

# Right Royal Treat

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Last year's downsized Reine de Naples in white gold, with bezel, dial rim, and ball-lug set with 139 diamonds, and dial paved with 211 diamonds (ref. 8928BB/8D/844 DDOD; £18,900).



(Left) The bezel and caseband of this Reine de Naples variant is paved with 86 baguettes, its silvered gold dial is partly paved with 67 diamonds, and the bracelet is set with 600 diamonds, 151 baguettes and 11 sapphire cabochons (ref. 8909BB/VD/129 DDOD; £113,400) (Right) Fancy Breguet numerals identify this Reine de Naples, which features a pear-cut diamond at 6 o'clock and a crown set with a diamond of 0.26 ct (ref. 8918BB/58/864 DDOD; £17,400).



Although the interest women have displayed in mechanical watches has grown over the past few years, there is nothing new about the house of Breguet producing fine timepieces for women. After all, Abraham-Louis Breguet (1747-1823) produced the very first women's wristwatch in 1810, commissioned by Napoleon Bonaparte's sister, Caroline Murat, Queen of sunny Naples. Neither 'No. 2639', nor any of Breguet's illustrations have survived, but its sophisticated and regal legacy is upheld by the modern brands' Reine de Naples collection – the latest 'Montre des Femmes' to take QP's spotlight.

Maria Doulton

A desire to please a woman was the driving force behind Abraham-Louis Breguet's most famous creation, the No. 160 or 'Marie-Antoinette pocket watch'. Commissioned in 1783, presumably by a secret admirer, it was to be the most complicated timepiece of its era, incorporating a minute repeater, perpetual calendar, equation of time, a power-reserve indicator and a metallic thermometer. No mere bauble, then. The queen herself never actually saw the watch as A-L Breguet's son did not finish it until 1827 – 34 years after her death at the guillotine.

Some 200 years on and the Reine de Naples collection was unveiled as Breguet's first girls-only collection, reflecting the fact that Breguet is serious about wooing women with complicated mechanical watches. The pioneer model was the Reine de Naples ref. 8908, which captures the high-horology

spirit of the original 1810 watch and included a moonphase display and power-reserve indicator. Fortunately, material for creating straps has moved on and satin, gold and pearls have replaced hair and gold wire. Today, women represent 25% of Breguet's business.

## Cocktail hour

Five years and several variants later, what sets the current offering apart is size. While products are increasingly defined by their dimensions – look no further than the iPod Nano and the Smart car – timepieces only appear to be getting bigger, with the tin-of-tuna size establishing itself as the norm amongst both men and women. The 2005 Reine de Naples 8928 watch (£17,900 in yellow gold and £18,900 in white gold) and its *haute joaillerie* version (£143,000) are actually dropping down a dress-size or two, measuring in at a petite 33 mm x 24.95 mm.



First launched in 2000, the 'mid-complication' Reine de Naples, with small seconds, power reserve and moonphase (ref. 8908BB/52/864 D00D; £16,775).

Are we seeing a return to the smaller watch, with Breguet leading the way? "Clients were looking for smaller, cocktail-type watches for the evening," explains John Burns of Breguet UK, "and with the new Reine de Naples we are moving away from the idea of a complicated watch. The 2000 model was considered a mid-complication with manual winding, moonphase indicator and a power reserve - more of a day watch." To further emphasise the aesthetic thrust of the new Reine, this model has no sapphire glass back and is auto-winding.

The ref. 8928 retains many Breguet signatures however. The off-centre chapter-dial is characteristic of the house since 1812, as are the Arabic numerals, blued steel hands and details such as the individually numbered plate on the dial. Three hundred and fifty one diamonds sparkle away on the dial, case, ball-shaped lug and crown. But what is perhaps most Breguet-like is the attention to detail in the movement.

A smaller watch means a smaller movement, so the 6.75-lignes calibre 586, numbered and signed by Breguet, requires the weight of platinum to ensure optimal output for the rotor-winding system. In fact, the little movement packs a fair punch, with a respectable

40-hour power reserve. The jewellery version is entirely paved in 42 mystery-set baguettes and one pear-shaped diamond, with sunbeams of pink mother-of-pearl running across the face into which is set an engine-turned silvered-gold chapter dial. Faithful to the high jewellery style of the watch, it is available with a magnificent bracelet composed of a lustrous garland of Akoya pearls of the most delicate pink, to match the mother-of-pearl dial details.

"Although not a limited edition, the six months' work that goes into each of these timepieces means that no more than 400 or so will be produced a year," comments Burns. So thankfully you are unlikely to come across another lady wearing the same watch - heaven forbid.

But who exactly buys these watches? "The first reason that people buy a Breguet is because it is a Breguet and all that it implies," explains Burns. "Breguet is particularly popular in Russia because of all the associations with Pushkin and the brand, but the Reine also sells well in France and London. Women buy these watches because they are pretty, of course, but a large majority are interested in what is inside - proven by the popularity of the earlier, more technical Reines. However, when you buy a Breguet you take it for

granted that it will have a beautiful movement, even if you can't see it."

### Regal intentions

So who can we imagine wearing this watch? Ideally, she would have royal connections, or at least a regal air. She would have style and refinement and appreciate both the fine mechanics and indulgent nature of the watch. Perhaps Gina Lollobrigida, Italian queen of the screen would fit the bill nicely as a modern day Queen Caroline, though the fair Letizia, wife of Spain's Felipe de Borbon would be a more youthful choice.

And what next from Breguet? Showing that the interest in fine mechanical women's timepieces is not a passing, politically correct nod or indeed a case of marketing strategy alone, one of the highlights for 2006 is the re-creation of Marie-Antoinette's pocket watch, famously stolen from the LA Mayer Memorial Institute for Islamic Art in Jerusalem in 1983. Only one will be gloriously reproduced, proving Breguet's technical mastery and ability to work the old-fashioned way - in a similar vein to last year's reproduction of the No. 5 pocket watch. So one very lucky modern-day Marie-Antoinette will indeed have the horological equivalent of cake, with a cherry on top. Watch this space. ○