary Calibre 9455 MC movement that also acts as a dial.

