

Would I wear an MT? Never – but I want one as a desk clock that I can pick up and admire for its over-engineered beauty. This is the Peterbilt truck of timekeeping.

Tooling up

Except BRM isn't really an 'upstart' at all. It may be fewer than five years since the first BRM-dialled watch was created, but Richards has been at this game for a good deal longer than that – about 30 years longer, to be precise.

Having been fascinated by mechanical objects since first becoming obsessed with motorcycles at the age of 12, Richards enrolled at horological school in Paris when he was 18 to work in the family watch business. This occupied him until his late twenties, when he moved out of the French capital and into 'la campagne' where he set-up his own tooling company, making pens, lighters, cufflinks and other luxury goods – as well as complete watches – for firms he'll only describe cryptically as "big names who would not like me to tell you who they are".



(Above and right) Details from BRM's big hitter at Basel last year – the V8 engine-inspired 'MT' (€9,300). Instead of lugs rammed into the titanium case, each element is made separately at BRM, and screwed on via complex means. Thus, it is possible to assemble different materials and colours (e.g. black-titanium case and polished stainless-steel lugs, or grey-titanium case and polished stainless-steel lugs, etc.).

"We used to turn out thousands and thousands of pieces each year – we even made components for luxury car companies; such as dashboards for a British manufacturer with a two-part name and connections with James Bond," explains Richards, not quite so cryptically. "But the problem with working for other people is that they are always unhappy – they always want things more quickly, or more cheaply, or in greater or lesser numbers. And that led me to think that what I really wanted to do was to make my own products the way I wanted to, with my own name on them. So one day I did. I made my own watch, just for me – and everyone who saw it said they wanted one!"

Driver's choice

That was back in 2002. Within 12 months, production of BRM watches was underway with the first commercial model, the GP-44. Forty-two examples were delivered that first year. Since then, demand and production figures have risen almost vertically to the point where more than 2,000 watches were completed last year across a 12-model range, with each model available in several different guises.



(Above) Just a few miles from Paris, BRM's small but perfectly formed *manufacture*, where all of the watch cases' industrial-strength components are engineered to demanding tolerances.

(Left) V12-44 BOU Racing (€13,250), limited to 45 editions. 'JPC 7753' movement modified and assembled by master watchmaker Jean-Paul Crabbe.



Richards has now abandoned all other aspects of his business to concentrate exclusively on the production of BRM watches and many of their components, for which he has a purpose-built workshop around 60 miles outside Paris at Magny-en-Vexin, housing a dedicated team of 13 employees and no fewer than 14 CNC machines.

"While it is true to say we offer 12 different models, the peculiarity of our brand is that there is no specific watch you have to buy – you can specify the colours you want, the shape of the hands, the type of strap. We don't actually have any watches in stock at all, because each one is produced for the individual customer. It means there is a four-month waiting list for models such as the MT, for which it takes nine hours of continuous machining just to make one caseback. But that is my concept of luxury," explains Richards.

Enzo Ferrari always said that he liked to make one less car than he knew he could sell, and BRM, too, seems to have found itself in the happy position of demand exceeding supply.

"I don't believe it is an exaggeration to say that our watches are currently the hottest timepieces in the motorsport world. At the 2006 24 Heures du Mans, there were eight different drivers wearing BRM watches, and all out of their own choice. People like the brand because it is small and because they know they are not going to see the same watch that they own on someone else's wrist," says Richards who, despite its apparent potential, insists his company will remain a low-volume producer.



(Above) From BRM's first collection, the GP-44 111 (€6,350), powered – as in all BRM chronographs – by ETA's Valjoux 7753 movement. The black-titanium case is shaped like a piston, assembled with screws specially manufactured with three holes (a feature that requires 12 times the machining time of normal screws).

Sheer audacity

At last year's Baselworld, BRM wowed the crowds with the aforementioned MT; an eyepopping 51 mm-by-49 mm monster based on a V8 engine block. Richards was hoping against hope that he might take 50 orders for the MT during Baselworld. By the end of the show, he was committed to producing 162 pieces.

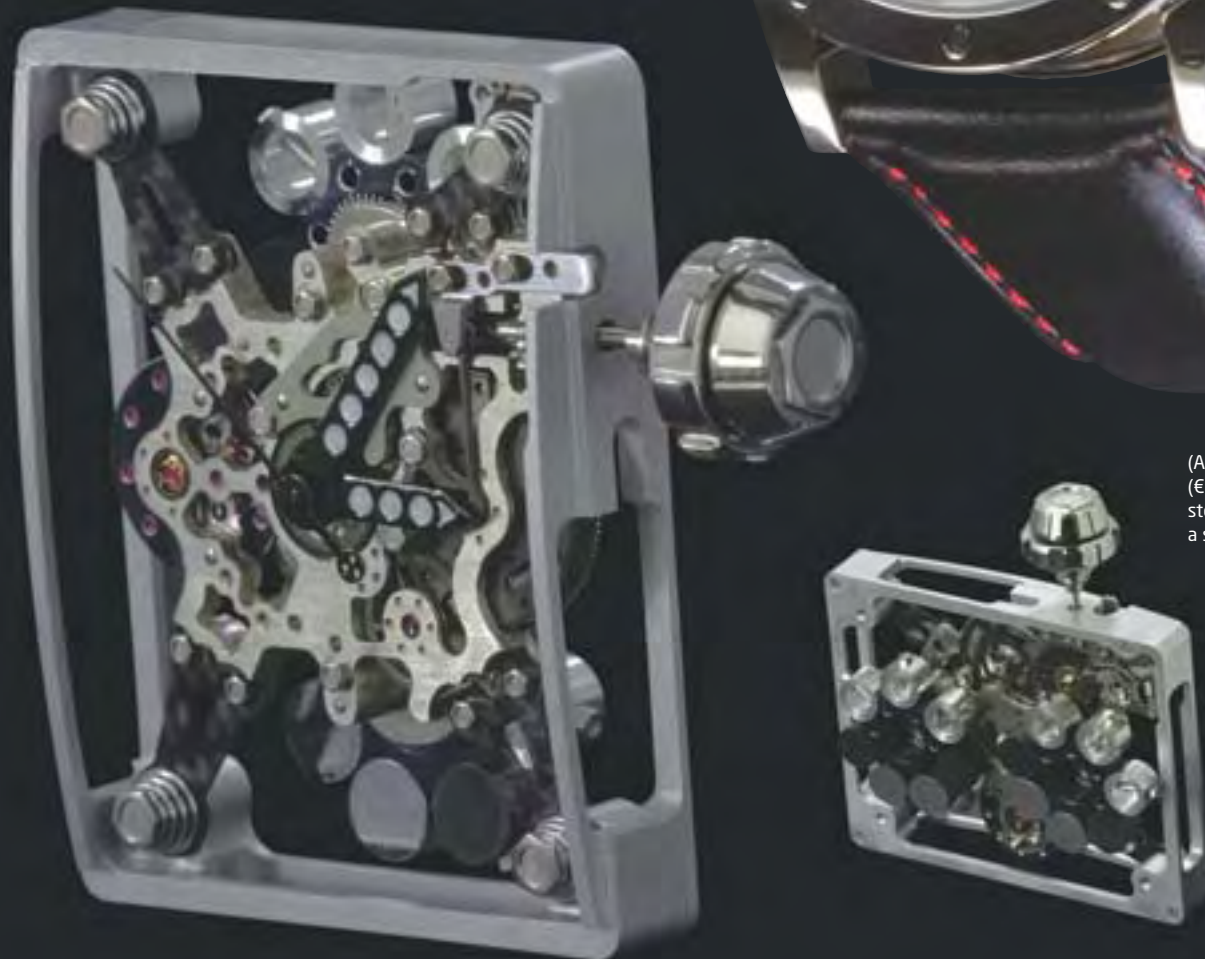
Its sharply angled chronograph push-pieces are like miniature pistons and the sides of the grade II titanium case resemble rocker covers. Would I wear one? Never - but I want one, just because I love its sheer audacity and the power of its construction. I want it as a desk

BRM Birotor Precitime Movement

- Suspended on carbon-fibre triangles
- Shock absorbers with cone-shaped spring ('isolastic system')
- Differential automatic Birotor mechanism
- ARCAP plate and bridges (hard-wearing nickel-copper alloy)
- Lightened motor structure
- Double ceramic rotor bearings
- Fortale HR rotor hubs
- Tantalum rotor bob weights



(Above) The WL-44-01 (€2,850) has a sandblasted steel dial shaped to emulate a sports steering wheel.



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The least expensive models in the BRM range are the 44 mm V6 and 38 mm V7 (BRM's one concession to the Penelope Pitstops of the world), which both boast the trademark case shaped like a sectioned piston, and the 'racing numbers' dial. Though starting from a

mere €2,550, the engineering details are still exceptional - check out the screw-fit lugs and the 12-piece buckle.

Other models include the WL (shaped like a steering wheel), the SCR (like a central wheel nut) and, latest of all, the high-end rectangular Birotor - set to cost up to €72,500 in platinum when the first models are released in April (from €38,000 in titanium and stainless steel).

You may agree that it looks pretty spectacular, but just wait until Baselworld 2007: "The new watch we have planned for this year's show is going to send everyone crazy - there is absolutely nothing like it on the market," promises Richards.

Best pack your toolbox now. And include some mighty big spanners. ◯



(Left) One of BRM's few concessions to the Penelope Pitstops of this world: the V7-38 GTB-RF (€3,500), whose 'mere' 38 mm diameter case is set with fuchsia rubies.

(Right) SCR-48 CO Racing (limited to 100 pieces; €14,350), whose 48 mm titanium case is shaped like a racing car's central wheel nut. Note the carbon-fibre inserts on the caseband. Like the V12-44 BOU Racing, Jean-Paul Crabbe has modified its Valjoux 7753 movement.

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