



Postcards

Fresh from the fairs, QP finds plenty to write home about

🕒 When Messe Basel rebranded itself as 'Baselworld', the vast majority of exhibitors and visitors simply shrugged their shoulders and set about trying to work out how to remember that Hall 2 would now be the Hall of Illusions, or Delusions, or Dreams or Something. But in a unique case of life imitating branding, attending the fairs at Basel and Geneva has become ever more like visiting another planet - particularly when viewed from the week after.

The process of filtering and sorting the kaleidoscope of bright new watches, shiny new brands, fresh gimmicks and artfully concealed future classics is daunting to say the least. But the sheer size of the problem turns out to be an advantage when trying to select highlights, as only the strongest impressions survive.

Just what makes one watch more memorable than another is a question thrown into relief by the choices our team of writers have made in their postcards from the fairs. Jaeger-LeCoultre's Extreme Lab Tourbillon caught everyone's attention for sheer technical excellence - the lubricant-free movement represents nothing less than a horological grail. Rolex seems to feature simply for being Rolex (hard luck everybody else), while other watches seem to have captured the zeitgeist, which in 2007 terms means updated classics (1960s diver's watches from Breitling, Blancpain, Jaeger-LeCoultre and Longines) or pink gold/black dial combinations.

Other choices seem more idiosyncratic, more random, as must surely be the case when attempting to choose stars from a cast of thousands - how else is it that none of the other writers saw, or rather agree with me, that the stars of Baselworld were Gérald Genta's Arena, Anonimo's bronze and titanium watches and Glashütte's fully crystal-backed Senator Sixties? Less open to doubt is that Jaeger-LeCoultre is *the* 'form' house of the moment and that Patek Philippe's failure to show anything truly new just goes to show the strength of its position.

James Gurney



Jaeger-LeCoultre Extreme Lab (£200,000)



Breitling SuperOcean Heritage (from £1,845)



Anonimo TP52 (£4,550)



Blancpain Fifty Fathoms (SFr.13,000)



Longines' Legend Diver (£1,060)

Diving In

Ken Kessler

While everyone else was looking for awe-inspiring new movements or counting the number of new tourbillons (it's almost a Basel/Geneva tradition), I chose to be wholly self-indulgent by scouting for unabashed retro. Hey, I like the classic stuff, OK? For those of you fed up with retro, it's enough to demonstrate the commercial wisdom and acceptability of 'archive trawling' by pointing out that Rolex (possibly the most professional company in the watch, or indeed any other business) relaunched its Milgauss. And everyone I asked *loved* it. But was there something in the water in Switzerland that led to the mass reissue of classic... *diving* watches?

No kidding: it was looking like a conspiracy; as if the heads of various and disparate brands decided one night, over a few dozen schnapps, to revive their finest wet-wear. So now I'm scrimping and saving first and foremost for the latest version of the Blancpain Fifty Fathoms. Not only has the current line reverted to the superior styling of the original after a couple of years with a hideous raised-numeral bezel, they've even added a drop-dead cool chronograph. Oh, and a Fifty Fathoms tourbillon.

Longines' Legend Diver is a sublime, spot-on replica of the original, at a silly, low price (£1,060); Doxa and Rado have new variants of

their Sixties classics; Eterna's readying the anniversary edition of the KonTiki; and Breitling's SuperOcean (from £1,845) - with a choice of three dial colours and a stunning facsimile of the original bracelet - had me salivating. I was so impressed by this crop, I may even take up swimming.

But it wasn't all revamped old divers: Volna is an entirely new brand inspired by but not replicating classic, oversized Russian diving watches, while Victorinox Swiss Army's chunky Dive Master 500 is the first all-black PVD watch I've ever coveted. And the watch I covet most of all just happens to be a sporty, water-resistant example of true *haute horlogerie*: De Bethune's macho Big Power. It has to be the classiest ballast of all time.

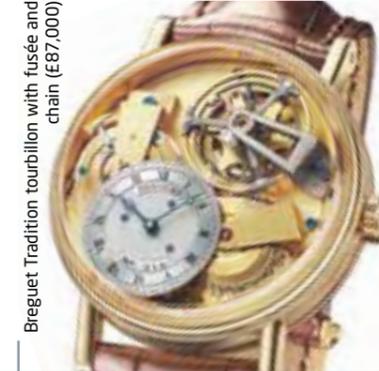
Studied Bling

Bill Prince

Cars finally moved aside to let yachts overtake in the 2007 marketing stakes, and there was an oh-so Eighties, Armani-suitsleeves-rolled-up return to bicolour steel bracelets. Yet both Baselworld and Geneva's Salon International de la Haute Horlogerie (SIHH) conspired to leave the chattering classes relatively mute this year. Over six days, I was inveigled, *sotto voce* of course, to investigate just three pieces: Rolex's recherché Yacht-Master II regatta chronograph, Jaeger-LeCoultre's



Bicolour's back! Bvlgari Assioma (£6,000)



Breguet Tradition tourbillon with fusée and chain (£87,000)



Rolex Yacht-Master II regatta chronograph (from £16,000)



Glashütte Senator Sixties (£3,100)



Jaeger-LeCoultre Duometre (£20,900)



Rolex Milgauss (£3,120)

"It looked like a conspiracy, as if the heads of various and disparate brands decided one night, over a few dozen schnapps, to revive their finest wet-wear."

revolutionary Extreme Lab Tourbillon and Girard-Perregaux's one-armed bandit mini-casino. Otherwise, the story from Chopard to Zenith by way of just about everyone else was any colour you want, so long as it's red/pink/rose gold, ideally with a black dial and rubber strap. Blame the Hublot Big Bang if you must (and many do) but city boys and those with a more studied sense of bling will be enthralled.

More interesting was the return to (relative) classicism. Leading this field, by dint of its recent fascination with everything gothic and crepuscular, was the return of Corum's elegant, Bvlgari Bvlgari-esque Romulus. Vacheron Constantin's new Patrimony Automatique was exquisite too, as was the new Saxonia collection from Lange & Söhne, TAG Heuer's smoothed-out Link series, Bedat & Co.'s art deco pieces and Cartier's pebble-smooth Ballon Bleu - easily my most pawed piece at the SIHH.

Bill Prince is Deputy Editor of British GQ

Effortlessly Superior

Simon de Burton

Jaeger-LeCoultre's strategic decision to unveil its remarkable Master Compressor Extreme Lab immediately before Baselworld and the SIHH left me, and many others I suspect, with the feeling that anything else would be less in terms of innovation and watchmaking expertise. But, as it turned out, there was more than enough to talk about to fill a postcard.

My 'watch of the week' was undoubtedly A Lange & Söhne's Lange 31, simply because it executes a single, impressive complication with devastating style and elegance. If a watch can be 'effortlessly superior' then this must be it. I was mesmerised, too, by the fusée-and-chain movement in Breguet's Tradition Tourbillon, not to mention the frosted finish - even A-LB himself might have been almost impressed.



Gérald Genta Gefica Safari (€10,650)



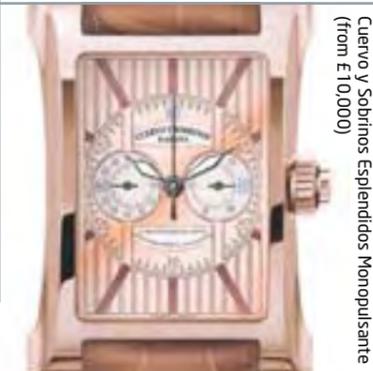
Girard-Perregaux's 'Jackpot' (€317,000)



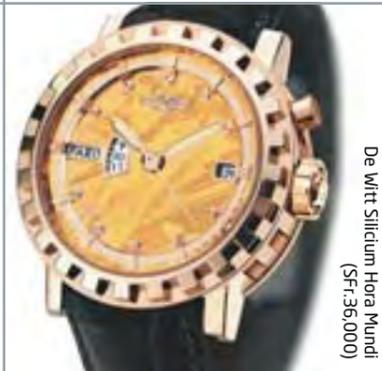
Corum Romulus (€13,750)



Montblanc Lady Moonphase Automatic (€5,350)



Cuervo y Sobrinos Esplendidos Monopulsante (from £10,000)



De Witt Sillium Hora Mundi (SFr.36,000)



Ebel 1911 BTR Chronograph (€4,150)



Victorinox Dive Master 500 (€950)

'Revived 45s' that appealed included Breitling's SuperOcean, which wins my vote for 'most delectable bracelet' - smooth, slinky and very like the one from the '57. But why didn't the designers go the whole hog with the dial and give it the elongated hour markers of the original?

In that respect, Longines did a better job with its Legend Diver, but Patek Philippe presented the best recreation of all in the form of its Chronometro Gondolo - a model not seen for 80 years.

Wacky watches abounded of course, but the one slightly weird one I found myself liking, against all the odds, was Gérald Genta's Gefica - another 'back to the future' number, reincarnating a model from 1988. This big game hunter's watch has a non-reflective bronze case that is intended to patinate with age.

Vacheron Constantin provided more than a touch of the tribal too, with Les Masques, but they just made me want to run away.

Cutting Loose

Maria Doultou

It appears that 2007 marks the year in which the watch industry has embraced the philosophy that watches have very little to do with telling the time, instead doing the horological equivalent of a 'burn your bra' protest, in a liberating mood of self-expression.

One of the first breaths of fresh air to blow through Baselworld was Maurice Lacroix's presentation of its 'Memoire 1' concept. At present it's little more than that - a concept - but the final product is promised for 2008 and CEO Philippe Merck claims it will be "the most complex three-hand watch in the world", which should well-and-truly shake the marque's reputation as purveyor of predictably nice watches.

Too young to consider liberation is Romain Jerome, founded in 2004, which bring us



TAG Heuer Link Calibre S 1/100th second chronograph (£1,750)

Bemat & Co.'s platinum 878 (£16,700)



Cartier's Ballon Bleu (£15,400)



De Bethune DB24 Big Power (£37,200)



A Lange & Söhne Lange 31 (£134,000)

the Titanic-DNA watch. "This is no bullshit," was how Dutch-born Wendy Witte presented the rusty watch to me, which contains actual traces of steel and coal salvaged from the *Titanic* wreck.

However, two watches fought closely for my top spot, both at SIHH. Vacheron Constantin's set of four Les Masques watches (£205,400) use tribal art from Africa, Asia, Oceania and America as an inspiration (very ethno-chic) and the result is an unusual and surprisingly beautiful watch with a sculpture of a mask floating magically between layers of crystal.

In contrast, Piaget's Vinyl Inspiration is a 'groovy' piece of kit: a watch made to look like a record (remember the old-fashioned black ones?). Looks like the watch industry is finally letting its hair down.

Theatricals Aside...

Claire Adler

There is a tradition at Baselworld and the SIHH of asking visitors to don gloves before inspecting fine watches. Call me blasé, but I've long suspected that in most cases this is just marketing designed to create a sense of theatre and suspense.

My suspicions were confirmed during my meeting with Harry Winston. While I chatted with 36-year-old Andreas Strehler, the humble and determined watchmaker behind Opus 7, I tried-on the madly decadent, turban-inspired Duchesse bracelet watch - all 61.44 carats and £370,000 of it - then sampled the Ice Floe watch (58.88 carats, £500,000) and finally the supremely elegant Opus 7 itself (£97,000). All of this while the American sales director whisked in and out to borrow each of the masterpieces, bringing them back a couple of minutes later and nonchalantly announcing he had sold them. There wasn't a white glove in sight. Harry Winston is undoubtedly the real thing, and that's why they don't have to try so hard.

Of course, the best marketing isn't marketing at all. It's a consistency and love for detail that feels authentic. Lange & Söhne's new 31 comes with two tools to wind its 31-day power reserve - one to hang on your key ring and a spare for your watch wardrobe. And I loved the watch boxes at Blancpain: varnished wooden cases metamorphose into humidors and jewellery boxes.

Finally, the most bizarre watch fact I gleaned this year is that burgeoning watch empire Bovet Fleurier provides movements to, amongst others, Yeslam bin Laden, a Geneva-based jeweller and half-brother of you know who.

Plaget 4.586 mm Secret Inspiration (£20,350)



Harry Winston Duchesse (£370,000)



Vacheron's Les Masques 'Congo' (set of four, £205,400)

Patek Philippe World Time in platinum



Hublot One Million Dollar Tourbillon



FP Journe Centigraphe



Panerai Black Seal in ceramic (£3,450)



Seiko Spring Drive Chronograph (£4,200)



Concord C1 (from £5,000)



Bell & Ross BR01-94 Blue (£3,400)

The Winner Is...

Imran Khan

Best vintage revival

Amazing variety and quality, ranging from the sumptuous Patek Gondolo ref. 5098 to Omega's Marine 1932. For me, however, Rolex's Milgauss wins the revival game, with Longines' Diver close behind. The new Milgauss is modern yet remains faithful to its history by remaining antimagnetic to 1,000 gauss.

Best technological breakthrough

The nominees include Lange's weighty 31, Jaeger-LeCoultre's dual-drive Duometre chronograph and Extreme Lab (an amazing year for the Le Sentier house), FP Journe's hundredth-of-a-second Centigraphe, and the new Spring Drive chronograph from Seiko. But I'm afraid it's Rolex again, with the Yacht-Master II's programmable countdown timer: a genuine innovation and Rolex's first complication since its in-house chronograph launched in 2000. Just a shame about the looks. Speaking of which...

Best looker

The Speedmaster Broad Arrow 1957 in rose gold and steel and Cuervo y Sobrinos' Esplendidos Monopulsante both deserve worthy

mention, but the winner by a whisker is Patek's World Time, re-issued at last in platinum - the new electric-blue guilloché dial leaves you mesmerised.

And my favourite?

A legendary watch that celebrates its 50th birthday this year, the Speedmaster. I was thrilled that Omega chose to create a celebratory watch for enthusiasts: a genuine oven-baked enamel dial, manual-wind Co-Axial chronograph (a first), all wrapped in the most luxurious packaging. A must for any serious Speedmaster or chronograph collection.

Lasting Impressions

Michael Balfour

Released like dogs from the traps to sniff out the best of the best, we approved journalists poured once again through the barcode-controlled gates and into the elegant, labyrinthine halls beyond. Products aside, the general working conditions were excellent as ever. Even better in a few years, as the Swiss architects of Tate Modern have won the contract to extend the front of the main entrance to Baselworld in time for 2012's event. The trams and shuttle buses at the fairs are always great,

although I preferred the eight-minute train journey into Geneva from the SIHH. The latter reminded me daily of Mondaine's hugely successful Official Swiss Railways watch range, which this year is joined by the impressive quartz Chrono Sport model.

I must have inspected about 5,000 timepieces at Baselworld, but a few always stand out in the crowd for 'in your face' reasons. Hublot's One Million Dollar Tourbillon was simple egomaniacal fun, but was easily surpassed for classy looks by Corum's magnificent new Classical Billionaire Tourbillon. Movado's newly awakened brand Concord made a techy departure with its castellated C1 chronograph, which came as a welcome surprise, as did newcomer De Witt's grandly titled Academia Silicium Hora Mundi, a world-timer with a silicon dial.

Cartier's new Ballon Bleu line was centre-stage at SIHH, but trade visitors were noticeably intrigued by Panerai's new trio of proprietary movements, which build on the year-old P.2002 eight-day GMT: an automatic version, a monopusher chrono' and a tourbillon no less, which 'rolls' instead of 'spins'. The ladies' market was well served by Montblanc's new diamond-set Ministar Automatic and the romantically designed Lady Moonphase: all diamonds on mother-of-pearl, complete with a neat diamond-set seconds dial. A nice touch.

Style and Substance

Jonathan Scatchard

Much more buzz this year, even if some of the brands look to consolidation rather than innovation. Of all the Swatch brands, Omega had the bragging rights quite rightly due to the sensational Omegamania auction, beamed in live from Geneva to the big screen in Hall 1. Great excitement as astonishing prices were realised. All this and the 50th anniversary of the Speedmaster gave the perfect opportunity to launch some mouthwatering limited editions.

Breguet launched the Tradition two years ago, but how could it be bettered? I found out when I was shown the gorgeous Tradition fusée; at £87,000, is it the best tourbillon on the market? Last year Longines impressed with almost everything offered, this year, aside from the Weems and lovely Diver re-issue, a disappointing sports range was unveiled. Glashütte as ever was a delight: the hand-painted porcelain dial on the Senator Meissen (no more than 100 will be made in a year) and the Senator Sixties' incredible caseback are already causing interest among collectors. The next 12 months hold a lot of promise as, behind the scenes, I was privileged to catch a glimpse of the Dent prototypes, a brand that should soon become rightfully prominent. ○