

# Crowning Glory



A decade on from its launch, the iconic Chanel J12 has come a long way and for 2010 has been re-invented with the introduction of the AP Renaud et Papi collaboration TRM.

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To give an uninterrupted case edge, the crown of the TRM was moved to the top of the dial, creating a whole new set of problems for the team at APRP to overcome. Yours for £210,000.



The caseback of the TRM.



The TRM dial, featuring the unusual positioning of the crown.



TRM with rose gold accents.

Chanel's next step was obvious really - especially with the aid of hindsight. Having created a genuinely iconic watch design in the J12, the design team utilised the model's apparent ability to support a near endless succession of colour and gemset variations. Impressively, the J12 has never been seen as either exclusively male or female, that bias only coming with obvious cues - add a GMT movement to the black ceramic version and you have quite a masculine watch. Horological purity may not have been Chanel's first priority, but then which of its immediate competitors was even offering an automatic GMT whether from ETA or anywhere else?

In 2005 Chanel showed that the J12 could even carry off a tourbillon, quite the feat given how common it is to see these movements shoe-horned into designs that simply cannot support the complexity. Then 2008 saw Chanel offering a J12 for the more discerning, based on a newly forged partnership with Audemars Piguet, a similarly independent, privately owned company with serious intent

to stay that way. The result was the Calibre 3125, based on an existing AP movement and the only movement Audemars supplies to a third party. This particular J12 was almost painfully severe, the gold detail in the images being much more discrete in the flesh. Given that the 3125 was born of a certain mutual admiration and that for Chanel the watch was a statement of credibility as well, guessing the next stage hardly needed vast expertise in the watch business.

If AP does not supply its movements to other houses, its subsidiary, AP Renaud et Papi, certainly does, Giulio Papi's business being one of the guns for hire that have driven the creative surge in the watch business over the past decade or so. APRP conceives, designs and produces both movements and modules for a blue-chip client list that stretches from Richard Mille to IWC via Lange and Parmigiani, so it was not exactly hard for a journalist to work out what was on the agenda when the call came through in January to visit Chanel in Paris and preview an important new watch, their immaculately glamorous HQ in the Place Vendôme being worth the trip even without the promise of horological fireworks.

## Guessing games

Knowing a little of Giulio Papi's creativity, the time spent on the train over to Paris guessing what might be unveiled was almost completely wasted but nevertheless enjoyable. We managed to rule out a simple tourbillon (no point), sonnerie (ceramic would be a poor sound conductor we thought), yacht chronograph and others. The only element we felt certain of predicting was the amazing coated bridges that seem to exist as a test of APRP watchmaker's dexterity (one false breath and a frighteningly expensive component becomes junk to recycle).

Once arrived and small talk disposed of, the watch was unveiled and as can be seen from the images, it is truly original. The idea emerged that the J12's form would be improved if the crown could be done away with - something along the lines of the LeCoultre Futurematic of the 1950s (one of the first production automatics, the Futurematic's crown was hidden to emphasise that it was self-winding). After playing with various ideas, Giulio Papi settled on the idea of having the crown mounted on the dial side, popping up only when needed, this of course had

the advantage of creating a really serious set of challenges to meet and overcome - the perfect APRP project that resulted in the J12 TRM.

The most obvious drawback to devoting dial real estate to the crown is that it reduces the space available for the hands, the easy and, therefore, instantly rejected solution, being to offset and reduce the size of the hands. Instead APRP developed a way for the minute hand to remain the 'correct' size for the dial, by introducing a curious retrograde function. Essentially the minute hand travels normally until ten minutes past the hour at which point it is about to come up to the crown, the hand then reverses over a ten minute period until it reaches the twenty past the hour position whereupon it continues as normal for the rest of the hour. During this period a digital display at six o'clock comes into play showing the minutes eleven to nineteen. Written down, this barely makes sense, but

The 2005 J12 Tourbillon - the world's first grand complication in ceramic. £120,000.





A collaboration with AP in 2008 resulted in the Calibre 3125 and allowed Chanel to create the dream of a *haute horlogerie* automatic movement with three hands, going back to the deepest roots of traditional watchmaking. £18,900.



the watch is beguiling all the same as this process never appears other than seamless.

### The heart of the matter

Even more appealing is the detail of the mechanisms that make all this possible. Normal crowns use a system where one step engages the winding system and following steps the time and date. With the TRM's vertical crown, this would be difficult, so once the crown is popped out, you press either the bezel lozenge at two o'clock (to set the time) or four o'clock (to rewind the watch). Simple and neat on the surface, but wilfully complicated to make function with the desired resistance and feel - you can almost feel the shame when they admit that rewinding the mainspring to its limit, which gives ten days running, is probably easiest with the tool they supply.

The key components are, in the best APRP tradition incredibly over-engineered, coated with PVD type treatments and then finish to levels

impossible to achieve. The twin mainspring barrels are, for example, coated with a black PVD, circular grained above and satin-polished on the sides, the black PVD Titanium power reserve bridge has chamfered and sanded surfaces and even the balance is blackened. Less apparent but particularly impressive is the monobloc ceramic mainplate with its polished angles and surfaces, ceramic both being an essential code of the J12 and extremely hard and unforgiving to work on.

Only 20 black ceramic TRMs are being made together with a white ceramic version, which is, if anything, even more breathtaking. Unfortunately, the white ceramic version seems to have suffered from heavy handling at Baselworld and has had to return to APRP.

Naturally overshadowed by the launch of the TRM, but perhaps more in keeping with the J12 spirit is the J12 Marine also launched this year and, perhaps surprisingly, the first true diving watch in the line. With a good rubber strap, 300m water-resistance rating and uni-directional bezel, the J12 is certainly equipped properly, but more than that, it is the smartest variation on the J12 design since the Superleggera. ☺



The über cool Marine, the first J12 diver's watch with 300m of water resistance. From £3,500.



Sporty and ultra light, the Superleggera concept was inspired by 1950s racing cars. £4,600.