

Squaring Off



The Reverso might be 75, but it is far from flagging. Jaeger-LeCoultre has once again proved the durability of its iconic reversible wristwatch with a host of new models, boasting peepshow enamel dials and an awe-inspiring three-faced grande complication - that eventually became QP's most popular watch of the April fairs. At the vanguard however is a model that departs alarmingly from the Reverso's familiar rectangularity and art deco temperament; a very modern machine of imposing proportions, "conceived with men in mind." QP squares up to the Squadra, polo stick in hand.

Simon de Burton



(Far right) The 75th anniversary of Jaeger-LeCoultre's Reverso is being marked in suitable style this year. Most notable of the new products is the square-faced 'Squadra', available in three models - Hometime, Chronograph GMT and, pictured here, the World Chrono in titanium (£8,700), limited to 1,000 examples.

(Right) The Squadra Hometime (from £3,250), in the mid-size Squadra case, with silvered guilloché dial. The am/pm indicator for the second time-zone is at 9 o'clock, balanced aesthetically and legibly by the date at 3.



The World Chronograph is simply exquisite in construction. Opting to engineer an already-complicated case from titanium is a tribute to the brand.

(Above) The Squadra World Chrono's caseback displays a world-time disc bearing the names of every time-zone's major city within a 24-hour collar, allowing the time to be read-off for any given corner of the globe. A transparent disc placed over the cities serves as a day/night indicator.

The tale of how the Reverso was invented to satisfy the demands of British polo players in colonial India for a smash-proof sports watch has become something of a horological legend. So it was no surprise that Jaeger-LeCoultre chose Rajasthan for the unveiling of several new versions to mark the model's 75th anniversary.

An impressive display of polo prowess in the Maharaj Sir Pratap Singh cup match at New Delhi's historic Jaipur ground set the scene before the covers were drawn back, to reveal that the highly anticipated new Reverso was, rather shockingly, square.

According to Jaeger-LeCoultre's CEO Jerome Lambert, a patent for a square-cased Reverso was granted simultaneously with that of the now-familiar rectangular model. Yet, in the brand's official words, "It was felt that the time was not yet ripe to introduce a timepiece of such uncompromisingly modern proportions."

Since the rectangular Reverso was entirely modern when it was launched in 1931, by virtue of its unique flip-over case and quintessential art deco styling, the suggestion that a square version might be too *avant-garde* seems odd. One was left wondering whether or not it was left on the drawing board simply because it was less appealing.

The square Reverso for the 21st century is called the 'Squadra' and comes in three versions: the two-time-zone Hometime, the Chronograph GMT and the titanium World Chronograph, which is limited to 1,000 pieces. Instead of being bowled over by its freshness and audacity, I was left with a puzzling feeling of *deja vu* - eventually accounted for by the realisation that the Squadra reminded me both of JeanRichard's Paramount and the Girard-Perregaux Vintage 1945.

What you don't get in either of the others, of course, is the flip-over case or, indeed, the superlative engineering and finish of Jaeger-LeCoultre. The World Chronograph is simply exquisite in construction; a tribute to the brand in opting to create an already-complicated case from difficult-to-work titanium.

The action of sliding the case to one side and turning it over - always irresistible with any Reverso - reveals on the World Chronograph caseback a sapphire crystal, beneath which is a beautifully detailed world-time disc driven from the same movement as that for the main time display, chronograph, day and night indicator and large date functions.

Behind closed curtains

Engineering brilliance aside, the aesthetic of a square-cased Reverso provoked something of a lukewarm reaction here at QP. However, it has been exceptionally well received by retailers such as Jeremy Pragnell of Pragnell's in Stratford-upon-Avon, who expects the model to be one of the outlet's best sellers.

(Right and below) Two of the first Reverso models, born out of Colonial India in 1931, where polo was popular amongst British officers, adopted from the team sport played by the ruling class of princes and sultans from Persia to the limits of Arabia and Tibet. In 1930, Swiss watch distributor César de Trey visited India, where a polo player showed him the smashed glass of his watch (crystal sapphire was yet to be developed) and challenged him to create a timepiece that would survive a game undamaged. César de Trey entrusted the work to an engineer named René-Alfred Chauvot, who applied for a patent for "a watch capable of sliding into its base and of turning completely on its axis." César de Trey knew that Jacques-David LeCoultre's workshops were the only ones that harboured the necessary expertise to produce appropriately high quality movements. The rest, to use the cliché, is history.

Jaeger-LeCoultre has not forgotten about traditionalists such as us, however. It has also produced some interesting new variations on the rectangular-cased Reverso to acknowledge its 75-year milestone; one of the most appealing being the Reverso à éclipses model, which harks back to a concept first explored by the manufacture in 1910.

As its name suggests, the Reverso à éclipses is a shutter-dial watch in which a delicate 'louvre blind' arrangement beneath the crystal can be made to open and close by turning a tiny knurled wheel on the top edge of the case. Such a mechanism was first used on pocket watches in the 19th century, but recreating it on the small scale of a wristwatch has necessitated a down-scaling of the already delicate chain and cog arrangement that makes it work. The Reverso à éclipses pulls it off superbly, with a gentle revolution of the wheel parting and closing the shutters in a delightfully smooth action to reveal the enamelled dial beneath.

The different 'official' themes available for dial decoration include 'Voyages of Discovery', 'Chinese Zodiac' and 'Famous Nudes,' the latter inspired by various celebrated paintings. Special commissions will, however, be welcomed (in the same vein as the enamelled or engraved casebacks of standard Reversos) but it remains to be seen whether or not the enamellers at Jaeger are sufficiently broad-minded to produce the type of erotic scenes that add a delicious sense of mischief to the already-playful 'Famous Nudes'.





Three-faced

In addition to these flagship models, Jaeger also introduced new takes on its ladies' Reverso models, using India as a spectacular backdrop to the revamped, gem-set versions of the Lady Jewellery and twin-dialled Duetto Duo models. However, we had to wait until Geneva's SIHH fair in April for the true *pièce de résistance* of the Reverso range.

We had been promised something special, and we were not disappointed. As you might have already read in our 'Postcards' pages, the Reverso grande complication à triptyque was my top watch of the SIHH because, not only is it a genius piece of engineering, it is a brilliant tribute to a horological icon and, best of all, it is rectangular - just like a proper Reverso should be.

(Above left) A cheeky offering from Jaeger, the Reverso à éclipses, which uses a new shutter-dial system (platinum 950 model pictured; £47,000). The manufacture's enamellers have paid homage to the "beauty and divinity of the human body" in a series of nudes inspired by the works of Renoir, Ingres, Klimt and the anonymous masters of the Kama Sutra and traditional Mogul art. (Above right) The new Reverso Duetto Duo (from £7,950) combines subtle femininity with the practicality of a dual time-zone, found on the caseback.

Not only is the Triptyque a genius piece of engineering, it is a brilliant tribute to an icon. And best of all, it is rectangular - like a proper Reverso should be.

(Right) The grande complication à triptyque is the first Reverso - and possibly the first watch - to have three faces. Developed over three and a half years, with six new patents, only 75 examples of this 18-complication, €450,000 platinum watch will be made. A new 'ellipse isometer' escapement does away with the traditional Swiss pallet, eradicating the impacts on the mechanism normally caused by classical detached escapements, and reducing the seconds hand's 'gallop'. The blocking-lever arm and escape wheel are also made of silicon, requiring no lubrication, and the tourbillon cage is made of titanium. The whole mechanism comes to just 0.29 g.

(Far right) On the Triptyque's caseback, a disc in an oval aperture represents the angular displacement of the constellations, adjusted for either the northern or southern hemisphere, depending on where the watch's owner lives. Also displayed are the signs of the zodiacs, and the equation of time (indicated by the 'Sun' hand), which shows the difference between mean and true solar time. Ingeniously, the perpetual calendar born by the Reverso's carriage communicates with the movement via a lever that descends from the case into a notch at midnight, advancing the retrograde date, day, month and moonphase.



The 'Triptyque' name gives it away as being a watch with not just two, but three dials, driven from a movement which can claim true 'grande complication' status - featuring, as it does, a tourbillon with a detached escapement on the main dial side and a zodiacal calendar, equation of time and sunrise and sunset on the reverse. On the third dial - set into the base of the carriage holding the main case - is a perpetual calendar activated once a day by energy transmitted from the main movement.

What Jaeger-LeCoultre is calling its 'ellipse isometer' escapement is a new, shock-resistant

version of the detached escapement, originally favoured for marine chronometers but previously considered unsuitable for wristwatches as sharp impacts can cause it to run fast. The fact that it has been successfully adapted for a Reverso seems particularly appropriate, as the original was, after all, intended to be capable of sustaining knocks and jolts.

Just 75 examples of this masterpiece will be made, each costing an entirely understandable €450,000. None are likely to be spotted mid-chukka atop a polo pony. ○

(Left to right) An enamel miniature is revealed from behind the Reverso à éclipses' two-part 'eclipse' curtain (pink-gold version pictured; £18,000) - an idea first explored in 1910, when Jaeger produced a pocket watch with a similar mechanism. 'Open sesame' merely requires a gentle rolling motion applied to the rowel located on the side of the Reverso case at 1 o'clock.

Further information: Jaeger-LeCoultre, Tel: 0800 587 3420, www.jaeger-lecoultre.com