

What Would *You* Buy For £25k?

The advent of Jaeger-LeCoultre's new 'affordable' tourbillon got QP's writers wondering what they'd spend their city bonuses on...



The watch that got *famille QP* thinking: Jaeger-LeCoultre's Master Tourbillon in steel (£25,300). For deeper insight into the significance of this remarkable watch, see 'Setting Standards', Issue 21.

Jaeger-LeCoultre's Master Tourbillon was quite the most talked-about watch at the 2006 SIHH fair in Geneva, not for the engineering solutions that enabled Jaeger to become a series producer of tourbillons, nor for the near-perfect presentation of the watch itself. The point that caught everyone's attention was the price. How could Jaeger-LeCoultre even consider offering a tourbillon at such a low price? Would this not devalue the whole idea of tourbillons? It seemed that a strategy praised as radical when attempted by Swiss Time Technology in 2004 was bordering on heresy when adopted by Jaeger-LeCoultre - even

though the Jaeger-LeCoultre tourbillon was both more expensive and higher in value than the STT.

STT and the imminent arrival of Chinese-made tourbillons had already changed the perceived value of the tourbillon, but there is something else curious about the price of the Master Tourbillon. In pound sterling, the retail price is almost exactly £25,000, which puts the watch into an interesting bracket, as the responses below show. Above this level, price starts to become detached from measurable value; it effectively becomes an abstract quality. Who, after all, is to

say that a Richard Mille is worth €110,000 as opposed to the quoted €118,727? At lower levels, it is much easier to quantify value and price. A steel automatic chronograph priced above, say, £4,000 has to offer something specific to justify its value, compared to watches nearer the average. The question arose: what else might you buy instead?

We asked *QP* contributors to forget their mortgages and school fees and decide what they would spend £25,000 on. The results were interesting both in terms of variety and the light they shed on Jaeger's 'democratic' tourbillon.

Bat-Watch

Alex Doak

Strangely, the very day I sat down to write wistfully of my fantasy watch, *QP*'s London office enjoyed a surprise visit from the very watch brand I had chosen. And irritatingly, Urwerk's delightful PR, Yacine had brought with her something that easily topped the watch I was preparing to wax lyrical about - but something we can't reveal until the April-fairs embargo passes. So, for now, I'll just have to make do with Urwerk's well-established '103.07' in white gold (€41,400, ca £27,250), which, nonetheless, still outshines anything else in this price range for me.

Like Richard Mille and De Bethune (also notable here), Urwerk wears its modernity on its sleeve, unafraid to draw inspiration from anything outside traditional watchmaking (something that's becoming more and more important as the luxury watch industry settles into a healthy future). Architecture, astronomy, fighter jets and science fiction all combine with awesome menace on the 103.07. And though its 'orbiting satellites' or 'wandering hour' concept dates from the 1820s (Breguet, surprise, surprise), revived in the 1990s by Audemars Piguet's classical Star Wheel watches, Urwerk's approach seems so utterly unique and so, well... *cool*.

If you think the carousel dial's a gimmick, then it's one that I'm sure a few brands wish they'd thought of first. With characteristic foresight, one of Max Busser's last acts as head of Harry Winston Rare Timepieces was to get Urwerk's watchmaker, Felix Baumgartner on board for the most popular Opus collaboration yet. Opus V showed that Urwerk was anything but a one-trick



pony, with a completely new hour-satellites system - three rolling cubes instead of four spinning discs - proving Baumgartner's formidable horological talent beyond any doubt. Sure, a Patek, a Vacheron or an Audemars would be nice, but my £25,000 gets me a watch that has enjoyed contact with the talent himself. And Urwerk's independence (Baumgartner is an AHCI member) means production will stay low and exclusive. I could even visit the *atelier* and witness my new toy taking shape on the bench.

And since you're desperate to know, the watch Yacine showed us - the 201 'Hammerhead' - evolves Opus V's cube system, but within a watch that looks even more at home on Batman's utility belt than the 103.07. Given that Urwerk's first watch was inspired by the *Millennium Falcon*, it seems the boys will always have the best toys.

Watchmaker's Watch

Tim Treffry

An imaginary £25K to spend on a 'Dream Watch'? The Editor was clearly overcome by the season of goodwill! Given that 64% of the UK market is for watches priced below £30 this thousand-fold mark-up lifts us into the stratosphere and offers some mouthwatering possibilities. So what makes my mouth water?

"Look at me" watches seem to get heavier and heavier and with their sculptured interiors, reading the time becomes increasingly difficult. The cognoscenti are turning to simple two-handed watches that just tell the time and can be read at a glance. Vacheron Constantin wowed the horological press at the SIHH last year with its Patrimony Contemporaine - a simple two-handed manually wound slender watch in platinum. In a limited edition of 150, these discreet "I am a person of superior taste" watches can be had for £16,450.

As well as the time, it is also rather handy to know the date. If this is to be relied on, it must be based on a perpetual calendar mechanism (as befits a 'QP' dream watch). H Moser & Cie's 'Moser Perpetual 1' actually has five hands, but is in the spirit of a two-handed watch; three of them are very unobtrusive. As well as hour and minute hands there are slender hands for subsidiary seconds and up and down indication. The stubby fifth hand at the centre is unique in a watch, for this model has the most unobtrusive perpetual calendar available. The large date window at 3 o'clock conceals a patented 'flash date' mechanism, which, at the end of one month, will leap to the 1st of the next month in one smooth movement. That stubby little hand actually indicates the current month on the simple principle that there are 12 hours in the day and 12 months in the year. This elegant solution is used by German clockmaker Matthias Naeschke who helped independent young watchmaker, Andreas Strehler to design the Perpetual 1. Behind the dial it becomes clear that this is a 'watchmaker's watch'. The 18,000 vph hand-wound train has two spring barrels and a seven-day power reserve. The train wheels are hardened gold, as is the escape wheel, dispensing with the need to lubricate. The free-sprung balance is poised and timed by screws, and, for ease of service, the entire escapement assembly is a separate, removable unit. Unfortunately, at SFr.41,500 (ca £17,000), this watch doesn't spend all my dream money - but Moser has assured me that I can have a bespoke platinum dial for an extra £7,000!



Classic Allure

Imran Khan

You would assume that given a substantial budget like £25,000, it would be straightforward 'acquiring' your fantasy watch. Yet, initially at least, it caused quite a dilemma. The choice was whether I should favour an exotic *nouvelle complication* (preferably from an independent watchmaker) over a traditional mainstream classic.

Ultimately, the choice was made by answering a simple question: what would I procure if it were my money? Answer: A Lange & Söhne's sublime 'Datograph' chrono' in rose gold - conveniently retailing 'on the nail', at exactly £25,000!

But why this Lange? For starters, it represents the most splendid fusion of classicism, tradition and technical prowess. Generously but not ostentatiously proportioned at 39 mm, the Datograph was launched in 1999 in platinum with a black dial, outside date, flyback function and the patented precise jumping minute counter. The sapphire caseback allows visual inspection of the mesmerising, column-wheel calibre L951.1, finished so exquisitely that the master of finish himself, Philippe Dufour felt compelled enough to purchase his own Datograph - perhaps the ultimate seal of approval! His choice was rose gold with a black dial, made between 2003 and 2005, known today by collectors as the 'Dufour Dato'.

Whilst this version has been retired, the platinum and rose-gold models with silver dial fulfill Lange's need for a traditional chronograph. Although the platinum version currently retails for £32,000, those who do not have the prejudice of only owning new watches can acquire a used example for around our budget.

Purchase of the Datograph demands patience, however. Lange's total production rarely exceeds 5,000 pieces per annum and encompasses as many as 24 different movement types. So relatively few examples of my dream watch leave the Glashütte *manufacture* in the first place. But if you're looking to acquire a Datograph, you've made an important choice; you will be investing in what should become one of the most revered chronographs of the 21st century, whilst simultaneously savouring one of the most alluring chronographs ever created. Who said you can't buy with your heart *and* your head?



Fierce Intellect

Claire Adler

The Richard Mille 007 (white-gold with diamonds, £26,150) is probably not the easiest watch to wear. Its style and shape are bold and graphic and it won't suit every woman; it's far too sophisticated for that. But then again, I suppose that's why I have found myself admiring it.

Firstly, it's a rare find. Richard Mille produced his first watch, a tourbillon, in 2001, but the company still produces only

900 watches a year. Mille's aim is to be to watches what Ferrari and McLaren are to the automotive industry - performance-oriented, technologically advanced and innovative players. It's no surprise then, that the materials in this, his only ladies' watch, are as atypical as his men's models. This is still a timepiece with feminine sensibilities, however.

While unusual to find hardwearing grade V titanium in a woman's watch - it would generally be steel - the titanium components help to keep the watch light. A patented rotor system contains tiny free-moving gold ball bearings, which

help to absorb shocks, as well as adding a fabulous visual dimension to the caseback. They wind the watch generously with relatively little movement required from the wearer - perfect for the lady of leisure, regardless of the extreme tolerances the watch is designed to.

For a woman to choose this watch, I think the prerequisites are a fearless quality and a sense of personal accomplishment. This is a watch for the woman who knows what she wants - and in short, she wants it all. Striking, distinguished, unforgettable looks, a splash of diamonds and a fierce intellect, all wrapped up in a Richard Mille watch.





Exquisite Egg Timer

Simon de Burton

The arrival of Jaeger-LeCoultre's £25,000 tourbillon has left me distinctly unmoved. In fact, if J-LC had announced a £2,500 tourbillon I could scarcely have been less interested, because this is one complication I can definitely live without in a wristwatch.

Come to think of it, when it comes to wristwatches, you can keep your minute repeaters, your moonphases and your perpetual calendars and lock them away, out of sight, along with your skeleton movements and your openworked dials: I just don't like all this, well, complication. Not on a wristwatch, at any rate. It's an entirely different matter on a pocket watch (the only place where a tourbillon remains justified) and where, because everything is on a grander scale, the true beauty of the works can be properly admired without squinting through a jeweller's loupe.

So, now that my colours are well and truly nailed to the mast, here's what I'll be buying with my imaginary £25,000: a Vacheron Constantin Chronographe Malte from the Excellence Platine collection.

Yes, I know a chronograph counts as a complication - it is, in fact, one of the most complicated complications of all to achieve in a wristwatch (not that the tourbillon boys will admit it) - but at least it's a useful one that will tell you when your egg's had three minutes or how much off the pace you are around the International Circuit at Silverstone.

But beyond this, I just love the simplicity of this watch, from its clear and functional dial (hewn from platinum, too) and the telemetric scale that adds a slightly vintage flavour, to the subtly flared lugs of the flawless case.

Inside is Vacheron's long-proven hand-wound calibre 1141, which can be seen in all its glory thanks to the crystal caseback and pleasing absence of a winding rotor. I'm already looking forward to the daily ritual of re-charging, although the power reserve is more than adequate at 48 hours.

Would I change anything? Well, the standard dark-blue alligator strap is perfect so that must definitely stay. But to make my Malte even more low-key, the "PT 950" could be left off the dial. Other than that, no.

Price-wise I'd go over-budget buying here in the UK where the watch retails at £29,500. But a daytrip to Europe could secure one for €37,470 (currently circa £24,600), while in Switzerland it's cheaper still at SFr.57,700 (around £23,400). For a platinum chronograph from such an elite brand, this seems entirely reasonable to me - and with just 75 being made, it will definitely hold its value and very likely increase.

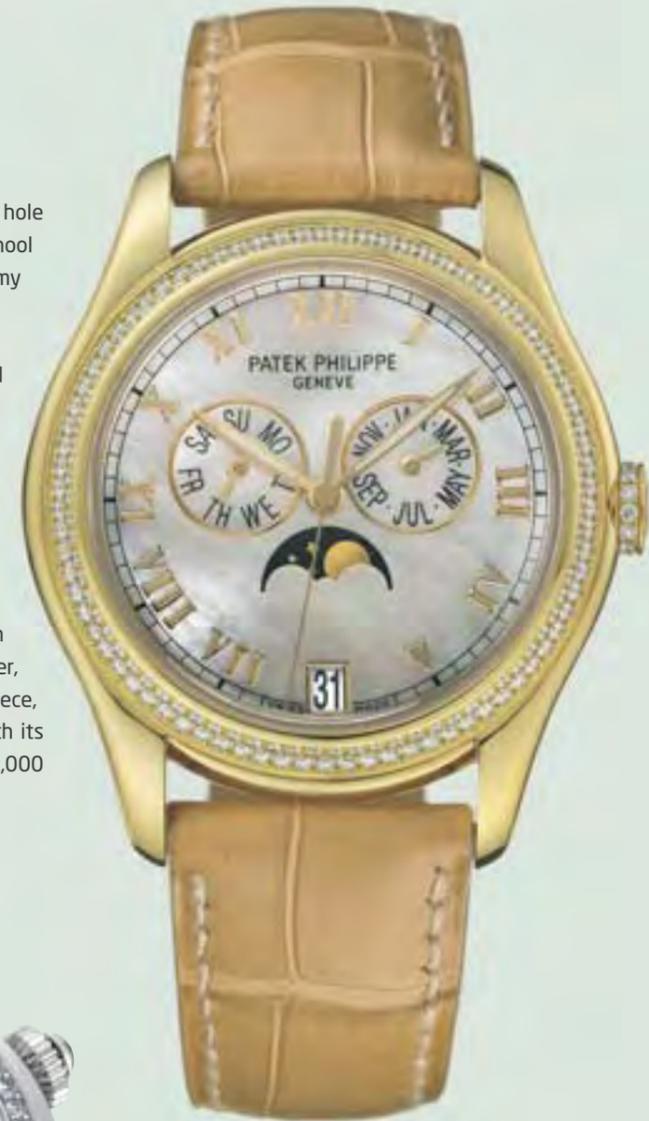
That makes it a far better investment than any 'bargain basement' tourbillon.

Hypothetical City Girl

Maria Doulton

Were I ever to find myself in the situation of having £25,000 burning a hole in my pocket and assuming that the boiler had been replaced and school fees fully paid up for the next decade, how would I choose to wear my wealth and incisive watch knowledge on my wrist?

Not such an easy question as, believe it or not, bar fully loaded diamond pieces, there is not that much on offer for women in the £25,000 category. Once you hit the £15,000 mark, the offer seems to fizzle away. For many years now, I have lusted after a mechanical Vacheron Constantin Egerie with a rippling engraved dial that catches the light like the dunes of the Sahara, set onto a voluptuous tonneau case. Very sexy, but it only clocks in at around £10,000. I could really see Patek Philippe's first ultra-slim watch for women, the Calatrava ref. 4896, glistening discreetly from under my cuff. The wave pattern engraved on the dial shimmers with a tantalising sheen of midnight-blue lacquer, surrounded by a discreet ring of diamonds. A seriously elegant timepiece, but a mere £10,275. Even A Lange & Söhne's delicate little Soirée with its pretty mother-of-pearl dial and diamonds only just makes the £20,000 mark - not enough for Hypothetical City Girl.



Short of raiding the boy's watch box, which would be cheating (and since you ask, something appropriately fabulous from FP Journe) I continued my hunt and came up with Patek Philippe's ref. 4936 annual calendar in yellow gold with a mother-of-pearl dial and a sensible smattering of diamonds. And the £17,200 price tag leaves me enough change for the new dove-grey and pink Audemars Piguet Millenary (£6,950) to wear during the day... or for a new boiler.

Made in England

Alan Downing

For an alluring moment, I thought the Editor wanted me to write about the watch I wouldn't wear, even if you paid me £25,000. A dozen brands blinged enticingly to mind.

Alas, it turned out to be the opposite: "Write about a watch you would love and treasure for ever," was the final instruction. So I'm condemned to inflict on you, the reader, the most eyeglazing subject known to horology - somebody else's favourite watch. And I assure you, it is quite unlike the Zenith Starissime Tourbillon.

I could easily swap my world-beating collection of Swiss Army toothpicks for a watch like the one my grandfather wore - a massive lump of gold with a snow-white face and black markings. It was one of the last hand-made English pocket watches - to my mind the finest ever built. The craftsmen of Coventry and Clerkenwell knew that they had created the perfect watch, because the design stayed basically the same for 50 years. It was as plain as possible, with the characteristic spherical, deeply grooved crown. The numerals were nearly always Roman, the hands and screws blued, the jewels bushed and the plates frosted.

But the solid Victorian craftsmanship was too good and too expensive to compete against cheap, machine-made watches from Switzerland and the US. The English watch industry died, but no enamel has since matched the creamy texture of the Willis dial, and solid three-quarter-plate movements - now a century old - are only just getting into their stride.



Sold last year at Antiquorum for HK\$295,000, this detent keyless chronometer tourbillon was made between 1904 and 1905 by Nicole, Nielsen & Co. - perhaps the leading complication makers of 19th century London.

So if Santa loves me at all, he will bring a big, gold open-faced English pocket watch with a Willis dial, and a massive case by Thoms, Oliphant or similar. The movement? It has to be a chronometer - the highest calling for a watch. If the budget does not stretch to a tourbillon, an English detent escapement will do nicely, with free-sprung balance of course, fusée, and at least a grade 'A' Kew Observatory rating. And I promise to love and treasure it forever.

Dreaming of Delhi

Bill Prince

In my other life as a 'reservoir poodle' on *GQ*, I'm often called-upon to dispense hard-won wisdom on any number of male-oriented topics. And I recall on one occasion a writer seeking my advice on a good barber in the vicinity of Mayfair. Unhesitatingly, I suggested Ian Matthew, formerly of Curzon Street's legendary Trumper's, then on his own patch in Maddox Street (I wonder where he is now?). Anyway, encouraged by his grateful response, I further counselled the hirsute individual that Ian also offered a 'blinding' (it was the Nineties after all) wet shave - a fatally unbidden remark that earned me a look of equal-parts scorn and very real concern. "I can shave myself thank you," came the withering reply.

Which is rather how I look at world-timer watches. Yes, they are an undeniably attractive complication (not since the heady days of long-wave wirelesses have so many out-of-the-way places figured quite so prominently in our lives), but do I really need one? After all, I am equipped with a passable facility for mental arithmetic, and even when recently presented with the challenge of calculating home time from Delhi (a brain-frying five-and-a-half hours ahead) I resorted to a technique I learnt during a seminar on A Lange & Söhne's handsome Lange 1 Time Zone in Geneva a couple of years ago - I wore my watch upside down for the duration.

But if I were to do the required 'man maths' and legitimise the expenditure of £25,000 on a watch, it would have to be a world-timer. There's just something ineffably romantic about imagining that on a daily basis, I might need to know the time in Cairo or Caracas, Durban or Detroit.



So, if pushed (and having checked the price of a used Maserati 3200GT, I would need to be) I would take the Patek Philippe World Time 5130G. I note it's currently on sale for around £16,585, so I'd better be having it in platinum [sadly discontinued in 2005]. That's my watch: a possibly superfluous complication that nevertheless looks, well, blinding.

Bill Prince is Deputy Editor of GQ



Deliriously Cool

Ken Kessler

When *QP's* contributors were asked to come up with a dream watch for £25,000, I was stumped: £25,000 is far beyond the retail price of anything I covet in current production. I am notorious for my distrust of complications beyond chronograph and GMT. Aside from rare vintage items, every watch I desire is under £10,000.

Then I remembered what had me salivating at last year's Basel watch event. While it falls short at 'only' €24,500 (ca £16,100), thoughts of De Bethune's deliriously cool DB20 GMT Automatic draw me weekly towards the Lotto counter at WH Smith.

De Bethune itself appeals to me due to my respect for Head of Development and Production, Denis Flageollet and Chief Executive David Zanetta [see p.84 for the interview]. With greater rapidity than any brand I can name, they have created an entire family of all-new, in-house movements. Their watches look like no other, they always have a new take on the way the functions operate, they bow to no one.

With the DB20, De Bethune has broken away from the classic look of the earlier models, creating a new aesthetic for a sporting watch. The 45 mm white-gold/palladium case (a steel/titanium version will follow) is home to the new DB2024 automatic calibre with titanium/platinum rotor, self-adjusting barrel, titanium balance bridge and a host of other proprietary elements.

Seductive details? How about power reserve, jumping-hour GMT mechanism with display for day and night, futuristically shaped hands, sandblasted steel dial accented by blued titanium spheres every 10 minutes, *ad infinitum*. But the clincher is the way it feels *in situ*. Bluntly put, they had to prise the prototype off my wrist. For a DB20, I'd even sleep with Cherie Blair... ○