

Flying 1st Class

The 'winged Bs' continue to gain altitude

Nicholas Foulkes

Driving non-stop from London to La Chaux-de-Fonds in one day might normally sound foolish. But when your means of conveyance is a bespoke Bentley Arnage T limousine, and your final destination promises an exclusive glimpse of Breitling's latest tribute to the car-maker from Crewe, you wouldn't hesitate. Never one to disappoint its readers, *QP* took this arduous task upon itself, and discovered some radical thinking behind the next Breitling for Bentley project, the Mark VI. As for the road trip, everything went as smoothly, and luxuriously, as expected. Save for one hairy encounter with a pot of yoghurt...



New for 2006 is the Breitling for Bentley Mark VI, commemorating the 60th anniversary of Bentley's Crewe factory, whose first production vehicle was the Mark VI. This model lends the Breitling for Bentley range a new retro feel.



(Above) Nick Foulkes and Breitling's UK boss, Count Franz La Rosee at their final destination in La Chaux-de-Fonds, next to their trusty steed - a Bentley Arnage limousine.



(Left) The new Mark VI inside the Arnage T limousine. Twenty-five layers of tulipwood are used to create the substrate for a Bentley veneer.

the job," I asserted helpfully. It is the last time I present a customs official with a dairy product. On seeing the yoghurt, his suspicions seemed confirmed; perhaps he had been tipped off that two Al Qaeda operatives - one Count Franz La Rosee, Breitling's man in Great Britain, and Nick Foulkes, special correspondent for *QP* - would attempt to enter Switzerland at around 9pm one November evening in a Bentley with carmine upholstery and a yoghurt of mass destruction. Searches were conducted, and passports were checked and re-checked. I do not think his mood was improved when, having asked if we had any papers for the vehicle, I handed him the instructions for the DVD player and Sat Nav. He got particularly upset when I then tried to film his searches.

Eventually he let us go, and at around 10pm - some two tanks of petrol, four Havana cigars, 12 hours, 43 minutes and 57 seconds after we had left London - we sat down to dinner at the Hotel Les Endroits in the hills above La Chaux-de-Fonds.

Travelling in style

The idea of driving a Bentley from London to La Chaux-de-Fonds had come up in discussion some months earlier. Car and watch partnerships are now an accepted part of the marketing repertoire for both high-end horology and automobilia, the

The Swiss border guard cannot have been older than 24 or 25; nevertheless he took his role as a guardian of Helvetia's borders with commendable seriousness. As our Bentley Arnage T Mulliner pulled into the quiet border-crossing in the Jura mountains, he pulled himself up to his full height of five foot nine inches (in his hat) and adjusted his state-issue anorak. Tapping on the window with the polite efficiency of the official who feels the weight of national security falling on his shoulders, he asked us a list of questions about our destination, our line of business, what was packed in our luggage... And then he asked if we were carrying any 'alimentation'.

"Hang on a minute, old fruit," I said. After rummaging around, I proffered a yoghurt left over from breakfast in the Eurotunnel. "If it is 'alimentation' you are after, old stick, then this should do

template for all such relationships being, of course, the partnership between Girard-Perregaux and Ferrari, which ended recently. Perhaps the best-known partnership nowadays is that between Breitling and Bentley, and I idly speculated that it might be fun to drive from London to the Breitling factory. Idle speculation soon became concrete travel plans. Early one morning, towards the end of November, I shackled a Breitling for Bentley Le Mans Limited Edition 24-hour watch to my wrist, pressed the pushpiece to set the chronograph in motion, collected Count Franz La Rosee from his London residence and set off for the continent, Breitling bound...

I used to own a Bentley. Well, two actually. I wrote the first one off 10 days after I bought it and, even before I called the AA to remove the wreckage from the roadside, I was on the phone to Jack Barclay ordering another. Sadly, my finances could not keep up (especially if I kept hitting things with it) and after three years I had to let it go. I still miss it, and any opportunity to get behind the wheel of one of these remarkable cars is always eagerly seized-upon.

The car I asked for was an Arnage, which although getting on for 10 years old as a model, is what I see as a real Bentley - absurdly powerful, indecently comfortable and ludicrously expensive. There is nothing like sitting in its quilted armchair-like driving seat and, at the curl of a toe, being able to surf a tidal wave of torque. It is a big road-filling car and as such is the perfect match to the wrist-filling presence of the Breitling for Bentley watch series.

Before we had reached Elephant and Castle, the cup holder had already come away in my hand (given this was a Bentley, I felt a cup holder was a rather pusillanimous fitting and that an ice bucket with a bottle of Taittinger might have been more appropriate). But nothing much else of note happened until the Channel Tunnel. What is it about customs officials and Bentleys?

We managed to make the train though, and subsequently began our triumphal procession through France. Virtually nothing of any significance occurred for 500 miles. Occasionally, when we reached very high speeds, an eerie banshee-like wail would fill the cabin. At first I thought this ghostly whooping was the spirit of WO Bentley himself haunting the engine bay. But before pulling into the nearest Catholic Church for a quick exorcism I phoned the factory and was told that this was unusual, but was nothing more than the surround of the windscreen lifting fractionally allowing air to create a whistling sound - absolutely nothing to be concerned about whatsoever. Thus reassured, I chose to see it more as a cherished characteristic of the marque rather than a fault. Otherwise the journey was fast, comfortable

Limited edition Havana-dial Breitling for Bentley 6.75, with white-gold case. Each 6.75 model (named after the Arnage limousine's 6.75-litre engine) has a caseback evoking Bentley alloys.





(Above) Launched at Baselworld last year, the Breitling for Bentley Mulliner Tourbillon (POA) allows the buyer to specify certain features of the watch, just as you can commission Bentley's Mulliner workshop to create a bespoke car, with a unique combination of features. Only a few dozen Mulliner chronographs will be made in the coming years.

(Above right) One of the features you can specify on the Bentley Mulliner Tourbillon is which of six Bentley veneers you would like on the wooden caseback ring - burr walnut, dark stained burr walnut, madrona, bird's eye maple, burr oak or olive ash.

and surprisingly economical (with only one stop for fuel between London and the Jura, somewhere south of Reims). It was superior to taking an aeroplane in every respect except speed... but we did our best to match that too.

Retro feel

The reason for our dash to Switzerland was to be the first to see the latest Breitling for Bentley model - named after the Mark VI, which was the first Bentley to roll out of the Crewe works. It is in celebration of 60 years' production at this factory that this commemorative two-subdial chronograph has been issued. While it carries the gnurled bezel that has become one of the signatures of the Breitling for Bentley range of timepieces (executed here in platinum), it is smaller and much more restrained and retrospective in design than its siblings. The central, cushion-shaped subdial achieves this in a remarkably subtle fashion.

This departure from the Breitling for Bentley house style was due, in considerable part, to the design input of Dr Franz-Josef Paefgen, the anglophile Chairman of Bentley Motors, who felt that a watch bearing the name of the Mark VI Bentley should be more in keeping with the spirit of a classic Breitling from the archives rather than the bold design that has distinguished the Breitling for Bentley brand so far.

Indeed, it can be legitimately viewed as a brand *per se*: what was initially a short-term commitment of about three years has now been extended to the beginning of 2012. "Now we are going to move to the rest of the Bentley consumer base towards the more aristocratic side of Bentley," explains Breitling's Marketing Director, Ben Balmer, "which is still very much alive."



According to Balmer, this will give the brand a chance to show another side of its expertise. With the first series of watches it has shown its competence in the manufacture of large, sporty timepieces in keeping with the lifestyles of the new breed of younger, more fashion-conscious Bentley drivers.

"As a technical brand, we did not have the easy access to an even higher positioning. The association with Bentley opened-up the upscale segment of the market. Now, we are really thinking long, long term. We strongly believe that the brand will be around for many, many years," asserts Balmer vigorously. "Of course it depends how Bentley's automobiles perform in the market!" he says ironically. "But I doubt that Bentley will not remain as strong though, and we are convinced that we can bring a great deal of credibility."



(Top left) The 'swatches' for Bentley Mulliner Tourbillon dials and straps. (Above) The original Breitling for Bentley chronograph, the Bentley Motors (£4,765).

(Left) Interior of a Bentley Arnage limousine by Mulliner, featuring specially commissioned flat-screen TV, drinks cabinet and cigar humidor. It takes at least 15 cows to provide the 400 pieces of hide needed for one Bentley car's leather interior. The trimmers achieve 60% usage from the hides; the best in the industry.

(Below) Since 2002, the Continental GT has been turning heads worldwide, converting a younger generation of autophiles to Bentley by virtue of its ultra-modern, sporty lines.

(Bottom left) Bentley's famed 6.75 litre twin-turbo engine, found inside the Arnage limousines.





(Above) Bentley GT chronograph, designed by Eddy Schoepfer. The dials are reminiscent of the dashboard on Bentley Grand Tourer cars and, unusually, the series uses metallic colours in the Bentley signature shades (Moroccan blue model pictured; £4,155).

(Below) This year's Arnage R model: maximum power, 400 bhp; torque, 835 Nm; acceleration, 0-60 mph in 5.9 s; top speed, 155 mph.

Further information: Breitling UK, Tel: 020 7637 5167, www.breitling.com
 Bentley UK, Tel: 0800 100 5200, www.bentleymotors.com

The Bentley spirit

Happily, this slick marketing spiel is backed up by world-class design. The man in charge of how Breitling for Bentley looks is Eddy Schoepfer, a watch industry veteran who has worked on classic designs from the Cartier Santos of the late 1970s onwards. His approach is considerably more intellectual than merely shoehorning-in automotive design cues and incorporating elements of car-related gimmickry.

Schoepfer wanted to create a series of watches that "corresponded to the opulence and performance of the car and the luxury associated with it." He is a thoughtful man and his is a purely horological interpretation of what Bentley means, old and new. He visited Crewe when the recent Continental GT was being prepared for its launch and took the opportunity to immerse himself in the broader culture of Bentley Motors. "I refused to work on the basis of the Continental GT exclusively; the thing was to design a watch that related to Bentley - not just the GT. I would have been closing the door to so many things had I only designed for the GT."

Thus, the first Breitling for Bentley timepiece should be viewed in a broader conceptual sense rather than as just a single watch. Following on from that, the Mulliner Tourbillon that appeared at last year's Basel fair was not meant to be viewed as just another tourbillon, but rather

as a concept aligning the Breitling for Bentley brand with the cars. Just as Bentley customers can have specialist coachbuilder Mulliner incorporate individual features, creating in effect a bespoke vehicle, so those buying the tourbillon were able to dictate numerous aspects of the watch to ensure that no two Breitling for Bentley tourbillons need be the same.

New tack

In a way, the Mark VI watch heralds the diversification of the brand, which starts in earnest with the launch at Baselworld 2006 of the Flying B. While I was speaking to him, Schoepfer was busy sketching away in that deft fashion of the seasoned product designer. With a few strokes of graphite on paper he created a rendering of the Flying B. It is a radical timepiece. While keeping the distinctive shoulders, gnurled bezel and interplay of brushed and polished surfaces that have come to characterise the timepieces made for the carmakers of Crewe, it was different. Very different.

Unfortunately, we have been asked to keep quiet about this watch until nearer the fair. "The Flying B is such a different design and different spirit, is way too early to say what is coming after that," says Schoepfer. However we can be sure that we will be seeing a lot more of it in coming years: "The design will be expanded in the same way we expanded the original Breitling for Bentley watch." ○

