

Breguet Delivers



Breguet's communication with the world has taken on a new quality, in press releases and public events and, above all in the new watches, a harder, feistier, more bullish approach is all of a sudden evident.

James Gurney

Certainly Breguet is a growing force at the top end of the market, particularly through the boutiques where demand for exceptional watches is rising month by month, while Swatch Group reports single out the financial success the house has enjoyed in the recent past.

Alongside the busy and expanding circle of boutiques, Breguet have a heady mix of high culture sponsorships ranging from support for the Lucerne Music Festival to



The 7074 Tradition Tourbillon is fitted with a Fusée and Chain device to equalise the force fed through to the escapement through the winding cycle. Expected to be available in March 2008, this is latest addition to the Tradition line. The 41 mm case is in yellow gold only and the price is expected to be £87,000.



(Above) Montres Breguet S.A. has been patron to the Versailles Petit Trianon restoration project. Built for Madame de Pompadour in 1768, the Petit Trianon is expected to reopen in 2008 and will allow visitors complete access for the first time.



A rare picture of the famed and missing Marie-Antoinette watch. Breguet have a large team of watchmakers attempting to recreate what was or is one of the most complex timepieces ever made.

funding, as principal patron, of Versailles' Petit Trianon restoration scheme - an apt association given Breguet's links to the French Court and their on-going project to recreate that famous lost masterpiece, the Marie-Antoinette watch.

Breguet, or Nicholas Hayek or the Swatch Group in Breguet's name at least, are spending millions of Euros on these projects and are famously acquisitive when desirable Breguet watches come up at auction. All of this being part of Hayek's strategy to return the house to the pre-eminence of the late 18th and early 19th Centuries. As Hayek says, "as part of the Swatch Group, Breguet has unprecedented resources with which to fulfil its watchmaking destiny".

This would all, with the exception of the Marie-Antoinette watch which is controversial enough anyway, be so much hot air without a collection to

match. And, in this respect, there can be no doubting the ambition of Breguet. That the new watch collections are not over-the-top monstrosities is exceptional. While individual makers and boutique brands are grabbing the headlines for astronomically priced horological creations, it seems that Breguet are one of the few houses capable of actually making and selling watches at this level. The catalogue shows some 17 different tourbillons, all of which are in production and finding owners.

This is not to say that Breguet are immune to the habit of announcing watches well in advance of possible delivery, but watches do come through the system at a steady rate - certainly enough to keep clients returning for more. The Double-Tourbillon shown on the cover of *QP 23* is a case in point. Originally shown at Baselworld in April 2006, the watch is now penciled in for delivery in March 2008. The delay is longer than Breguet's norm, partly due to the level of serious interest shown by collectors. According to the Breguet boutique in London, their allocation for the next year or two can be entirely accounted for by clients who have

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(Clockwise) Breguet's Classique Grande Complication or Double Tourbillon (£205,100) featured in *QP 23*. The Tradition 7027 appeared at Baselworld 2005. A dial and a caseback in transparent sapphire bring to light the movement; its bridges, bars, gears and other features are distributed on both sides of the main plate. Cufflinks in 18ct. white gold with fluted caseband set with diamonds. Breguet dial in silvered 18ct gold, hand-engraved on a rose-engine. Its engine-turned pattern makes each cufflink dial a unique design. Just to show that Breguet are equally capable of simple, effective and desirable watchmaking, the 5177 won last year's public prize at the Geneva Grand Prix d'Horlogerie.



(Left) The Marine Chronograph Tourbillon is Breguet's first watch to feature a silicon balance wheel, hairspring and lever. Unsurprisingly the reverse engineering required to make the existing tourbillon design "fit" the new escapement has taken considerable time and energy. Nevertheless, Breguet hope to deliver the first examples later this year. The price will be £79,000. (Right) Lange may own the phrase "state of the art tradition" but the Tourbillon Messidor lives out the ideal with its modish semi-skeleton design.

Harder, feistier, Breguet are bringing the noise.

already put deposits down. Now at £205,100 for the "plain" version and £384,000 for the diamond set version, this is a quite exceptional statement of faith in the house. For this reason, Breguet have decided to hold delivery back for extra "rough wear" tests as their experience tells them that these are watches that will be worn day to day.

While the catalogue remains firmly slanted toward the traditional, classic Breguet style, recent launches show that Breguet is trying to move forward in terms of style and watchmaking. There is, for example, a new Marine Tourbillon chronograph that has been fitted with a silicon escapement (delivery of which is actually expected before the end of the year) thus keeping Breguet abreast of the technological advances moving through the industry.

But the future direction of the house is best illustrated by the Tradition line, already a perennial favourite at *QP* and developed further this year with the launch of a tourbillon version fitted with a fusée and chain mechanism. The Tradition line's trick has been to live up to the name but with an astonishing and overt contemporary

feel - yes the movement is laid out like an 18th Century pocket watch, but then you never saw a pocket watch with the dial on the same side as the escapement and open to view. The new tourbillon follows this path in less visible ways to through the use of a titanium bridge and other 21st Century touches.

The Fusée mechanism itself is an elegant addition to the tourbillon. In theory the system equalises the variation in torque over the life of the power reserve, thus delivering a more equal and constant level of energy to the tourbillon regulator. While it will doubtless work well in practice, this is more an exercise in fascination than precision time-keeping. And if the fusée is not quite as delicate as that produced by Renaud et Papi for Lange, then the design is far more unique - oh and it is somewhat cheaper at a mere £87,000, though obviously that is unlikely to be a major concern to the surprisingly large band of collectors that Breguet hope to attract.

And if you plan a visit to one of Breguet's stockists for a fleeting glimpse of a prototype and need to take a little horology away with you, then have a look at the cufflinks made from discarded dials. [O](#)