

And the Winner is...*

Mingling with the watch world's movers and shakers at November's glitzy Grand Prix

Maria Doulton

Brandishing his golden statue on a stage before an audience of 1,500, flanked by gorgeous girls in sparkly, cleavage-enhancing evening gowns, the handsome silver-haired winner comments, "Tonight is Oscar night."

And we could well be in Hollywood, with the glitzy set-up: red carpet, paparazzi, the black suits and evening dresses, explosions of clapping following the famous words, "And the winner is..." But look again, and rather than scrubbed-up stars of the screen, it is actually the great and good of the watch industry, gathered for the Swiss version of the Oscars. Observe closely and the silver-haired gentleman is in fact François-Paul Journe, collecting his prize, the 'Golden Hand' (too heavy to be carried off the stage); on the podium

a clock whirrs around at random, disconcertingly clockwise *and* anti-clockwise. Then again, earlier clues such as the child band and a dignitary wearing a yellow and red cape and a Napoleon-style hat might have sufficed to indicate this is far from California dreaming.

For the sixth year in a row, the watch industry has come together for the Grand Prix d'Horlogerie de Genève, organised by the authorities of the city in conjunction with *Tribune des Arts*. "It is getting better," comments one industry leader who prefers to remain anonymous. "Before, they were giving out prizes to keep everyone happy. Still, winning a prize doesn't really make any difference to how many watches you sell."



Men's Watch Prize
Roger Dubuis
Excalibur
(SFr.51,700)

Rubbing shoulders

Whether it makes any difference to your business or not, the dinner that followed the award ceremony at the Grand Théâtre in Geneva, was wall-to-wall watch-house CEOs. Hamdi Chatti, my host and Director of Harry Winston Rare Timepieces is on my right. From the next table along, the lively Caroline Gruosi-Scheufele, Co-President of Chopard winks at me. Jean-Claude Biver of Hublot is in his trademark black polo-neck playing the star, undeterred by the fact that this year, alas, no prize. Two tables along, Bernard Fornas, number one at Cartier is chewing on a piece of bread and, though out of sight, I can hear Jean-Christophe Babin of TAG Heuer laughing over the roving tuba and banjo players (I kid you not), happy with his prize for Best Sports Watch, the Carrera Calibre 360.

Thierry Nataf of Zenith is more dapper than ever in head-to-foot Hedi Slimane,

Gino Macaluso of Girard-Perregaux is engaged in intense conversation with British author and *QP* contributor, Nick Foulkes, while Fabian Krone of A Lange & Söhne smiles happily, glass of wine in hand, surrounded by his colleagues from Glashütte. The jovial Jean-Claude Pittard from *Tribune des Arts* - weekly cultural supplement to *La Tribune de Genève*, which has engineered this evening since 2001 - is, with characteristic Swiss neutrality, wearing a transparent plastic watch.

"If the roof were to cave in, the Swiss watch industry would disappear," jokes Gianluca Maina, Marketing Director of Harry Winston, between the foie gras starter and roast veal course.

So why are they all here? Probably because it is the only Swiss watch industry award with any significant international presence, and to not support it would be churlish. Or as Carlos Dias, at the helm of Roger Dubuis, so eloquently stated when picking up his prize for Best Men's Watch: "It is the first time we have participated. It was not because we were boycotting the awards but because we have been so busy developing and verticalising our company." You get the scene: don't rock the boat and use those precious podium minutes for some corporate trumpet



Grand Prix L'Aiguille d'Or
FP Journe
Sonnerie
Souveraine
(SFr.650,000)



Special Jury Prize
A Lange & Söhne
Tourbograph
'Pour le Mérite'
(€380,000)



Ladies' Watch Prize
Patek
Philippe Gondolo
Gemma ref. 4991
(£12,100)



A gong for his gongs: Journe won the Grand Prix' top prize, L'Aiguille d'Or, for his grande and petite sonnerie clockwatch, the Sonnerie Souveraine.

Watch Design Prize
Cartier Santos
Mystérieuse
(£79,900)



Ultra-thin Watch Prize
Chopard LUC Extra
Plate (€4,700)





(Above left) "If the roof were to cave in, the Swiss watch industry would disappear" (Left to right) Zenith's CEO Thierry Nataf, Chopard Co-President Caroline Guوسي-Scheufele, François-Paul Journe, Patek Philippe Vice President Thierry Stern, and CEO of TAG Heuer, Jean-Christophe Babin.



(Above right) As well as the hospitality, Babin clearly enjoyed his Best Sports Watch prize, for the Carrera 360 - TAG's 100th-of-a-second mechanical chronograph.



Jewellery Watch Prize
Piaget
Limelight Party
(SFr.37,700)



Complicated Watch Prize
H Moser & Cie
Perpetual 1
(SFr.32,000)



Sports Watch Prize
TAG Heuer Carrera
Calibre 360 (€10,995)



Public Prize
Breguet Classique
5177 (€11,300)

blowing. Babin, in his trademark red glasses, bounded onto the stage and ably used his allotted minutes to whisk us through a breathless 360,000-oscillations-per-hour history of timing and TAG Heuer's contribution. Guوسي-Scheufele click-clacked onto the stage in high-heeled boots and collected the prize for her brother's double-barrelled LUC 'Extra Plate' - a pleasant surprise for LUC, coinciding nicely with its 10th anniversary (see Issue 22).

The jury's out

So is this really just a parochial exercise in mutual backslapping? Although undoubtedly there is an element of 'taking it in turns', with the same big names fêted each year, it is not a closed shop. Lange & Söhne's Krone remarked that the fact a German company won the Special Jury's Prize for the Tourbograph 'Pour le Mérite' shows that "the jury are flexible and open to awarding prizes to 'different' brands". And to further prove the point, the microphone was lowered to Asian height during the 'Best Electronic Watch' acceptance speech, for Shu Yoshino of Seiko. And it is not all about big names. This year, relatively tiny concern, H Moser & Cie won the prize for Best Complication and Honorary President of the Board,

Roger Nicholas Balsiger confessed to being absolutely dumbfounded.

But who decides on the winners? According to the organizers, the jury are all "connoisseurs of horology" and this year's eclectic line-up included Japanese, British and Russian journalists and editors, a director from antique watch specialists Bobinet, London, as well as collectors and a lecturer from the University of Hong Kong. The general public even had a say, too. And in contrast to all the exotic winners, they chose Breguet's sober Classique 5177 - a fairly safe bet (despite being kitted-out with an escapement wheel and anchor in *matériel du jour* silicon), and a phenomenon repeated year after year, which suggests that either the public (and those presumably who buy the watches) hasn't a clue, or that the jury really doesn't know best. ○

Electronic Watch Prize
Seiko Electronic Ink
(€1,000)

