

Skullduggery!

Quinting's transparent dials, hidden mechanics and curious penchant for piracy

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(Left) The Jolly Roger model from the Golden Age of Piracy range launched by Quinting this year (Sfr.25,000). It uses the new patented Transparency movement. There are nine sapphire layers in the dial - four of which are mobile, despite there only being three hands. The rapid rotation of the seconds hand and the relative heaviness of its sapphire disc necessitate a counter balance. A sabre is pictured on each counter-rotating seconds-hand disc.

(Above left) The unique mixture of 230 electrical and mechanical components that make up a Quinting 'Mysterious Chronograph'.

(Right) The Sea Devil model launched this year (Sfr.38,400) features Black Bart - the first legendary buccaneer to be painted on the dial of this ongoing series. The next two chronographs will be dedicated to Bleakbeard (Edward Teach) and Henry Morgan.

"All our watches are see-through and they always will be," expounds Pascal Berclaz, President of Quinting - a young brand based in St Blaise, near Neuchâtel. And so he would, as this house's claim to fame is being the first to crack the conundrum of how to make a watch that isn't really there; "a mechanism that erases itself to make way for transparency and light, giving the impression that the hands are suspended in the air."

Put into the context of the antics of the watch world, this is no less noble a pursuit than, say, making Mickey Mouse's left hand a retrograde minute counter or getting a triple tourbillon to actually keep accurate time. As Berclaz points out: "I was attracted to Quinting because they did not limit their innovation to one part of the watch but applied it to the whole thing."

Wheels in motion

In 1993, René Quinting and two Swiss engineers were bent on creating a completely transparent chronograph. They searched for solutions from a range of industries, including the automotive, aeronautical and optical fields and within seven years brought to light the first working prototype of a transparent watch. And won one of three 'Prix Spéciaux' at 1999's Revue des Montres to boot.

However, to get their project from prototype stage to the reality of production, they required further capital and this is where Pascal Berclaz came in, buying-out the company and investing Sfr.2 million. Under his leadership, the first Quinting watches appeared on the market in 2000. Today, the house produces 1,000 pieces a year, with an entry-level price of US\$8,000 for a steel model.

Understanding how the watches work is a complex matter and the press material is deliberately elusive: "a very complicated system of stationary and moving sapphires that make the hands run." This does not throw much light on how the hands are actually powered, but you would be right to assume that the mechanism is hidden in the case's rim, beneath the bezel.

Unlike other mechanical movements whose toothed wheels are made of metal, Quinting's hidden mechanism is linked to the hands by transparent wheels made of sapphire. An ultra-thin band of rubber attaches a band of metal teeth to the circumference of each sapphire and each disc is treated with an antireflective coating to give perfect transparency. The whole dial is a multilayered sandwich of crystal, with no more than 0.1 mm between each disc.

So much for the mysterious see-through dials, but what of the movement itself? It is actually a combination of quartz-regulated electronics and mechanical parts, driven by a battery and four motors. However, Berclaz is clear that his watch is not so easily categorised: "It is not a quartz movement; it is much more than that. Quinting is not about mechanical or quartz, it is Quinting."

Such an unusual watch cannot rely on components from traditional industry suppliers, so with the exception of 7 parts, including the hands, all 230 components of the chronograph model are manufactured exclusively for Quinting. "Dust is a very big problem in see-through watches. One speck and you can see it right through the watch," points out Berclaz as he underlines the importance of the precision assembly process. Each watch



(Above) The 'Mysterious Quinting' chronograph contains 13 layers of sapphire. Seven of them are stationary and there are six mobile sapphire glasses for each hand. Steel QSL55 model pictured; SFr.19,800.
(Left) President of Quinting since 2000, Pascal Berclaz originally invested SFr.2 million in the company.

takes one month to put together and includes 26 operations at the firm's manufacture, where 30 staff are employed.

Privateering

Given the adventuring spirit of these watchmakers (and perhaps the proven success of Corum's 'Bubble' range) it came as no surprise this year when Quinting chose to adorn their chronograph and time-only Transparency dials with themes from the 'Golden Age of Piracy'. Despite there being historical records of piracy dating back three millennia, Quinting's chosen 'golden age' dates between 1690 and 1730, when

colourful 'buccaneers' such as Blackbeard and Henry Morgan were rife throughout the Caribbean and West Indies. Clearly, the quirky horologists feel akin to the swashbuckling romantics: "This is the pirate spirit that helped talented engineers overcome the fear of the unknown and spend seven years on research and development," explains the effusive company literature.

In sympathy with Quinting's chosen 40-year period of history, 40 pink-gold Jolly Rogers will be produced to mark the 40 years of the Golden Age of piracy. A menacing skull is painted on the

central, stationary disc around which two sabres, painted on two counter-rotating seconds discs, rotate. Additional to the range is the Sea Devil chronograph (20 in each gold type), which will bear a miniature portrait of one of 20 dastardly sea dogs, presented in a box rather gaudily decorated by "one of the most talented" Ukrainian artists.

With his company now awash with buccaneers and rebels of the sea, does Berclaz consider himself a pirate? "Oh no, I don't think so, I'm too realistic and it is not my philosophy." The Mediterranean authorities can rest easy, it seems. ○