

# Smart Bomb

Not content with looking at the design-driven dashboard of an alluring Aston Martin, flashy Ferrari, or even the Peugeot prototype for inspiration, the designers and watchmakers at Bell & Ross looked to the skies for a bit of divine revelation. When they found it, they went large; 46 mm large. Taking a 'plane's cockpit clock as its design motivation, the Parisian brand has made the BR01 an undeniable statement piece. But this isn't a watch for the faint hearted. This watch, or rather 'Instrument' as it's referred to, is big. Big on design, big on readability and big on black carbon-powder coating, all demonstrating that this is a piece for the 21st-century action man.

This seminal watch launched just two years ago onto a market going into overdrive for oversized watches. But don't mistake the BR01 as just a passing fad; so distinguishable was its appearance, it became a design classic from the moment it arrived, regardless of the Marmite reaction evoked. First appearances suggest it might struggle to sit comfortably on even a shot putter's wrist, let alone mine, but then intrigued by its aeronautical and military references, I tried it on and was sold instantly.

**The BR01 Instrument has been proven as a design classic with every permutation of its sinister, military bulk**

Gareth Scourfield



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The BR01-97 power reserve model (£2,200), which, like all Instruments, doubles as a desk clock.



### Jet Sold Separately

If watches are to men what shoes are to women, the BR01 surely sits somewhere up there with Blahnik and Louboutin. But what sets this model apart from other oversized, more complex timepieces, now so fashionable even on sparrow-like Asian wrists? The answer is simple: quite literally, it's a timepiece that does exactly what it says on the box. The design not only delivers a watch whose strength is in its simplicity, but also an Instrument with added accessories that can be assembled differently depending on your needs. The construction of the case with its removable clip fastening system allows the wristwatch to be

transformed into an office watch, a pendant, or even part of your fighter jet's instrument panel. This in my mind makes for a stylish and versatile piece of kit.

The four attachment screws on top of the case have become the BR01's symbol of functionality and authenticity, evoking Bell & Ross' early-Nineties origins as an aeronautical clock maker, when eponymous founders Belamich and Rosillo were in partnership with German brand Sinn. The four-screw attachment is identical to the clamping system used for the gauges, gyros and read-outs in cockpits - all of which need to be easily

Bell & Ross' Baselworld line-up was emphatically BR01-based. (Left) The Phantom BR01-94 chronograph (£3,300), whose '94' suffix indicates an ETA 2894 movement; (centre) Blue BR01-92 (£2,200), driven by an ETA 2892 automatic movement; (right) the Titanium Orange BR01-94 limited edition (£3,700).



removable for replacement or repair. It is these details across the four models, BR01-92, 94, 96 and 97, that will appeal to the design purist; in the same way as the individual, piped inside seams of a Jil Sander jacket, or the precision hand-folding of an Hermès tie. Designers with similar aesthetic sensibilities understand the importance for inner detail. Whilst the outside may remain constant, underneath there is a continual evolution.

### New iterations

Bell & Ross has been making these evolutionary steps this year, one more obvious than the other, with the launch of its first tourbillon movement and the 500-piece Phantom and Blue BR01s. The former lends itself perfectly

to the large Instrument. The product of a collaboration with leading 'shadow workshop' BNB Concept, this tourbillon manages not to stray from the brand's design principles, instead incorporating no less than four complications with coherence: a tourbillon, a 'Trust' precision indicator (essentially a torque meter), a regulator and a power reserve indicator. For the first time, carbon fibre is used for the bridges and mainplate, which in combination with a 4,000 Hv hardened titanium case (4,000 is almost unnecessarily high on the Vickers scale) makes for a very robust tool. Of course, the diamond-like-carbon (DLC) case coating, carbon-fibre dial and carbon-fibre inserts are mere cosmetic flourishes, but the sum of all these parts is utterly spellbinding.

Upping the BR01's clarity - if more were needed - is the Blue edition, which uses the photo-luminescent



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colour contrast of cockpit counters both for function and design. While lifting a vital visual aid for professional aviation, it is no coincidence either that Blue makes reference to the sea and sky - something that fighter pilots see plenty of while commanding stomach-churning manoeuvres several thousand feet up (perhaps last year's Orange scheme echoed the results of said churning..?)

Aviation is in Bell & Ross' genes, so with the B-2 stealth bomber acting as inspiration, it's no surprise that the Phantom is the most sinister-looking timepiece to exit the brand's La Chaux-de-Fonds factory yet. The black-on-black

design of the Phantom ('Furtive' in French) is further proof of the genius in subtlety. The matte, anti-reflective timepiece is void of any contrast, unlike the Orange and Blue models, but is not quite invisible either, due to the discreet photo-luminescent numerals enabling readability both day and night. Like all of Bell & Ross' utilitarian oeuvre, this dark and handsome piece is definitely more Bond than Milk Tray. And although it might fall short of giving you super powers, it will give you all the confidence of an action hero without the hard work. ○

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(Above) The BR01 Tourbillon (£70,000) took everyone by surprise this year. And no, despite the jet fighter overtones, the 'Trust' indicator isn't 'Thrust' misspelt. It actually interprets the mainspring's level of torque in terms of how 'trustworthy' it's keeping time.